

**Interviews of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Supreme  
Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Mr. Ilham Aliyev, to foreign media  
(since 27.09.2020)**

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**On November 6, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by BBC News.**

**-President Aliyev, thank you for your time for speaking to us on BBC News. Do you intent to fight for every square inch of Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding seven territories?**

-Our position was very clear from the very beginning. We are ready, and are still ready to stop any time when Armenian side will commit itself to the liberation of the occupied territories. I am saying this from the very beginning of the war that if Armenian prime minister publicly will make a commitment that they will liberate the occupied territories we will stop. But so far it's already forty days and there is no sign of him saying this.

**-So, that means you will be fighting to the finish.**

-We will fight until the end if Armenia does not make a commitment that they will withdraw from occupied territories. I think Armenia is making a big mistake, because if they listened to us from the very beginning the war would have stopped long time ago, and we would have been already on the negotiation table.

**-But with respect Mr. President, you are delivering an ultimatum. You are saying they have to agree to give up all of this territory, and then there can be talks. That's a very big precondition for talks.**

-No, not exactly, because what I am saying is based on the basic principles and the basic principles are very clear with respect to the liberation of the territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh. It is a very clear message to Armenia and unfortunately, Armenia did not agree to the basic principles which have been elaborated by the Minsk Group co-chairs and the previous Armenian leadership. These basic principles say that in the first stage they have to liberate five occupied territories, at the second stage-two. But four out of the five have already been liberated. Therefore, if they do it when they will liberate part of Aghdam, when they will liberate Kalbajar and Lachin, we will stop.

**-So, just to be clear, President, because these locations are not familiar to our international audience. Are you saying that if the Armenian leadership agrees to vacate the territories outside of Nagorno-Karabakh you will stop, you will not fight on?**

-Exactly. That is the position which I articulated many times, at the same time, this is not the whole issue on the negotiation table. Of course, after that we will work on the return of Azerbaijani refugees to Nagorno-Karabakh. Because before the war in 1990s, there have been 40 thousand Azerbaijanis living in Nagorno-Karabakh, and the percentage of Azerbaijani population was 25%. So, they expelled them all, and after that, committed ethnic cleansing, and then, announced independence.

**-But the fear is, that if you take control of Nagorno-Karabakh by force, that you may do exactly the same. There are very strong fears being expressed by Armenia that there will be ethnic cleansing of their people.**

-These are groundless accusations. First, if Armenia is really concerned about that, why they do not agree to the basic principles? Because if the basic principles are confirmed, and Armenia will make a commitment which I already demand from them for many times, then everything will stop.

**-So, you are not asking them to withdraw from Nagorno-Karabakh. You are asking only for the territories alongside.**

-We ask and we demand the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions which were adopted back in 1993, which demanded immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian troops from the occupied territories. With respect to the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh, they will continue to live there. They are our citizens, and I on many occasions expressed this position.

**-Well, with respect President Aliyev, you are saying that the Armenians will consider to live there as your citizens. You have very recently said and I am quoting you here: “If they do not leave we will chase them like dogs.” Now, that’s hardly the kind of statement that would make people feel safe.**

-No. Please be accurate with my statements. What I said, I meant those who continue to occupy our territories, I meant Armenian military-political leadership, I meant the so-called “authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh”, this criminal junta which has already, by the way, run away. And I got information that the so-called “leader of Nagorno-Karabakh” is already in Yerevan. So, I meant them, I didn’t mean Armenian people.

**-So, are you saying that you will give an absolute guarantee that there will be no ethnic cleansing of Armenian citizens in Nagorno-Karabakh?**

-Yes. We are not Armenians. They committed ethnic cleansing against us. They expelled all Azerbaijanis from Nagorno-Karabakh and seven surrounding districts. Thus, we have one million refugees as a result of the ethnic cleansing policy of Armenia. But we will not behave the same way, we will not take revenge. I said many times even when they bombed Ganja, when they bombed Barda, when they bombed other cities and killed 92 people, civilians, I said we will take revenge on the battlefield. Therefore, taking into account, this official position and the fact that there are thousands of Armenians who live in Azerbaijan, and nobody is ethnically cleansing them, why should we do it there?

**-Well, with regard to the Armenians who are living here in Azerbaijan, we have been told that many live in fear that they change their surnames, because they do not want to be identified openly as Armenians. So, how can Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh have confidence that they will be safe?**

-No. This is wrong information.

**-Well, it’s coming from people who are here.**

-Well, maybe somebody got married and changed the name that’s a usual practice here. But no. There are many Armenians who live here and we know that they are Armenians. And by the way, I can tell you, not many people know that the sister of the former Armenian defense minister

Arutunyan lives in Azerbaijan. If you would like we can organize the meeting with her. Therefore, this is not actually fear, this is Armenian propaganda.

**-But, if this is a propaganda President Aliyev, there is clearly propaganda on both sides. There is institutionalized messaging against the Armenians which takes place here as part of the state dialogue. People have been primed to have hatred for the other side. Are you actually expecting them to be able to co-exist?**

-Why they can co-exist in other parts of the world? Do you know that there are villages in the neighboring Georgia, where Armenians and Azerbaijanis live together in the same village? They live together in Russia, they live together in Ukraine, they live together in Azerbaijan, in many other parts of the world. And if you observe the situation in the world now, apart from some pro-Armenian rallies in the West, the situation between Armenians and Azerbaijanis is very calm and quiet. Why can they live there and cannot live here?

**-Do you honestly expect a single Armenian to stay and remain in Nagorno-Karabakh, if you take control, and live under the rule of Azerbaijan?**

-I think it is possible, because I, as a President, say today and said many times that we want to live side by side. And if we did not want to live side by side why should I say that? Today, as you know, Azerbaijani Army is winning the battle. Today, we liberate one city after another, one village after another. And in principle, anyone in Azerbaijan can say, look, they committed a genocide in Khojaly, they expelled Azerbaijanis from their native lands, they destroyed all our cities and villages.

**-Armenians, of course, also claim that they were expelled, and they were the victims of massacres over the years?**

-From where have they been expelled? From where? They have not been expelled. We did not commit ethnic cleansing against Armenians. No. Armenians live in Azerbaijan. They expelled us not only from Nagorno-Karabakh, but from seven districts on the administrative border of Nagorno-Karabakh where Armenian population have never lived. They changed the names of the cities, of the villages.

**-Well talking about religion President Aliyev, we have had an attack in Armenia. A church, a cathedral attacked.**

-That was not in Armenia.

**-We have had an attack in Nagorno-Karabakh, I beg your pardon, a church which was shelled twice on the same day. Now, you have said that possibly it was a mistake, you have said you will carry out an investigation. What's the result of the investigation?**

-In order to investigate it, we have to be there to investigate. I said many times, either it was a mistake of our artillery or it was a deliberate provocation by Armenians themselves.

**-So, they shelled their own church?**

-Exactly.

**-They, of course, deny this.**

-Of course, they deny, they deny everything. They denied that they hit Ganja with ballistic missiles from the territory of Armenia. Armenian prime minister said that it is false information. Though your country, United States, France, Russia can easily detect from where the ballistic missile was launched.

**-But with regards to the church...**

-With regards to the church, I said, either it was a mistake or they did it deliberately, because the images of that church which I have seen, show that it is a very minor damage. And this damage can be repaired within maximum two weeks. This is first. Second, you are here in Baku, probably you have seen Armenian church in the city center which we restored and we keep thousands of Armenian books. If we are destroying churches as Armenians say, why didn't we destroy it here in Baku?

**-But can you say categorically that your forces did not attack the church?**

-I say categorically that many times, either it was a mistake or...

**-So, you may have done it.**

-Who you? Who do you mean by saying you?

**-Your forces may have done it.**

-It could have been by mistake only. Because there was no military target. Church was not among the military targets. We had military targets in Stepanakert, which is the city called Khankandi in Azerbaijani. We had military targets in Shusha and we hit those military targets because they attacked us. So, probably that was a mistake.

**-But could you have made a mistake twice in the same day? It was hit twice?**

-Why not? Have you seen the images of Azerbaijani mosques on the occupied territories? They are all destroyed. They keep pigs in our mosques. And the recent video footage of mosque in Zangilan which was liberated show that they kept pigs there.

**-But you have made a point, President Aliyev, of talking about the military superiority of your army. You have a 100 thousand men. You have the most sophisticated weapons that can be bought from Israel, from Turkey, particularly the Turkish drones. So, with all of that expertise at your disposal, could there be two mistaken episodes of shelling a church?**

-Absolutely, there could be. Because we need to be there in order to investigate. And when we will be there we will repair it. We will restore it. You will see. When we go back to Shusha we will restore it.

**-But doesn't that mean if these weapons can be so precise and mistakes can be made so easily that you shouldn't be using them in civilian areas.**

-We are not using in civilian areas. We are using them in order to destroy military infrastructure.

**-With respect, President Aliyev...**

-The city of Khankandi was full of military objects. The city of Shusha was full of military objects. We do not attack civilians unlike them. They attacked Ganja with ballistic missiles, deliberately destroying the civilian compound.

**-Well, let me tell you President Aliyev, for our own BBC colleagues have seen that this is not hearsay, this is what was filmed, this was what experienced by BBC colleagues. They were in Stepanakert, in Nagorno-Karabakh on the 1st, 2nd and 3rd of October. They witnessed random shelling of the town, including at an Emergency Service Center, an apartment block destroyed. As people tried to flee there was a drone overhead. Shortly afterwards more shelling nearby. They characterized it as indiscriminate shelling of a town without clear military targets. Now this is not hearsay, this was witnessed and filmed by the BBC.**

-I doubt this witnessing. I doubt it.

**-Well, they were there President Aliyev.**

-So what, they were there. It doesn't mean anything. That can be fake news. We had military...

**-And why would that be fake news? Why would any journalist go in there to sight to broadcast fake news?**

-Because of the biased approach to the conflict. Because of this black propaganda against Azerbaijan in international media.

**-So you cannot be guilty of any wrong. Everything is false news.**

-Absolutely. It is false news. We closely watch the western media and during these 40 days I had maybe almost 30 interviews. All of them were very aggressive and as if it was not an interview, as if it was a kind of accusation. Nothing is happening on Armenian side? Nobody is asking Pashinyan why he hits with ballistic missile Ganja. Why he killed 92 people, why they attack funeral in Tartar, why they use Smerch with cluster bombs to attack Barda, killing 21 persons, and injuring 70. No one asks him, where does he get weapons? Only attack on us. Only demonizing Azerbaijan by international media. So, that's why what BBC, your colleagues, so-called witnessed there, I do not believe that.

**-Well, in fact, they filmed it President Aliyev. But of course, it is important to say that there has been killing of civilians on both sides. There has been an indiscriminate shelling on both sides. We have witnessed here ourselves the aftermath of the attack in Ganja and which ballistic missile was used. So there is no doubt that there have been casualties on this side as well.**

-Thank you for that.

**-But equally, when you mention cluster munitions there is evidence that you have used cluster munitions in civilian areas, in the streets of Stepanakert, documented extensively by Human Rights Watch, photographs, videos, testimony from witnesses and they actually had**

**the opportunity to go to the scene. Now why are you using cluster munitions which can be so imprecise in a civilian area?**

-We are not using them. This is another fake news. It is Armenia who uses the cluster bombs.

**-So everything is fake news.**

-Of course. Why not? We are facing this fake news for decades. Do you know how many fake news were published in the British press about Azerbaijan? Thousands.

**-But you admit President Aliyev you are fighting a war. You are making advances. But then you are telling us on the other hand you are not using these weapons.**

-No, we are not, because we are fighting on the battlefield. We are fighting against Armenian army. We are not fighting against civilians. No sense in that, because our task is to liberate the territories. And we liberate one village, one city after another. And we do not use cluster bombs. We don't need it. We have enough other...

**-So, the evidence uncovered by Human Rights Watch is fake also.**

-Of course, because Human Rights Watch due to very biased approach to Azerbaijan, due to the fact they did not notice any wrong doing in Armenia even when journalists are dying in prison, even when main opposition leader is in prison. They don't report on that. Only against us. Therefore, we stopped cooperation with Human Rights Watch some 5-6 years ago and only now, when this war started, we invited them to come and see, because we wanted them to testify, because there was no way for them to say no. That's why we invited them. So, this organization is not credible in Azerbaijan.

**-May I ask President Aliyev how many civilians have been killed on this side now? What is the death toll?**

-92 civilians were killed, 405 were wounded, almost 3000 houses either demolished or seriously damaged by Pashinyan regime. So, this is the fact. And you can verify it, when you go there and see.

**-We would like to be able to see the frontline for ourselves and during our last trip here we were prevented from travelling independently. Can you give us an assurance that we would be able to go there this time?**

-Yes, I think it is possible, but the security measures must be taken in order to protect you. But I think it is possible. It is regulated by the general situation, by the martial law in Azerbaijan. Therefore, it must be in line with these temporary regulations.

**-So we can't have free movement at the frontline.**

-What do you mean, on frontline? Going where the battle is?

**-Yes.**

-There have been journalists there. There have been from...



**-But not moving independently.**

-What do you mean by saying, “independently”?

**-Moving independently without minders from the government. Moving at their own discretion, which is what we do in other conflicts. We decide where we wish to go. We make our own choices we go there, we film.**

-I am not sure about that. I think that must be checked with our authorities whether there is a possibility or not. Any company which foreign journalists have, only have one purpose, to protect them and to advise them where they can go and where they cannot go. But there is nothing to hide. You can see our destroyed villages. You have been to Ganja, probably you could go to Barda also. Therefore, we have nothing to hide. We are fighting on our own land. Armenian army is on our land. They are aggressors. We have been the victims of aggression, but today we pay back. Today we show them their place, and we will move them until the end, as I said, if they do not liberate voluntarily the remaining part of the territories.

**-That sounds like a very chilling message to Armenian civilians.**

-No. Why? We already talked about Armenian civilians. We have nothing wrong in communications with them. I said many times and I mean what I say. I keep my words that after we liberate the territory from this criminal gangs which occupied our territory, Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh will live much better. They will have more salaries, because the salaries in Azerbaijan are higher. More pensions, because pensions in Azerbaijan are three times higher than in Armenia. They will have all the social protection. We will invest in those areas largely. They will get rid of poverty.

**-Will they have the full range of human rights which people here in Azerbaijan do not have? Will they have a fully free media? Will they have an opposition that’s allowed to raise its voice. Will they be allowed to have the things that people here in Azerbaijan do not have?**

-You think they do not have it? Why do you think that people in Azerbaijan do not have free media and opposition?

**-Because this is what I am told by independent sources in this country.**

-Which independent sources?

**-Many independent sources.**

-Tell me which.

**-I certainly couldn’t name sources.**

-Oh, if you couldn’t name that means you are just inventing the stories.

**-So, you are saying that the media is not under a state control.**

-Not at all.

**-And there is a vibrant free opposition media.**

-Of Course.

**-Where do I see this?**

-You can see it on internet. You can see it everywhere.

**- But not in newspapers.**

-Why? You can see it in newspapers. Whom do you call opposition here? Can I ask you?

**-Well, is there allowed to be an opposition here?**

-Yes, it is allowed of course.

**-I mean NGOs are the subject of the crackdown, journalists are the subject of the crackdown.**

-Not at all.

**-Critics are in jail.**

-No, not at all.

**-None of this is true.**

-Absolutely fake, absolutely. We have free media, we have free internet. Now, due to the martial law we have some restrictions but before there have been no restrictions. The number of internet users in Azerbaijan is more than 80 percent. Can you imagine the restriction of media in a country where internet is free, there is no censorship, and there are 80 percent of internet users? We have millions of people on Facebook. How can you say that we don't have free media. This is again, a biased approach. This is an attempt to create a perception in Western audience about Azerbaijan. We have opposition, we have NGOs, we have free political activity, we have free media, we have freedom of speech. But if you raise this question, can I ask you also one? How do you assess what happened to Mr Assange? Isn't it the reflection of free media in your country?

**-We are not here to discuss my country.**

-No, let's discuss. Let's discuss.

**-No, President Aliyev.**

-In order to accuse me saying that Armenians will not have free media here, let's talk about Assange. How many years, sorry, how many years he spent in Ecuadorian embassy and for what? And where is he now? For journalistic activity you kept that person hostage actually killing him morally and physically. You did it, not us. And now he is in prison. So you have no moral right to talk about free media when you do these things.

**-Returning to the conflict...**

-Yes, better return to the conflict, because this is not what you like. You like only to accuse, only to attack. But look at the mirror. I told many times. Before coming and lecturing us and in your

question, accusing me. It's not a question, it's an accusation. You talk like a prosecutor. Why? If you are so democratic and so objective why do you keep Assange in prison? For what? You keep him in prison because of his journalistic activity.

**-I am not keeping him in prison President Aliyev.**

-You don't like this.

**-It's not a question you don't like this.**

- You are not used to this.

**-It is not the subject of our interview.**

-Because you are used only to attack.

**-It is not the subject of our interview.**

**-It is not the subject of your interview, but you raise it.**

-You raised it.

-No. You raised it.

**-You raised the case of Assange.**

-You said if you don't have a free media in your country how Armenians can live without opposition? That was your accusation.

**-You have answered the question President Aliyev. Could I ask you going back to the conflict? As you say, forty days and counting. How long do you expect this to continue? Is this going to be a battle through the winter?**

-Nobody knows. Again, coming back to the beginning of our conversation, if Pashinyan says today that yes, I accept basic principles and I will liberate part of Aghdam, Kalbajar, and Lachin in one week, or in two weeks, we will stop immediately.

**-But he doesn't need to give you a guarantee for liberating the rest of Nagorno-Karabakh. You are speaking about the territories on the outside. I just want to be very clear to understand your position.**

-Yes, that's the basic principles. On the basic principles we have very clear picture. Liberation of seven districts, then return of Azerbaijani IDPs, then return of Azerbaijani people, refugees to Nagorno-Karabakh.

**-So he has to give you Nagorno-Karabakh also.**

-He has to allow Azerbaijanis to go back there. To go back to Shusha.

**-So you don't need to be in control of Nagorno-Karabakh.**

-Well, what do you mean by the "control"?

**-Do you need to take physical control of Nagorno-Karabakh and remove the Nagorno-Karabakh defense forces, remove any Armenian official presence or are you saying that you will be satisfied if your civilians are allowed to return?**

-In the basic principles which Armenia did not accept, and actually they are not valid because Armenia did not accept them, in the basic principles there is a provision that Azerbaijanis will return there and they will be living there in peace, in security, with security guarantees. We did not go too far in negotiation process in order to specify what kind of governance will be there. Our position is there must be a certain level of self-governance, like municipal governance or cultural autonomy for Armenians. But we didn't go too far. And if Pashinyan did what I ask from the very beginning, when we liberated Fuzuli, then the war would have stopped, and we would have talked now about how to move on the negotiation table. But he doesn't make this commitment. Therefore, if it continues like that we will continue. There is no other way. We will go until the end before we restore the territorial integrity of the country, which is recognized by the whole world.

**-So, President Aliyev, you have made significant advances already and taking territory alongside Nagorno-Karabakh. How soon do you plan to start sending your civilians back?**

-First we will need to evaluate the damage caused by Armenian state against Azerbaijan and against the property of our citizens. Because in the liberated territories almost everything is destroyed. I said many times that in the big city of Fuzuli, where ten thousands of people live we could not find any building in order to put a flag on. So, we raised it on a derrick. Therefore, first, we will evaluate the damage, we will invite international experts in order to evaluate the damage which was caused to our ecology, to our infrastructure, to our civilians who lost their houses and to our state, to our historical heritage, because all the mosques were destroyed, all the museums were destroyed. This is first. And after that, of course, there will be lawsuits, lawsuits against Armenian state, and we are already preparing for that. Second, we will need to create at least initial conditions for people to live there. We need to provide construction materials we need to invest in infrastructure.

**-So, do you think, it is a matter of years realistically?**

-You know, we have already resettled 300 thousand refugees and IDPs during all these times of occupation. And the last years were the most impressive, because only this year we are resettling seven thousand families of refugees. So, we can, I think manage to resettle from 7 to 10 thousand families a year, but of course, for that we need to have infrastructure. We do it in Baku where everything is ready. But in those areas where everything is destroyed we need power stations, we need roads we need water supply. So, all that will take time. I don't know how long it will take but we will try to do everything to do it in a maximum shortest period.

**-One or two final quick questions President Aliyev, if I may?**

**You have huge support from Turkey which is a very strong ally of Azerbaijan. How often do you speak to President Erdogan?**

-Very often, especially now several times a week.

**-And daily?**

-Not daily, but if necessary, may be several times a day. We are brothers, we are friends, and you say huge support, you are right, but I want to specify, this is a political support and moral support. Nothing more than that.

**-Are there Turkish pilots here, piloting the drones that are being used?**

-No. no.

**-So they are being used by your forces?**

-Yes. Everything is used by our forces, not only Turkish drones, but Israeli drones and Russian military equipment and military equipment from other countries which we purchase and which we pay for, unlike Armenia which gets it free of charge. Everything is done by us.

**-Do you foresee a day when you might want Turkish direct military involvement? We have seen that Armenia has already gone to Russia, and said ‘what are you prepared to do?’ Do you see a day when you would be asking Turkey to become more involved?**

-I don't want to look too far ahead, because it will depend on the situation on the battlefield. It will depend on Armenia's behavior, and on other countries' behavior. Because on many occasions I said that we are against internationalization of the conflict, we asked all the countries, neighboring countries, and not neighboring countries to stay away from this conflict. We are fighting on our land, internationally recognized. So, this is our position. And I think that what is happening now will continue. So there will be no need for any kind of military involvement of Turkey. But, with Turkey, many years ago, we signed the document which provides also military support in case of aggression. So, with Turkey we have more or less the same format legal basis like Armenia and Russia has. So, if Azerbaijan will face an aggression and if Azerbaijan will see that the Turkish military support is needed, then we will consider this option.

**-I'm going to beg your assistance just for two more questions, President Aliyev, if I may.**

**What would you say to those who argue and I'm sure you've heard this argument being made that one of the reasons why the conflict has reignited now and why you are pursuing such a strong advance is because of this very strong backing from Turkey that this really has been the clincher for you.**

-No, not at all. And by the way, where is this Turkish military involvement? Who can verify that, who have seen any Turkish soldiers.

**-Not involvement on the ground, but the strong political support the constant statements, the very strong backing from a very strong regional power. Has that not been a factor in this?**

-Yes. This is a factor, but this factor became very important after the conflict started. Because if you follow the chronology of the conflict, so, this statement started hours after Armenia attacked us and we pushed back. But Turkish political support to Azerbaijan has always been here. It is not just like it happened all of a sudden. It has always been like that. Why the conflict started? I can tell you, because Armenia wanted to disrupt negotiations. They launched an attack on us on 12

July, on the state border, and they entered our territory, we had to push back. And that clash lasted four days. And we stopped after we pushed them back from Azerbaijan and we did not cross the state border. Then in the middle of August, they sent a sabotage group, which crossed the line of contact, and the head of that group was detained, he confessed that they were planning terror acts against civilians. And then they started to shell our cities on the 27th of September, and we had the first victims in the early hours, maybe early minutes among civilians and among our military servicemen. They shelled us with heavy artillery. So, that's how it started. Why it started?

**-President, forgive me, because I know you wish to tell us the history. You mentioned the loss of military servicemen. Why is it that you are not releasing figures for your military losses are you concerned that support might wane if people knew how many young men are being killed in this war?**

-No, not at all. First, we don't have many. If you how to say, look at the scale of the war, and the fact that we had to break those engineering constructions and all those positions which Armenians built for 30 years our losses are minimal. Of course, we cannot talk like that because every life of the human being is priceless. But we have much less losses than Armenians because our military capability is much better. And we have modern weapons which allow us to have minimum losses particularly those drones. Because without those drones all those tanks and guns would have killed so many people. So, it is not a reason because we think we will not have public support. On the contrary, those people who lost there, close relatives, their sons, their brothers, they ask us not to stop. Can you imagine? I receive thousands of letters every day, thousands of letters, and in no one of those letters I saw that, stop. No. They say, I lost my son, I lost my brother, I lost my husband. Please go until the end. Please go until the end. Because our people have lived in this situation for almost thirty years.

**-But that almost sounds President Aliyev like you have nowhere out of this war like you must fight to recover every last inch.**

-Yes, that's what I am saying. But at the same time, I said from the very beginning that if Pashinyan, him personally, not his foreign minister, him personally, says Armenia withdraws its troops from Aghdam, from Kalbajar, from Lachin, the three remaining regions which they have to liberate and give us a timetable, we will stop immediately. We don't want to continue this war. We don't want. We want to stop, and what I am saying now I was saying from the very beginning and people who know me, they know that I am a man of my word. What I say, I do. If Pashinyan tells that today, I promise you that we will stop immediately, but he doesn't do it. He doesn't do it. He wants to regain back. He wants to use these ceasefire opportunities to regroup his forces, to mobilize more people. He is now as you said sent a letter to President Putin for military assistance. Thus, admitting his defeat, and if he admits his defeat why he cannot say that he will liberate the territories. These territories do not belong to Armenia. These are our lands. They have to give them back to us. If they don't do it, as I said, we will go until the end. No way to stop.

**-Do you know how many civilians have been killed inside Nagorno-Karabakh by the activities of your forces?**

-No, we don't know. We heard the official information from Armenian defense ministry. We do not believe this official information.

**-They say 45 civilians.**

-Yes. I know. 45 or 47. We don't know. I cannot say anything which I don't know. But I think that it is much exaggerated, because we did not attack their villages, we did not attack their cities. We only attacked

**-With respect, President Aliyev, there is a documentary, evidence of attacks on their villages and on their cities.**

-I did not finish yet. We attacked Khankandi, because Khankandi was full of military installations. So, we had to destroy them.

**-Civilian houses have been destroyed.**

-It happens sometimes during the war. It happens. We are not so accurate you know, if their artillery is just next to the house. It is not like Ganja when they hit deliberately by ballistic missiles the civilian compounds where there was no in the radius of maybe 20-30 km a military object.

**-But are you troubled by reports of civilian loss of life?**

-Yes, of course. I regret. I regret that it happened, and I express condolences to all those who lost their relatives. I mean civilians in Nagorno-Karabakh. But again, taking into account the scope of conflict, again saying that every life of the person is priceless, still, their losses are very low.

-And this shows that we are not fighting against civilians. Do you know how many civilians they killed during the war of the 90s? Thousands. Thousands.

**-There are concerns...**

-The Khojaly genocide. They killed 613 innocent people among them 63 children and 106 women only because they were Azerbaijanis. The Khojaly genocide is a well-known documented fact.

**-Do you accept that there is a danger now of a humanitarian catastrophe this winter in Nagorno-Karabakh? You are closing in. You could be in a position soon to besiege the area. What is going to be the fate of the civilians inside?**

-That's the question not to me but to Pashinyan to stop, and I say how to stop.

**-But you could cut them off. If they are cut off by your forces how can they survive?**

-We will take care of them. We will take care of them. Absolutely, no doubt about that. We will provide them with everything, with food with water with everything. No doubt about that. And all our, all our military commanders got a direct instruction from me in the first hours of the conflict that civilians must be taken care of. Do you know the story about two elderly persons whom we found in Hadrut? Their relatives and military they just left them and ran away. So, one lady and one gentleman of almost 90 years old. And we brought them here to Baku. We put them to the hospital, and we surrendered them to Armenia. But do you know what happened? When that old

gentleman was already on the border in Gazakh far away from here, Armenians refused to accept him. They said 'he is ill and he will die soon, we don't want him'. You know. That's what they've done and this person under the care of Red Cross was put to the hospital and the lady was surrendered to them and the man, unfortunately, died. That's how we treat civilians. Therefore, those who live in Nagorno-Karabakh now, they can be absolutely sure that we will take care of them and they will live under Azerbaijani umbrella much better.

**-But 90 thousand of them approximately have already fled, they don't seem to be comforted by these assurances.**

-According to our information, the real population of those who lived in Nagorno-Karabakh was from 60 to 70 thousand people. All those figures are highly exaggerated. Therefore, I doubt that 90 thousand could flee, because maximum 70.

**-May I ask you a long-term question President Aliyev? How do you see the future of the South Caucasus how do you see peace coming here? I mean do you ever see a day when there will be peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia?**

-Yes, if you ask my position, I think it is possible. But it depends not only on me, it depends only on Armenian side. And during this forty days of war, on several occasions, I said that I wish to see the day when three South Caucasian countries would be working together. As for instance we do with Georgia. Our close strategic partner and friend. Look how many projects we implemented with them. How close our relations are. They are based on historical legacy and they are based on pragmatism on balance of our interests. So why Armenia became isolated? Because of occupation. And if you look at the map for instance, our energy and transportation projects, you will see that they bypass Armenia. The shortest way for us to deliver our resources to the international markets was through Armenia and we offered them that in the 1990s. We said, 'look, liberate the territories let's build the pipeline through Armenian territory, and then entering Nakhchivan and then Turkey, we will then combine the interests of all countries'. We will make all countries of the region in a certain way inter dependent. And that will be a guarantee for peace. They said 'no'. I offered many times through the Minsk Group co-chairs, they can approve it, financial assistance, social programs in Nagorno-Karabakh financing from our budget, if they liberate territories. They said no. I offered autonomy, the highest possible autonomy in the world, I offered to Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenians said no. They said no to everything. So, what happens now is their fault. By the way, the first president who was overthrown by Karabakh clan published an article saying that what Azerbaijanis are offering now to us they will not offer again. That was in the middle of 90s.

**-And you would accept an autonomus status now for Nagorno-Karabakh.**

-Now, I prefer not to talk about that, because now situation on the ground has changed. But I offered this many times and Armenians rejected it.

**-So, now what do you want for Nagorno-Karabakh?**

-Nagorno-Karabakh is part of Azerbaijan. It will be part of Azerbaijan as any other region of Azerbaijan. If it will depend again on what will be Armenian government's behavior? It is still not too late for them to be reasonable. It is still not too late for them to get more on the negotiation



table. Because after we take control of other cities and villages, there will be nothing to talk about. So, they are losing time. And if they behave reasonably, we can work on some forms of self-governance. We are not against it. But they should not violate territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. They should be based on the best practice which European countries, like Italy like Sweden and Finland have between themselves. Why there should be something different? And then of course, the peace will come to the region and I think that, but frankly speaking, with this prime minister of Armenia I don't think that there is any possibility for peace. There must be a change of government in Armenia, reasonable people must come, those people which are not affiliated with bloodshed and military crimes. And then, I think, by joint actions we can create a new format of cooperation in the Southern Caucasus among Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia which used to be in Soviet times. We had friendly relations, we lived together.

**-Is there any compromise that you can offer for the sake of peace? Is there anything that you can say now you are prepared to give?**

-You know I cannot offer compromise when other side just is not willing to compromise. During these times Armenian prime minister also on several occasions was interviewed by foreign journalists, and he was asked. There was one program Russian TV, they were asking same questions to me and to him. And when I was asked about compromise I said what I am saying to you. When he was asked about compromise three times he said self-determination for Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh. But this is not a compromise. What compromise they are ready to do? And by the way, today their opportunities to compromise is shrinking, because we are getting those territories back by force. Our compromise is still on the table. But it is not 100% sure that it will be on the table if we take all these territories back. Then, what will we talk about? So, for Armenian prime minister for him, for his own sake, the best thing is now to listen to me and to say publicly 'we liberate Aghdam, Kalbajar, and Lachin'. And we stop, and there will be a ceasefire, and if they don't violate it again, and we will come back to those issues which you refer to-status, autonomy, cultural autonomy, community, et cetera. But we can be fair and I have always been honest with our people. Today situation changed therefore, what I offered to them a year ago, two years ago maybe is not valid. But it is premature to talk about it. Let's see.

**-Have you a hope of a peaceful settlement?**

-Yes. I have a hope, because my hope is based now on our success on the battlefield. My hope is not based on Armenian constructive position, because what we have seen on the battlefield, what we have seen in Fuzuli, in Jabrayil. We saw that they were not planning to liberate the territories. They were just lying to us, they were lying to co-chairs of the Minsk Group, because they invested so much in these fortifications, that they would have never, never liberated that. It took us a lot of time to take control of Fuzuli because of that. And then, when we were moving by the Araz river towards the state border with Armenia, in several villages there have been very severe clashes and it took us several days to break that defense.

**-President Aliyev, I wanted to ask you, if I may, a question on behalf of our Azerbaijan service of BBC and if you would be happy to reply in your own language? I think they would be very happy to have that. What kind of future do you see here for the people of Azerbaijan**

**after this conflict? Some would say here, and I know you disagree but some would say that this is a society which still does not have full freedom, full human rights. Do you see a peace dividend if this conflict finishes? Do you see the society here being able to move on from the Nagorno-Karabakh issue which is so consuming what future do you see here?**

- I think that the future of our country will be very bright. We have made great strides in recent years. Today, our country's successes in both political and economic spheres are recognized by international organizations. Great successes have also been achieved in the international arena. Azerbaijan has become a very strong country. All issues within the country are being resolved. Of course, the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict will give our country a new breath of life. First of all, people will be able to return to their ancestral lands and visit the graves of their relatives. The Azerbaijani state will definitely provide them with maximum assistance in this. We will rebuild the occupied lands, build houses, office buildings, schools. Thus, a new era will begin for our country. This new period will usher ample opportunities, and I believe that the positive trends will intensify not only in the economic sphere but also in political relations. Azerbaijan will further enhance its role in the international arena. Respect for Azerbaijan will increase. As a strong state, we are restoring our territorial integrity, we are restoring justice and international law. So I am confident that the future development of our country will be very successful. We have achieved all our goals so far. We have achieved all the goals I have stated. The restoration of our territorial integrity and the return of our lands have been my primary tasks as President. I am glad that I have managed these tasks with dignity, and we are returning to our lands thanks to the support, hard work and courage of the Azerbaijani people. The selflessness of the Azerbaijani people shows once again that we are a great nation, we have demonstrated unity, and this unity will strengthen us even more, will make our country even stronger.

**-Great. President Aliyev thank you so much. You have been very generous with your time this morning, and we are very grateful.**

-Thank you for your questions.

**-Thank you.**

**President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by the Spanish EFE news agency.**

**-Good morning, Mr. President. Thank you very much for taking the time to answer our questions in your busy time.**

-Thank you for this opportunity.

**-You are now entering the 6th week of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh. What is, at this point, the situation on the frontline?**

-Situation on the frontline is showing the dominance of the Azerbaijani army. We liberate one village in one city after another. And during this time on the battlefield, Azerbaijan liberated a large part of its territory, which was under occupation for almost thirty years, and Azerbaijani Army's successful offensive operation continues. And this once again shows that we are a strong country, and we are fighting on our soil. We restore the internationally recognized territory of Azerbaijan, the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. By the way, we implement the United Nations Security Council resolutions, which demanded the withdrawal of Armenian troops from our territories but were not implemented by Armenia for almost thirty years.

**-You want to recover the seven occupied districts - 5+2. How much of those lands have you already recovered?**

-Actually, four of the five occupied districts have already been liberated, either entirely or partially. Today we are in an active phase of de-occupation of other districts that have been under occupation. And as I said, we implement the UN Security Council resolutions, and by the way, we implement a part of the basic principles. Because the basic principles for settlement, which have been proposed by the OSCE Minsk Group, actually demanded the liberation of Azerbaijan's occupied territories. Unfortunately, Armenia was not willing to do it voluntarily. Therefore, we had to force them to do it.

**-Both sides have already agreed to three humanitarian ceasefires. But it helped not even a few minutes. Why wasn't it possible to stop the war and sit down to talks?**

I think one of the reasons these ceasefires didn't work was Armenia's attempt to regain back the territories that have been already liberated by us. In other words, they wanted to occupy them again. Therefore, they tried to use the ceasefire, which, as you correctly mentioned, was announced on humanitarian grounds, to mobilize their resources and launch a new attack. And when they failed to do it, they launched a ballistic missile attack from Armenia's territory on the second largest city of Azerbaijan, Gandja. They did it twice. But the first time on the 10th of October, right after the ceasefire was announced. And that caused the killings of almost ten civilians, and tens of others have been wounded. So, they brutally violated the first ceasefire. The second ceasefire also was violated by them about five minutes after the announced time. And the third ceasefire they violated by attacking the peaceful city of Barda, where 21 civilians were killed and 70 wounded. So, all three times, it was Armenia's deliberate, aggressive attack on us, and we had to respond. We had to defend ourselves.

**-You said that you want a concrete calendar for the withdrawal of Armenian troops. Armenia said they are willing to compromise and not to surrender or capitulate those territories. Are you willing to compromise, too and what does the compromise looks like?**

-First of all, our position has already been declared many times during these almost forty days. On many occasions, I said that our task is to restore Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, return one million Azerbaijani refugees and internally displaced persons to their homelands, to the territories they lived for centuries. And after that, to provide peaceful co-existence between Azerbaijani and Armenian community in that area. Our position is based on common sense, on humanitarian grounds and is supported by the international community. So, it is obvious, Armenia, when they talk about compromise, they do not say anything concrete. They talk only about self-determination. But self-determination is not a compromise on their side. They should be more accurate in their position because it is very ambiguous now. Therefore, we demanded the timetable for the withdrawal of Armenian troops from the occupied territories. And we demanded it from the very first day of the clashes. So, had Armenia listened to us and behaved reasonably today, we wouldn't have had the situation we are now facing. The war would have stopped maybe a month ago. Therefore, compromise from the Armenian side should be very precise. And the timetable for withdrawal from part of Aghdam district, which is still under occupation and from Kalbajar and Lachin, should be presented to us. And Armenian prime minister should personally declare that. Not only do they give us the timetable, but they also do not say that they will liberate those territories. During all this time, since the 27th of September, never Armenian military-political leadership said anything about the liberation of territories. In this case, they actually show disrespect to Minsk Group co-chairs, who elaborated these principles, providing a return of seven territories, and they lead to more escalation. So, we expect the Armenian prime minister to publicly say that they will withdraw from Kalbajar, Lachin, and the remaining part of Aghdam.

**-And if not, there is only the military option for you?**

-Nothing is left. There is no other option. We don't want to continue military operations. I said many times and can repeat today that if the Armenian prime minister, personally him, the person responsible for this bloodshed, makes such a statement, we are ready to stop immediately. I am a person who keeps his words, and we will do it. But he doesn't say. He wants to win time. He wants to have the ceasefire to get some more military assistance. He wants to use this ceasefire to launch new attacks on Azerbaijan and regain the territories we liberated. That's what he is after.

**-Are you willing to sit down at this point with Mr. Pashinyan, or is there no point in it?**

-No. No point in that at all. I had many meetings with him over the last two years. But all of them were absolutely useless and senseless. Except for the first meetings, he promised me that if Azerbaijan gives him time after the so-called revolution, he will do his homework and strengthen his political position in Armenia. Then, he will be willing to work constructively to implement the basic principles. That was what he told me in the early months of his leadership in Armenia. But after a year, he said completely different things. He said that there would be no centimeter of land to be returned to Azerbaijan. He said, "Karabakh is Armenia". He said that Azerbaijan has to negotiate with the so-called "authorities of this quasi entity Nagorno-Karabakh". So, he did

everything to destroy the negotiation process. Therefore, at this point, I don't see any sense in meeting with him. Our foreign ministers recently met in Geneva. And I think this is the proper format now for the communications.

**-You said that almost during thirty years, the Minsk Group did nothing or didn't reach any to recover the occupied territories. Now, what do you expect from the US, Russia and France?**

-Yes, you are right. I said that the Minsk Group did not deliver any result. But at the same time, I said that I could not completely ignore their activity and only criticize them. Because the basic principles that are on the table now, it is the principles elaborated with the Minsk Group's assistance. So, they worked, they tried. But they did not use all their tools, which they have to press Armenia to liberate the territories. Each of these countries unilaterally has enough leverages on Armenia, whether it's military support, political support, economic support, diaspora support, etcetera. But they did not use these instruments in their hands. They did not insist on implementing the UN Security Council resolutions, which they themselves adopted as permanent members of the UN Security Council. Therefore, the fact that there was no result, of course, demonstrates their unwillingness rather than they could not. If they could not, then who can? Can you find more powerful countries in the world? The three permanent members of the Security Council cannot influence small, impoverished, dependent Armenia? They just didn't want. They wanted the situation to be stable. This is true. They wanted a peaceful scenario. But when they saw no peaceful scenario for almost thirty years, and the new Armenian government actually destroys the process by statements and actions, I think they should have acted.

And I called many times, talking with their leaders, talking with their high-ranking officials, 'insert pressure on Armenia, put sanctions'. If you don't want to put sanctions, at least pronounce it. Announce it that the sanctions will be imposed; otherwise, there will be no other mechanism to influence this aggressor. Today, I think they realized that what they were saying many years, that 'there is no military solution to the conflict' was wrong. And we changed that reality. There is a military solution. But today, what we are talking about, let's just close that page of a military solution and move to the political solutions. So, the military-political solution must prevail. We are ready to stop today if the Armenian prime minister says what I already demanded from him. The peace process should be based on implementing the rest of the basic principles that have already been implemented. We need a precise timetable for Kalbajar, Lachin and part of Aghdam to be liberated. And then, I think peace will come to the region.

**-I now want to ask you about the statements of Amnesty International that both sides actually have used cluster bombs, and now you and also Yerevan is saying that both sides use phosphorous weapons against the civilians. Do you use internationally forbidden weapons?**

-We do not use forbidden weapons. We have enough ammunition to restore our territorial integrity - first. Second, we do not attack civilians. We do not attack cities in Nagorno-Karabakh after the 10th of October. Before, yes, we admit it. But that was because most of the Armenian army's military units and infrastructure were concentrated in the so-called capital of Nagorno-Karabakh, Khankandi. So we had to. We had to hit those important military objects to provide security for us and make our operation more efficient. But after the humanitarian ceasefire was announced, and

many times we announced that we never hit any city or any village where people lived. Armenians did it. On the contrary, they launched ballistic missiles from Armenian territory to Gandja, and it has been proved. Though the Armenian prime minister said it was not them, it is ridiculous. Because ballistic missile launch is being monitored by the satellites. Everybody knows from where it was launched and what was the goal of that missile. It was deliberately hitting the civilian compounds in Ganja, two times. They hit Barda two times with very destructive "Smerch" missiles. Twenty-one persons were killed and 70 wounded only by one attack. There have been many attacks. They attacked a funeral ceremony in Tartar. That is absolutely beyond any norms of human behavior. When people were burying the person who died, they hit the cemetery, and four people were killed. And the cluster bombs which they used have been verified by international media and NGOs. I am sure that the first who reported about that were international media who visited them. And Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch just didn't have any other option rather than to acknowledge that. But the question is why they didn't come in the first place to Azerbaijan. Why were they working only on the Armenian side? Only after international media, Western media showed those cluster bombs which Armenians' use, then these two NGOs confirmed that. It is good that they did. But frankly speaking, I cannot imagine how they could not confirm it, because when it's obvious.

**-Russia, Mr. Lavrov said yesterday nearly 2000 mercenaries are battling or combatting in Nagorno-Karabakh. What do you say regarding this?**

-I answered many times to these groundless accusations. Frankly speaking, I regret that high-ranking officials of countries that are supposed to be neutral, which are supposed to be acting within their mandate, given to them by OSCE, use this unverified, groundless so-called information and rumors - first. Second, we don't have any mercenaries. Many times I said that we don't need them. We have an army of 100 thousand fighters. We can recruit several times more if we announce total mobilization, which we don't do, unlike what Armenia did. There is no evidence of any foreign fighters fighting on our side. No evidence during this time - for more than one month. Not a single document, not a single proof was given to us, only statements. But then why they don't see what is happening on the Armenian side? How many mercenaries are fighting on the Armenian side? Why neither Russia nor France, which try to accuse us, why didn't they say anything about that? We have a list of people already eliminated with foreign passports. American, French, Canadian, Lebanese, from Iraq, from countries of the post-Soviet area. Tens of them coming from Georgia. Yes, they are native Armenians, but it doesn't make any difference. If they are citizens of other countries, they are considered to be acting there illegally. And so far, nothing was said about that. Though we have proofs. We have passports in our hands. We have evidence, video. Nothing is said about that. So, this is a selective approach that cannot be accepted by us. It is not in line with the mandate of mediators. I said many times; mediators must be neutral. If they take sides, it's up to them, but then they have to step down from mediation. Every country can have good or bad relations with any country. We understand there are special feelings towards Armenians due to some reasons from some countries. But in a national capacity, we don't mind. But if you are a mediator, please, be neutral. And stay away from accusations. If we start to accuse those who accuse us of mercenaries about what they do in different parts of the world, it will be a long story, a very long story. We don't do it. Therefore, we expect the same from our partners.

**-What do you say to those who state that Turkey is not only giving you political help, but also a military one?**

-I would say that this is another provocation, another false news. There is no military support from Turkey, apart from the fact that we are buying modern military equipment from Turkey. This is true. And this is sophisticated, modern equipment that I think every army in the world would have envied. And Turkey's military-industrial complex really demonstrates miracles. And this equipment helps us a lot on the battlefield. But we buy it. We sign contracts. Everything is transparent. Everything is legal. We buy weapons from other countries. Why nobody talks about how many weapons we bought from Russia? Only Turkey. Because Turkey is now in the center of attack from, unfortunately, different European politicians. There are attempts to demonize Turkey. There are attempts to blackmail Turkey, to press it. This is absolutely unacceptable. We buy, main of our weapons from Russia. We buy weapons from other countries. Only Turkey is here. So, this is the first. Second, those who always keep saying that Turkey provides military support to us, why don't they say that Russia provides military support to Armenia? A mediator, Minsk Group co-chair. We have proofs in our hands. We delivered this information to Russian officials. How many weapons were delivered to Armenia during these forty days? Why does nobody talk about that? Let's talk about that. Let's be fair. Therefore, first, this is wrong. Second, we buy Turkish military equipment, and we will continue to do it. And third, there should be no double standards about that. And those, by the way, who say that Turkey militarily supports Azerbaijan, I think, should refrain from these absurd accusations.

**-Turkey obviously has interests in the region, as has Iran and Russia. Armenia has asked Russia for a possibility to guarantee its security. Do you fear an internationalization of the war?**

-That is what Armenia wanted to do from the very beginning. And we were always against. I said many times to all the countries, 'stay away from this conflict'. It is our business. It's our battle for territorial integrity. And there should be no attempts to internationalize the conflict. But Armenia did everything to do it. And the letter which the Armenian prime minister sent to the Russian president demonstrates that they already admit their defeat, that we beat them on the battlefield, and that they want to internationalize the conflict. They want to drag Russia into direct participation on the ground, which is absolutely unacceptable. As far as I know, Russia rejected it, and the Russian foreign minister issued a statement about that. That maybe I'm not precisely correct in my words, but the sense was that the fight is taking place on the territory of Azerbaijan. If Azerbaijan attacks, or if any country attacks Armenia, then Russia will have their obligations. But the battle is going on our soil. So, these attempts, I think, are absolutely useless. The Russian position was articulated by the foreign minister. Iranian position was also articulated. Probably you heard about the Iranian plan for the settlement, which provides territorial integrity of countries. The Iranian religious leader recently made a statement that Armenia should liberate internationally recognized territories of Azerbaijan. So, this is a reaction of two neighbors. The position of Turkey is well-known. It always stands for international law and UN Security Council resolutions. Georgia, on many occasions before, also supported Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. This is the position of our neighbors. So, Armenia is in isolation. So, they want to internationalize the conflict. They want

to exploit some fake news and some fake news from history to get support. But the best way for Armenia to act now is to admit their defeat, admit our victory, and commit that they will liberate the remaining part of the territories.

**-If they recognize the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh, what would your reaction be?**

-You know, if they wanted to recognize, they would have recognized a long time ago. Why didn't they recognize it before? Because they clearly understand that by this very irrational step, negotiations will stop. Absolutely. So, if they do it, there will be nothing to talk about. And then, no peaceful initiative, no basic principles, no future settlement, nothing will be on the table. So, I think that they understand it. They always wanted to use it as a kind of instrument to frighten us, saying that we will recognize if Azerbaijan does that. I told them many times during these days of the war, and I tell now, the Armenian prime minister, to recognize Nagorno-Karabakh today. Do it. Show your courage. Show that your words mean something. Recognize Nagorno-Karabakh today. Again, and you will see that they will not do it. Because they are cowards. They can fight only against peaceful civilians, and when they see our strength and our unity, they run away.

**-Will you be willing to accept the autonomy of the region?**

-This should be part of future discussions on the basic principles. Because the first part of the basic principles demanded the withdrawal of occupied territories. Five plus two in the timetable, then, there were other elements of the basic principles, like security, peacekeeping operations, the status of Nagorno-Karabakh, and we always were very open to discussing it. We offered them many times in different ways, but they rejected it. We offered them autonomy inside Azerbaijan. We offered them cultural autonomy. We said that there are good examples in the world, in Europe, in Scandinavia this Aland Islands, in Italy this South Tyrol district, in many others. But they rejected everything. They demanded independence only. And they wanted us to recognize this independence. By doing that, they actually know that we will never do it. They were doing everything to freeze the conflict. So, I don't know. We need first to end this hot stage of the conflict, come back to the negotiation table. Armenia should make these commitments, which I already said. And then we can talk about what will be happening in the future. I cannot say anything about that now.

**-Thank you very much, Mr. President. I really appreciate your time.**

-Thank you very much for your questions, for your interest in Azerbaijan.



**On November 2, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by the Italian La Repubblica newspaper.**

**-Mr. President, are you already tasting the flavor of the victory?**

-Our task was to restore territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, and we are coming closer to this task. We have been waiting for restoration of the territorial integrity for almost 30 years. As you know, during all this time Azerbaijan was strictly committed to negotiation process. But unfortunately, it did not result in any tangible outcome. Plus, Armenian leadership during last couple of years was always provoking us by the statements, and by actions, including military provocations. So the last one took place on the 27th of September. We had to respond and our response was very sensitive to Armenia. So, when we talk about the victory we did not put in front of us such a target. We wanted to resolve it at the negotiation table. But we were always ready to do it on the battlefield what we are doing.

**-Putin is not willing to intervene. So, you can act without obstacles.**

-Actually, I on many occasions commented the situation that co-chairs of the Minsk Group, 3 countries which are at the same time permanent members of the Security Council of United Nations, adopted resolutions back in 1993 which demanded immediate and complete and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian troops from the Azerbaijani territories. Therefore, these countries themselves created the legal base for the settlement. But Armenia did not implement these resolutions. Another point, which I was referring to is that mediators must be neutral, no matter how they feel about situation. How close their relations are with us, or with Armenia, but if they are not neutral they cannot be mediators. Therefore, the neutrality now which we more or less see on the ground I think is the only way how the things can happen. Therefore, it was not a kind of a green light for us. We responded to Armenian attack on the 27th of September without any 100% understanding who will do what. We just did what we thought was right to defend our country, to defend our people, and to restore justice.

**-How useful is the Ankara support to your action?**

-It is very useful. This support came from the very beginning, from the early hours of the clashes which started on the 27th of September. President of Turkey made a very clear statement that Turkey stands side by side with Azerbaijan. That was a very important sign of political and moral support, and I many times referred to the fact that this is only political and moral support, but it was sufficient. Because such a strong country as Turkey when openly declares its position on this issue, it also sends the signal to the whole world, that Azerbaijan is doing the right thing. Azerbaijan is restoring its territorial integrity, Azerbaijan is fighting on its territory. We are not aggressors, we are not attacking other countries. Therefore, this political support which started in the early hours of the clashes and continues up to now is very important for the conflict resolution.

**-What can you say about the jihadists' presence that president Macron, Russian foreign minister denounced that they are fighting against Armenia with your army. Is it true?**

-On many occasions I already during this time, more than one month, referred to this issue and said that this is not true. This is not correct information. I don't know why this information was

circulated, and still is circulated. First, we haven't been provided with any evidence, any proof about that. All were words, and those words were articulated in the early days of the conflict. And you referred to President Macron's statement about that. That was only in the first days of the conflict. Since that time, we didn't hear these kind of statements. So this is first. No proofs no evidence. Second, no need. Many times I said we have an army of a 100 thousand fighters, a regular army. We can mobilize several times more if we announce the total mobilization. We have modern weapons. We have a sophisticated technology. And we have a very high moral spirit. Therefore, there is no need for that. But unfortunately, what happens on the other side is being ignored. We already have enough evidences about foreigners fighting on Armenian side. They say they are native Armenians but first, it does not make any difference, because if foreign citizen is fighting against one country against another, it is a mercenary. Then, we do not have a 100% evidence that all of them are Armenians. We know that there are others. We know that PKK is there, we know that some terrorists from the Middle East joined the so-called "army of Nagorno-Karabakh". Therefore, unfortunately, this issue is absolutely out of picture. So, it creates an impression of a deliberate political attack on Azerbaijan. Plus, why Armenians are also exploiting this false statement, because for them probably it is very painful to admit that we beat them on the battlefield. For 30 years, they have been pretending that they have an unbeatable army. For 30 years they were telling that they on their own occupied our territories. Though, we know that it was wrong. So, we proved them who is who. We proved that their so-called "unbeatable army" is a legend, is a mythology. And for them to admit it is very painful. But they have already admitted their defeat. Prime minister Pashinyan sent a letter to President Putin asking for a military help. This is an admitting of their military defeat and our victory.

**-What will be the difficulty for you to manage a possible victory, in the territory which populated by 98% of Armenian people?**

-This territory was populated with maybe higher now. It was higher. Because all Azerbaijanis have been expelled. They committed ethnic cleansing against Azerbaijanis. It's a statistics, soviet statistics, not our statistics. How many people of different nationalities lived in Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous district in the end of 1970s? Almost 25% of the population there were Azerbaijanis. 40 thousand people. Shusha was 98% percent inhabited by Azerbaijanis. Today, there is no one. In Khankandi, there have been many Azerbaijanis. In Hadrut district, in other districts. Khojaly, which they committed a genocide, was 100% Azerbaijanis. So, they have been all ethnically cleansed, killed, tortured and expelled. And unfortunately, no one, no one accused Armenia of that. We did not see any sanctions on Armenia. We did not see any serious information supporting us. So, that was done and they created reality on the ground. This is the first thing. Second thing, 200 years ago, there were no Armenians at all there. Because I many times referred to the treaties which Karabakh khan signed with Russian empire. That Kurakchay treaty of 1805, nothing is said about ethnic Armenians there.

Ethnic Armenians were brought to that region from eastern Anatolia and Persia, by Tsarist Russia in order to change religious and ethnic composition of the region. So, this is historical part. Now coming to your question. I many times said that all those who live in Nagorno-Karabakh will continue to live there in peace and dignity. Armenians are our citizens. There are thousands of

Armenians who live in different parts of Azerbaijan, primarily in Baku, and those Armenians who live in Nagorno-Karabakh can be sure that their security will be provided, their financial situation will be much better. And they will live much better life than today under this suppression of the junta regime in Nagorno-Karabakh.

**-Three ceasefires as already were broken. The peace talks seem not to get any result. Who is to blame for?**

-Armenia. Look at their chronology. First, ceasefire was agreed in Moscow. In less than 24 hours they attacked Ganja with ballistic missiles from the territory of Armenia. It is proven. Russia, France and United States and many other countries can detect the launch of ballistic missiles. So, they know, it was launched from Armenia, and Pashinyan was lying when he said that it was not them. So, that was in less than 24 hours. They attacked at night, in a very mean way. They attacked deliberately the residential settlement. And as a result of two attacks almost 30 people, innocent people, including children were killed. The second ceasefire was violated by them after five minutes of the announcement of that. And the third ceasefire they violated attacking Barda. So, it was not us. What were we supposed to do? Sit and wait when they are killing us? Of course, we respond and will continue to do it. They needed ceasefire in order to continue their aggression, in order to try to regain and occupy again the territories which we have liberated. And also they wanted to create a chaos, panic in Azerbaijan by attacking civilians but they miscalculated the spirit of Azerbaijani people. Yes, we suffer from these mean attacks. We have 91 civilians so far killed, and more than 400 wounded. But this did not break our will, on the contrary, it makes us even stronger.

**-What would you answer to premier Pashinyan that I met 3 weeks ago? He said that you're here for a new genocide in Nagorno-Karabakh.**

-Absolutely false. All their history is false. There is no signs of that. You know, as I said, there are thousands of Armenians living in Azerbaijan. There are no Azerbaijanis living in Armenia or in Nagorno-Karabakh. 99% of Armenian population are ethnic Armenians. Can you find any other country in our region where such a full domination of one nationality? It is a mono-ethnic republic. Why? Because either they expel everybody, or other nationalities cannot live there. Azerbaijan is a multi-ethnic, multi-confessional country. Therefore, talking about the so-called genocide is absolutely unacceptable and this is another fake which they want to present as they always do. They always want to present themselves as the people who always suffering, always crying always needing help. And today look, he calls President Putin 5 times a day. He calls President Macron maybe less, but still. He calls everyone. He calls European leaders. He asks for recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh not understanding that there is a unified position of European Union on territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. Therefore, he tries to use every fake method in order to get some support. Therefore, it is absolutely wrong. And as I said, and I am responsible for what I am saying, those Armenians who live in Nagorno-Karabakh can be sure that their security will be provided.

**-With Italy you have a special partnership, you are our first provider of oil and gas. Are you afraid that if the war get bloodier and bloodier that partnership could be affected or not?**

-I don't think so. First, I think that the sooner the war stops the better. And we made such a suggestion. And our proposal was very constructive. I said many times during this more than one month, I can repeat once again. We are ready to stop today. If Armenian prime minister makes a commitment that they will liberate the remaining part of the territories. He has not made this commitment so far. When asked about compromises, he always talks about a self-determination. But self-determination is not the compromise they have to do. Their compromise must be liberation of all occupied territories with respect to the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions, and the basic principles. Because basic principles say that five regions and then two. So, five are already done by us unilaterally. Therefore, he must say that he will pull back the troops from remaining part of Aghdam and Kalbajar and Lachin districts. But he doesn't make this statement. So it shows that he doesn't want the war to stop. We are ready. This is first. Second, I don't think that it will create any complications with respect to our relations with our partners. With Italy we have a special relations. We have signed a document which is called a Strategic Partnership document. And just before the pandemic I paid an official visit to Italy which was very successful and with very big plans I returned back home. I am sure we will implement those plans though pandemic interfered a little bit. But it is mainly non-related to energy sector. On energy track, we did I think all what we planned today. I think Italy for us is a major trading partner, because of oil supplies. And also soon we will celebrate the inauguration of TAP. Thus, Southern Gas Corridor will be completed. Plus, many Italian companies work in Azerbaijan successfully for many years. We are planning to invite more Italian companies as contractors. By the way, they have completed such important projects as petrochemicals here and together with President Mattarella we have been at the opening ceremony. Therefore, I am sure that this conflict will influence our relations neither with Italy nor with any other country. So, I am sure about that.

**President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has been interviewed by German ARD TV channel.**

**-On the 27th of September, the war started. What is your answer to the question ‘who shot first?’**

-The answer is Armenia and we have evidences, because the first victims among civilians and military personnel were Azerbaijanis. That was a third in a row military provocation against us. The first was in July, when they launched an attack on the state border between Armenia and Azerbaijan. And we had casualties among the civilians and the military personnel. The second attempt was in August when Armenia sent a sabotage group, whose leader was detained and he gave evidence that he was sent in order to attack the civilians. And the third time on the 27th of September they launched a heavy artillery bombardment on some of the villages and cities situated close to the line of contact. We responded. So that’s how it started.

**-You responded tough and harsh. Why like this, this time? Is it a pre-dominance of the Azerbaijan military, because of the drones from Israel and Turkey?**

-We had these drones from Israel already for many years and by the way, some of them were used in 2016 during Armenian another provocation which launched in the liberation of the part of the occupied territories. But that clash lasted for several days because Armenia stopped. And if they stopped this time, we would have stopped also. But they did not. They wanted to make a big damage. They started to shell the cities which situated far beyond the line of contact. And we had many victims among civilians so far- 69. So we had to defend ourselves, defend our people and to respond. So our response was harsh, but they deserved it.

**-As far as I understand, you gained some grounds in the south especially, but as well, I mean next to Karabakh, further in the north and how long will this war continue?**

-It depends on Armenia, I said many times. We are ready to stop today. And by the way, the fact that three times we agreed for ceasefire demonstrates our will to stop military confrontation and to resolve this issue on the negotiation table by political purposes, political means. But 3 times Armenia brutally violated the ceasefire.

**-But they say the same.**

-But look yes, definitely they do. But look at what happened. On the 10th of October, the humanitarian ceasefire was announced. The next day they launched a ballistic missile attack on Ganja from the territory of Armenia. Probably you have seen the devastation which it caused. Ten people were killed, civilians. They said it was not them. But it is clear, because the launch of the ballistic missiles is observed by the satellite. So, the three co-chair countries of the Minsk Group definitely know who did it. The second time they did the same, they violated the ceasefire two minutes after it was announced. And the third time yesterday when they launched a cluster bomb on the city of Tartar. Four people were killed among them one seven year old girl. So it was them. There was no evidence that we did it. What we do is opposite. I said that we will not respond them the same way. We will respond them on the battlefield. We do not attack cities, we do not attack civilians, only on the battlefield. But we have to defend ourselves. If they attack, if they want to

regain the positions which they lost, we cannot just stay calm. We need to defend and the more we defend the more territories we liberate.

**-But exactly the same thing they claimed as well. They say that you use cluster bombs and I mean there was even like some proves from Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch that you used cluster bombs there in Karabakh. I mean, why do you use this kind of arms?**

-We don't use. We defend ourselves. We invited Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch to come to Azerbaijan. Unfortunately, their coverage of the events is only from Armenian side. They did not approach us to come here, therefore, we have big doubts about their impartiality.

**-But now they come. As far as I understand, Human Rights Watch, they are coming or they told me.**

-They are coming, because we said "why don't you come here?" After we made a request to them. "Please, do come here", they agreed to come. But why didn't they come in the first place?

**-They told me that they wanted to come. They asked for several times, but you didn't give them access.**

-No, no. That is not possible. Because that was what we did. Just yesterday we said, why they don't come, let them come and go to Ganja, go to Tartar, meet the people whom Armenians attacked. And again, the ballistic missile launch is seen from the satellite. No one can say that we launched a ballistic missile on any civilian compound in Nagorno-Karabakh or in Armenia.

**-Let me ask you again about this cluster munition. Because, of course, you know it's very serious subject. I had a look into the research of Human Rights Watch and the proof was quite interesting, they had pictures, and they even have names. The name of the weapon they said LAR 160 cluster bomb from Israel. Do you really want to dispute that fact?**

-Yes, of course. There are no proofs about that. And I would like them to come here, and to give these proofs. At the same time, to go to Ganja, to go to Tartar, to go to Barda and see what kind of weapons Armenians are using. And be impartial...

**-So, if they can find weapons here, you rely on their research.**

-No, they will have to, because there is no way for them to say "no". Let them say, because so far, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International was very aggressive against Azerbaijan. They never made any comment about violation of human rights in Armenia. When a journalist died in Armenian prison they were silent. When leader of main opposition party of Armenia was jailed, they were silent. When former presidents are on trial, they were silent. They don't want to see it, because they have the so-called Armenian origin people in their structures. And these organizations are basically used in order to damage the image of Azerbaijan. But nevertheless, we invited them. Let them come. And say what they see.

**-Actually, you never signed the UN Convention on cluster munition. So, why is it a problem for you? Actually you could use it.**

-But did Armenia sign?

**-We are talking about Azerbaijan and not Armenia.**

-We are talking about the conflict. We are talking about the conflict and the fact that we sign or don't sign any kind of convention doesn't mean that we are using it or not. We have enough ammunition. We have modern weapons and we demonstrate it on the battlefield. And what we do, we liberate the territories not with bombs. We liberate the territories with our fighters which take one village after another, one city after another, raise the Azerbaijani flag. So, that's how it is done.

**-Coming to this subject, I mean, wouldn't it be a goal somehow to take over those seven districts and afterwards to negotiate and maybe to come into autonomous zone of Karabakh?**

-We suggested that but Armenians always rejected. The co-chairs of the Minsk Group can prove what I say. We always suggested, we always were committed to the peace plan, so-called basic principles which provided the liberation of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan in phases. At the first stage five, at the second stage two. But now among those five, almost all of them have already been liberated. Therefore, Armenia was always against that. And frankly speaking, what we have seen on the battlefield after we liberated the territories. Those engineering constructions which were built there- they invested maybe hundreds of millions of dollars. They show that they were not planning to leave those territories. Because if they planned to leave the territories, they would not have invested so much. There were several lines of defense with the modern equipment, modern weapons, and modern engineering technology. Therefore, all their behavior on negotiation table was an attempt to mislead the mediators and us. They were making the negotiations endless and wanted to win time what they have managed to do for 27 years. Therefore, we committed to the basic principles. Seven districts must be returned to us. Armenians have never lived in those districts. Plus, Azerbaijanis who were expelled from Nagorno-Karabakh-there have been 40 thousand people of Azerbaijani origin in Nagorno-Karabakh before-must return there. Then, that's how the plan should be implemented.

**-An autonomous region without any Azerbaijani influence?**

-That was part of the discussions. But we did not come to a final agreement about that.

**-But would you agree about that?**

-Well, we need to discuss it now. Because now there are new realities on the ground. Always we heard...

**-What kind of influence do you want to have there-in an autonomous region? I mean is this contradicting by itself?**

-No. First of all, we did not agree on any autonomous region. This is first. We did not come to this agreement. When we were suggesting that, Armenians were rejecting. They were demanding independence, which we did not agree. Now the realities on the ground have changed. We heard many times that there are realities and you have to take them into account. It is okay. So, we changed the realities. Now they will have to take it into account, and what we suggested them during these 27 years, maybe is not valid any longer. Therefore, we need to have discussions now

and, by the way, we are ready to send our foreign minister to Geneva tomorrow to start a new round of negotiations if Armenia is ready, and to discuss the future of Nagorno-Karabakh at the negotiation table. But for that Armenia should stop. They always wanted during these months to regain back the territories which we liberated and that was a main reason for their defeat.

**-When we were there in this area, among us the question came up. Why actually is Karabakh so important for Azerbaijan? I mean, is there a kind of resource or is it just symbolic?**

- Alsace and Lorraine, is it important for you? Bavaria, is it important for you? Or Rhine-Westphalia? It is our land, our territory, internationally recognized. It is not a matter of resources. We have main resources here in Baku. It is a matter of justice, it is a matter of national pride and it is a matter of international law. International law and the whole international community recognize Nagorno-Karabakh as an integral part of Azerbaijan. And we are restoring justice and we are implementing the UN Security Council resolutions which were on paper for 27 years.

**-Are you actually recognizing that the majority of the people in these region were Armenians as most historians say worldwide?**

-With respect to the history, I can tell you that Armenians were transported or brought to this region after the peace agreement between the Karabakh khanate and Russian empire was signed by Ibrahim Khalil Khan and Russian general Tsitsianov in the beginning of the 19th century.

**-Aren't they living there for centuries?**

-No, no, no. They started to be transported to Nagorno-Karabakh after Kurakchay peace agreement and then Gulustan peace agreement, Turkmenchay peace agreement- in 1805, 1813, 1828. You can see on internet. There is no mentioning of Armenians in this agreements. Armenians then were brought by Tsarist Russia from eastern Anatolia and from Persia in order to change the ethnic and religious composition of the region.

**-So, most of the historians, experts on the Caucasus region are wrong?**

-Yes, of course. Because look at the documents. Historians, which historians? There are different historians and history sometimes is motivated by political preferences. But look at those documents. They are on internet and you can see. If you find any mentioning of Armenian population you will say that I am wrong. So, that's how it was. But the other thing is yes, they lived there for 200 years, and the word Karabakh is an Azerbaijani word, it is not an Armenian word. Do you know how they call the so-called capital of Nagorno-Karabakh? Stepanakert. Do you know whose honor is it called? Stepan Shaumyan. Stepan Shaumyan was an Armenian-Russian Bolshevik, head of the criminal gang here which committed a genocide against the Azerbaijanis in 1918. So, if it was an ancient Armenian territory, why is it named Karabakh? And why the capital city is named Stepanakert and not some ancient name? Because they lived there for 200 years. In 1978, Armenians who lived there, raised a monument on the 150 years of their arrival to Nagorno-Karabakh. This is a history, but again, they have lived there for 200 years and we want them to live. I said many times, we want Azerbaijanis to go back and Armenians live there, where they lived historically for 200 years. No matter.



**-Nevertheless, this people experience your military action as how they say ethnical cleansing.**

-No, no, not at all. We were the subject of ethnic cleansing. When they occupied Nagorno-Karabakh and seven districts surrounding it, we had 750 thousand Azerbaijanis ethnically cleansed from 7 districts plus from Shusha which was a part of Nagorno-Karabakh. We've been subject of ethnic cleansing. We didn't do any ethnic cleansing against Armenians and we are not planning to do it now. Because I said that we will have to live together. It will not be easy but we will have to learn.

**-But civilians were killed there right now, the last couples of weeks.**

-Civilians were killed in Azerbaijan also-69

**-There as well.**

-Yes. Because it's a war. But 69 civilians killed in the territories which are far away from the conflict zone, in Ganja, more than 300 civilians have been wounded by Armenians. It's a war. It happens. Unfortunately.

**-I used to live in Israel for five years. I know very well that the drones in Israel are very accurate. So, it wasn't done by a drone as far as I understand, how does that come that the church was hit in Karabakh?**

-That was as I said already, probably a mistake of our artillery or the second option could be that Armenians did it themselves. In order to put a blame on us.

**-Christians are shooting on their churches?**

-But it was a minor damage. It was not destroyed. Have you seen the images of that? It's a minor damage. The church was not destroyed. It can be repaired within two weeks maximum. Therefore, we have a doubt that could be done by them, themselves, in order to put a blame on us. Look at the Armenian church in Baku. We preserve it. We restored it.

**-Could you imagine Muslims to destroy, or to demoralize mosque by themselves to make something up like this?**

-I don't know. Maybe. Maybe it may happen. Why not? Armenian church here in Baku is preserved by us. We did not destroy it. We protect it. We keep thousands of Armenian books there. But in the mosque in Zangilan which was liberated, they kept pigs there. That's the difference.

**-As far as I understand, on the 1st of October, a man in Azerbaijan was put in prison because he demanded peace. I mean some human rights experts, defenders say you might have started this war as well to unite the nation behind you to somehow to distract from the problems in the country when it comes to democracy and human rights.**

-That is absolutely wrong assessment. First of all, I don't know about anyone who was arrested. If you can give me the name, if you have the name give me. Do you have the name?

**-I don't have the name right now but I will find out.**

-When you find out, tell me. So, we can consider this question invalid, because you don't have the name and I don't have this information. With respect to distraction of attention there is no need to distract the attention. Our political system is efficient. Before this clash, and even before the parliamentary elections which we had, I launched a kind of a new process of political cooperation. We made a public appeal to all political parties to start practical cooperation, to put an end to hostility, and to start at least talking to each other. Except two parties, all the other parties, 50 of them supported it. We started a modern new political process. We have now many opposition members in our parliament. The political process is very efficient.

**-Aren't there many opposition members either in prison in Azerbaijan?**

-No, no. Those who are in prison, they are in prison for the crimes they have committed. There are no one here on political charges and opposition is...

**-What kind of crimes? Saying their opinion?**

-No, no, different crimes as any other crimes. I don't know exactly which but it is just ordinary crimes. So, we don't have this kind of reason. Second, our economic performance during the pandemic is one of the best. Our economy declined only 3.9 percent, it is much lower than in some European countries. Poverty level in Azerbaijan is 5 percent, much lower. Unemployment level is 7 percent, much lower. We have hot currency reserves which exceed our foreign debt six times. So, I don't have internal problems, why should I launch it?

**-Would you call Azerbaijan an example for democracy?**

-No, no, never. Would you call your country an example for democracy?

**-Somehow yes.**

-But you ban opposition rallies.

**-No, actually not.**

-Yes, yes. Those extremists who wanted to have a rally, I forgot the name. You banned them.

**-I don't know about that. I mean even during those corona times they were doing demonstrations.**

-No. it was before corona times. We are not, and we do not pretend to be. But there are countries which pretend to be, but they killed protesters. Do you know how many people were killed during these yellow-vest protests? Do you know? More than ten killed.

**-But we are not talking about France.**

-No, no, let's talk about Europe.

**-About Azerbaijan...**

-No, let's talk about those who pretend to be democrats. We are not pretending. Yes, we have shortcomings.

**-I will ask Mr. Macron about this.**

-But those who kill protesters, who kill protestors on the street, ten of them killed. We look how in Europe you beat protesters, you beat them by forces. You bring dogs and this is considered democracy.

**-How important is the country-where we came from right now-Turkey for you and especially during this military operation during this war? I mean there are Turkish soldiers here. Yesterday, we talked to some of them and they told us they are from Turkey.**

-You talked to soldiers?

**-Yes.**

-On the battlefield?

**-No, no, not on the battlefield**

-But where?

**-In the city of Baku.**

-They are fighting here, in Baku?

**-No, they are here. Nevertheless, they are here.**

-There can be German soldiers here now.

**-You are doing military exercises together.**

-Yes, we do.

**-If, a third country would get involved into this conflict, do you expect the help from Turkey?**

-We do not expect any third country to be involved. We do not see which country can be involved, because the countries which surround us are our partners and friends. We know that Armenians want to involve some of them into this battle. But I am sure it will not happen. It's a battle between us and Armenia. And everybody should stay away from that. Turkish soldiers can be here, yes. Last year we had ten joint military trainings. But also, we have military trainings with other countries. We are part of the NATO partnership peace program. Nothing strange. You saw them in Baku, you didn't see them in the battle.

**-Do you feel safer with Turkish F-16s here in Azerbaijan?**

-Turkish F-16s came here as a result of the military training and they stayed here because the Armenians launched an attack on us. And they are here as a sign of solidarity. They are not participating in any battle, and there are not a plan to be part of that.

**-3 times ceasefires were broken. One negotiated by France, one negotiated by Russia one negotiated by the USA. Which international power could stop this war?**

-I think, Armenia should stop it. International power-these 3 countries which you mentioned are co-chairs of the Minsk Group. They are leading countries of the world, members of the UN Security Council, permanent members. These countries adopted four resolutions demanding withdrawal of Armenian troops. But these countries did not do anything in order to implement these resolutions. These resolutions were on paper. That shows that this mediation was not efficient. But at the same time, we cannot think about some other countries which can be more powerful. Therefore, the only way to stop war is for Armenia to stop, to admit its defeat, to admit our victory and then to commit to liberation of the part of the territories. We will liberate them anyway. They did not believe when we started counter-attack. We said we will liberate, stop it now. They could have stopped even when we took Fuzuli back.

**-Do you have the feeling that they are not very interested in this conflict?**

-Whom do you mean?

**-Those three countries for example?**

-Well, no, I don't have this feeling, because if they were not interested, they wouldn't have been mediators. They have a mandate from the OSCE.

**-But the mediation wasn't successful.**

-Yes it wasn't successful. Because they did not put sanctions on Armenia. I raised it many times. Armenia should have been sanctioned like Iraq was sanctioned when Saddam Hussein occupied Kuwait, immediately. And there were serious sanctions against Iraq. If the same happened to Armenia, then they would have moved the forces back.

**-So they closed their eyes?**

-Yes, they closed their eyes. They, I would say, not closed their eyes, they were always saying there is no military solution. They wanted that this situation continued more or less the same way. I think they were fine with the fact that the conflict seemed to be frozen. They thought that it may be frozen forever, and they only tried to think about some confidence-building measures, some monitors, so that there's no outbreak. But they did not implement their mandate, in accordance with the OSCE decision and they should have forced Armenia. I think each of these countries unilaterally can send such a message to Armenia that it should listen to it, but they did not.

**-Are you listening to them?**

-I am listening to every partner. But it depends what I do after I listen. But I am listening.

**-Two days ago, I heard you in the radio asking the question where has Armenia the money from to do this war? What is the answer?**

-No answer. I've been asking this question for a month. We made a preliminary calculations.

**-I mean, somebody asking this question continuously somehow has an answer in mind.**

-Well, if I had an answer I would not have asked. If I am still asking, it means that I did not get an answer. We made a preliminary calculation about minimum, by the way, I did not disclose all of

what we have destroyed. That will come. 2.7 billion dollars, cost of the ammunition which we destroyed and which we took as a trophy. Where the money comes from? Armenia is a poor country, its budget is less than 2 billion dollars. Its foreign debt is 8 billion dollars.

**-They are supported by Russia.**

-That's your opinion.

**-This is official. This is no secret. Somebody else?**

-Maybe, I don't know. So, I am asking but nobody is responding. So I will continue to ask.

**-Your Excellency, Mr. President, thank you very much for the interview.**

-Thank you.

**President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has been interviewed by Russian Interfax agency.**

**- Thank you, Mr. President, for finding the time for an interview with our agency despite your busy schedule. It was exactly one month yesterday since the counter- offensive of Azerbaijan's Armed Forces began in Nagorno- Karabakh. How would you assess this month from the point of view of the military- political settlement of the conflict?**

- Azerbaijan's Army has demonstrated its superiority on the battlefield. Significant parts of the occupied territories have been liberated in one month. Given that the Armenian side had been building fortifications in the occupied lands for almost 30 years, there were several lines of defense. Also, the terrain itself is more favorable for the Armenian side. It is mountainous and our servicemen had to overcome both engineering fortifications and mountainous terrain when carrying out the counterattack. Despite all these factors, significant territories in the occupied lands of our country have been liberated in one month, and this shows that Azerbaijan's Army is considered one of the most combat- effective armies in the world for a reason. According to the rankings periodically published by organizations that assess the military potential of countries, the Azerbaijan's Army is among top 50 armies in the world. The professionalism, training, combat effectiveness and, most importantly, fighting morale have certainly contributed to our success in many respects. Certainly, the equipment available to Azerbaijan's Army has also played its part.

We have liberated the cities of Fuzuli, Jabrayil, Zangilan, Gubadli, a part of Khojavand district. The successful mission, the successful advance of our army continues. I have said several times during this month that we want the settlement of the conflict to move from a military to a political phase. But, unfortunately, the Armenian side has grossly violated the ceasefire regime for the third time, attempted to recapture the territories we have liberated, and is pushing for a continuation of the confrontation. Therefore, I am answering your question again: the military-political settlement is the only possible way. We would like the military phase to end and issues of further de-occupation of Azerbaijani territories to be resolved at the negotiating table.

**- Mr. President, you noted that Baku is interested in completing the military phase as quickly as possible. How long do you think it can last and is Baku ready to be content with seven districts around Nagorno- Karabakh?**

- I have repeatedly said in my addresses to the Azerbaijani people and in numerous interviews this month that we are ready to stop at any moment, even today. But for this to happen, the Armenian side must commit to withdrawing its troops from the rest of the occupied territories. Therefore, I cannot predict how long the military confrontation will last. It depends on the Armenian side. As I said, their constant attempts to recapture our lands have failed. I think this should already be enough for them to understand that they will not achieve anything by military means. Unfortunately, in the political domain they are demonstrating an obstructive approach, as I said, and have grossly violated the ceasefire three times. Based on this, of course, we will continue to plan on further action. As for the occupied territories, of course, the Azerbaijanis must return to all the occupied territories where they used to live, and this has always been my approach. Not only to the seven occupied districts outside Nagorno- Karabakh, outside the former Nagorno-

Karabakh autonomous region, but also to the territories, to the lands they had lived on for centuries. First of all, these are Shusha, Khankandi and other lands that have been inhabited by Azerbaijanis for centuries. I also said that our vision for a settlement lies in the coexistence of the Armenian and Azerbaijani population of Nagorno- Karabakh. It so happened historically that the Armenian population has been living on these lands for 200 years. We all know the history of the resettlement of Armenians from Eastern Anatolia and Iran. But it so happened. They have lived there for 200 years. And we have no objection to the continued presence of the Armenian population. On the contrary, I have always said that thousands of citizens of Armenian nationality live in Azerbaijan, that Armenians and Azerbaijanis live together in neighboring countries and get along quite well. Why can't this be achieved in Nagorno- Karabakh? Our vision is this: Azerbaijanis should return to all the territories they lived in. The Armenian population should also live on this land. And in the environment of good neighborliness, we will strive to heal the wounds of war.

**- So it means that Baku will not stop until Armenian servicemen withdraw from all the occupied territories.**

- We need the Armenian side, through of its leadership, to undertake a commitment to withdraw troops from the occupied territories. We haven't heard that yet. As soon as this commitment is made by the Armenian leadership and as soon as it is confirmed and approved by OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs, we are ready to stop military action immediately, provided that the Armenian side also stops it because all three violations of the ceasefire were committed by the Armenian side. Four civilians, including a seven- year-old girl, were killed as a result of a cluster munitions fired on Barda yesterday. This is not a conflict zone. So this is a flagrant violation of the ceasefire, which was agreed in Washington. Prior to that, the ceasefire agreed in Moscow was violated by the Armenian side the next day when they launched a ballistic missile from the territory of Armenia to Ganja. And as a result of this, 10 people died. As a result of the second ballistic missile attack on Ganja, even more people died. There are about 30 victims in a peaceful city. Therefore, it is not our fault that the ceasefire is not observed. Therefore, the Armenian side must undertake that they will withdraw from the occupied territories they are still holding under occupation: these include a part of Aghdam district, the entire Lachin district and most of Kalbajar district. And then we will be ready, of course, to move on to a political settlement. It will cover many aspects. In principle, we have accepted the fundamental principles, while the Armenian side has rejected them. But the Armenian prime minister's aggressive statement yesterday suggests that they say one thing to the mediators and do something completely different.

**- Mr. President, you have said that Baku is mainly committed to the fundamental principles. The first point of these principles was the liberation of five districts around Nagorno-Karabakh. But at present, four out of five districts have already been liberated by Azerbaijan's Army. It turns out that, at a minimum, the fundamental principles are either not relevant or need some adjustment.**

- It will depend on the Armenian side's conduct again. As you know, negotiations between the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia are to be held in Geneva tomorrow. There we will see how committed the Armenian side is to the fundamental principles. After that, we will give our assessment of how relevant they are now not, although I have repeatedly stated during this

month that Azerbaijan accepts them in general, there are certain aspects that do not suit us, of course, but we accept them in general. As for the return of five districts at the first stage, of course, this is no longer relevant because the fundamental principles determined the sequence of territories to be returned – five districts at the first stage, and Kalbajar and Lachin districts at the second. Then comes the return of Azerbaijanis to the territory of Nagorno- Karabakh, in principle, the return of all refugees to the places of their original residence. We have almost completed the first stage. Therefore, if the Armenian side expresses its adherence to the fundamental principles, we will talk about an immediate transfer of Lachin, Kalbajar and a part of Aghdam district that are still under occupation to Azerbaijan. Thus, we will somewhat facilitate the work of mediators because one of the important issues will have already be implemented and we will not have to wait for a second stage. It must come right away. If we agree on a political settlement, then Armenian troops should withdraw from Kalbajar and Lachin districts and a part of Aghdam district immediately.

**- You have already touched upon tomorrow's meeting of foreign ministers and outlined the overall expectations of Baku. I would like to clarify if Baku still expects the Armenian side to show constructivism and the negotiations to be more substantive, not abstract and broad?**

- I think we are still hopeful. Although the aggressive conduct of the Armenian side and the fact that they are flagrantly violating international law, the Geneva Conventions, and committing war crimes does not suggest that they are going to address the substance of the settlement issue, of course. Attacking peaceful cities with cluster munitions is a war crime. We have 69 civilians killed and more than 300 injured as a result of Armenian shelling. This is the face of Armenian fascism. At the same time, I think that the defeat we have inflicted on Armenia on the battlefield should nevertheless be a serious signal for them that they can no longer imitate things, deceive us, deceive the Minsk Group co-chairs and essentially evade substantive discussions. As for the process of negotiations, there was practically none for the past year, even more than a year. This was the first time this has happened since the 1994 truce. Because since then, the negotiations have been going on with varying degree of intensity and the parties have agreed on provisions of the fundamental principles. They did not fall from the sky. These were the principles proposed by the Minsk Group, its co-chairs, and agreed by the parties. Therefore, there was a process, albeit slow, and some progress was being made. But after the new government came to power in Armenia, they gave us and, as far as I know, the mediators, promises in the first year. But in the second year, they openly demonstrated their true intention that they would not give up a single centimeter of the land. Moreover, they threatened us with a new war for new territories. In fact, these were the words of their Minister of Defense who has been completely discredited as such both in the eyes of his own people and in the eyes of the international community. And after such a humiliating defeat, I am surprised he hasn't resigned yet.

**- What is your assessment of remarks by Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, who on the one hand uses belligerent rhetoric but on the other hand says that Armenia should prepare for painful compromises, then changes his tone again? What is behind this?**

- It is hard for me to comment on this. I would probably refrain from an assessment of what is happening to the Armenian prime minister. Probably, this military defeat influenced his mental



state, otherwise how one can explain the series of inconsistent statements and actions that are absolutely irrational and harmful, primarily for himself as the country's leader and dangerous and harmful for his country?

Many people ask why the clashes happened now and not before. Even those who have are biased towards Azerbaijan and openly support Armenia would ask this question. Twenty-six years have passed since the 1994 truce. There were clashes; there were victims over those years, but not on such a scale. So what has happened? Nothing has changed in Azerbaijan.

I have been engaged in settlement negotiations for 17 years, and I have gone a long way towards agreeing on the fundamental principles together with the two previous Armenian presidents. That is why it is clear to impartial observers that it is not our fault. This has to do with inappropriate, irrational, and dangerous conduct of the Armenian prime minister.

No former Armenian leader ever allowed insulting innuendos with respect to the Azerbaijani people. None of them allowed the head of so-called Nagorno-Karabakh to be inaugurated in Shusha. None of them prided themselves on the demonstrative violation of the Geneva Convention - showing the resettlement of the Lebanese Armenians to Nagorno- Karabakh, including Shusha. And so on and so forth.

So these are the results of the ill-conceived and dangerous activity of Prime Minister Pashinyan. I wouldn't comment on his statements inside the country. But what he does concerning the settlement is very dangerous for Armenia itself. Today, Armenia can clearly see this. That is why I think that the Minsk Group co-chairs should clearly raise this issue before the Armenian foreign minister, who, as I understand, is in a very difficult situation. He has to answer for the inappropriate conduct of his leader, and in fact he deserves sympathy. He will have to get himself out of this situation and somehow explain series of inconsistent actions by his prime minister.

On the one hand, he speaks about painful concessions; on the other hand, he says that there is no diplomatic solution. First, he says that he is ready for a compromise but then he says that he will defend Karabakh until the very end. On the one hand, he says that Karabakh is Armenia, but then he says that we should negotiate with Nagorno- Karabakh. This is an absolutely mutually exclusive palette of inadequacy. So I think that many issues of these will be clarified tomorrow.

**- In your latest address to the Azerbaijani people, you quite harshly criticized the mediators for essentially being inactive. Does this mean that Baku will insist on changing the Minsk Group format?**

- I have spoken many times about the performance of the OSCE Minsk Group over the past month. And what I said in the address to the Azerbaijani people is the absolute truth. Any format, no matter what it is called and who it involves, should acknowledge its ineffectiveness if it doesn't fulfill the set task. And the set task has not been fulfilled. Although I cannot deny that the Minsk Group made attempts to reach a settlement, because fundamental principles were elaborated with its assistance. They worked and they proposed options. There were some things we didn't agree with, there were some things that the Armenian side didn't agree with. So that was a process that had lasted until Pashinyan came to power in Armenia.

But from the point of view of effectiveness and efficiency, the Minsk Group, of course, didn't live up to the expectations, I mean the the co- chairs' performance. Should the co-chairs be other countries, this could have been explained by their insufficient international relevance, by their lack of authority to implement even the UN Security Council resolutions that they had adopted themselves. But when the Minsk Group co-chairs are three permanent members of the UN Security Council, when three nuclear powers cannot exert pressure on Armenia, this, of course, raises a lot of questions.

As for the composition, I have already said that the Minsk Group was set up in 1992. I don't know how it was set up and what principles underlie the choice of its members. But as I said, if we formed a contact group today, its composition would, of course, have been completely different. It would include countries that have their positions in the region and that have potential and authority in the world. Of course, I think the countries that are current co-chairs could probably remain there. But this is not a question for me, because the mechanism and the procedure of forming the Minsk Group and its co-chairs is the prerogative of the OSCE.

I think that we should not cling to formalities in order to settle the conflict. The Minsk Group as such can continue working, but we should think about new cooperation mechanisms between the countries of the region in order to practically reach a political settlement. I think that Russian President Vladimir Putin probably meant the same when he spoke about this.

**- In this regard, some experts propose the 2+2 formula. How acceptable is it to Baku?**

- Two is Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the other two?

**- Turkey and Russia.**

- This would be acceptable to us, because Turkey and Russia are our neighbors and countries with which we have close mutual relations and countries with good potential for cooperation among them. It is enough to look at the history of the past few years. Turkey and Russia have reached a high level of mutual understanding on many issues, including the bilateral agenda and the international security agenda. We see that in Syria and in Libya, and in tackling issues of countering international terrorism, let alone energy projects, economic, investment projects.

Even before this escalation, I said that we have always welcomed the rapprochement between Turkey and Russia. I believe that this is an important factor of regional security. Considering that Armenian separatism is the main threat for us, and not only for us but for the entire region, I believe that combining the efforts of Turkey and Russia would benefit the region and could accelerate the political settlement of the Nagorno- Karabakh conflict.

**- Mr. President, you have repeatedly said that the mediators should impose sanctions against Armenia in order to secure a breakthrough in the settlement process. What it might look like?**

- I have been talking about it for a long time, but regrettably my calls remain unanswered. What sanctions could be applied? Sanctions that would make Armenia fulfill the UN Security Council resolutions and withdraw its troops from the occupied territories. For example, we could have

considered the sanctions that were imposed on Iraq after its occupation of Kuwait. Similar things took place from the point of view of international law. The internationally recognized territory of Kuwait was occupied by Iraq, war crimes were committed, ethnic cleansing occurred, and only the timely reaction of the international community helped stop this occupation. And that happened within a short period of time. Next, economic sanctions, an arms embargo were imposed on Iraq. Iraq became a no-fly zone. War criminals, who committed crimes against humanity, were brought to justice and sentenced.

All these sanctions should be applied to Armenia. Even if one of those sanctions had been imposed, I am sure the conflict would have been resolved long ago. There has simply been no political will and desire to apply these sanctions. And more likely the position that prevailed was that - let's leave everything as it is as long as there is no escalation.

**- Do you mean frozen?**

- Frozen, of course. Although everyone understood that this cannot last forever. Everyone understood that 10 years ago. The presidents of Russia, the US and France made statements, and said clearly many times that the status quo was unacceptable. Well, fine. We welcomed this, and I remember this was praised in our country, I commented on this. But what happened next? Then they began to depart from this thesis gradually, stopped voicing it and invented a new thesis that the status quo is unstable. And we can clearly understand that these are completely different things. So the co-chair countries moved away even from a political attempt to exert pressure on Armenia. And it was common knowledge that the status quo was unstable. And recent events proved this.

This is why, let me repeat that again, it is not too late to apply sanctions in order to end the conflict as soon as possible. I think that co-chair countries should seriously think about what sanctions could be imposed on the aggressor in order to make them vacate the occupied lands.

**- Do you think that the co- chairs managed to remain entirely neutral over the month of the military phase?**

- Every country, including Azerbaijan, can have its own foreign political priorities. We have close relations with some countries and less closer with others. Our relations with some countries are based on historical factors and with others on pragmatic factors. That is why we have always treated with understanding the fact that there are very well structured and active Armenian communities in the co-chair countries, in the US, in France, and in Russia. Even when we analyze this situation, it is very hard to tell where they have greater influence on decision-making. That is why we have always taken and are taking this factor into account.

If there were some deviations at the first stage of hostilities that made us doubt their neutrality, I think now everything is fine-tuned. My contacts with the leaders of the co-chair countries, as well as, I am sure, international support that Azerbaijan got, resulted in the fact that we can see this neutrality now. Once again, what some people have on their mind is not our business, but, of course, the mediators must adhere to international law and neutrality, otherwise they will just forfeit the right to be mediators. A mediator must be impartial, it must leave emotions at home or leave them for the bilateral format, and as part of the settlement it must take into account the mandate from

the OSCE and willingness to settle the conflict in line with international law rather than in line with the wishes of Azerbaijan or Armenia.

**- You have said recently said that there will be no referendum in Nagorno- Karabakh. This is the new reality. Does this mean that Azerbaijan has changed its position, made it tougher?**

- I have been talking about this for 17 years, and the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs know my position. I don't remember how many co-chairs have changed over these years, how many diplomats have been co-chairmen, but all of them can confirm that I have always said that there would never be a referendum on the internationally recognized territories of Azerbaijan. Moreover, if we look at the fundamental principles, there is no such word as 'referendum' there. There is a certain wording related to the expression of will, to self-determination there.

We have always said that self-determination is an important principle of international law, but it cannot violate the territorial integrity of a country. Secondly, a country's territorial integrity cannot be changed without the consent of this country. And I naturally adhere to this position today: we will not let a second Armenian state be set up on Azerbaijan's territories. If someone is willing to create a second Armenian state, let them give a part of their territory and let them create it there.

**- Armenia says that it can recognize Nagorno-Karabakh's independence if hostilities continue. At the same time, there are calls for countries and international organizations to recognize Karabakh. How likely is this? And what could it lead to?**

- What you are asking about once again proves the inconsistency and insincerity of the incumbent Armenian authorities, because while failing to recognize Nagorno-Karabakh themselves, they want other countries do that. And their regular blackmailing and threats that they will recognize Nagorno-Karabakh in case of escalation turned out to be yet another bluff. Military confrontation on Karabakh has lasted for more than a month. Why haven't they recognized Nagorno-Karabakh yet?

It is very easy to do, let them just say that they recognize it. This is the essence of their policies, when they have been always trying for many decades, and regrettably they have sometimes succeeded under the cover of other states to have others solve their problems. This is the essence of the ideology of the present-day Armenian state. It is based on very deep historical roots; it has been this way throughout the entire history. If we look at the past 200 years of the history of the Caucasus, we can see how many wars started because of them, how many provocations they caused for other countries, only to retreat to the backstage, hide behind someone's backs and reap the fruits of confrontation and the fruits of shedding the blood of other peoples.

We know the history of their appearance in the Caucasus well. Historically, there was no Armenian ethnicity in the region. How did they get here? This was their way, trickery, cunning attempts to use a cat's paw to take roasting chestnuts from a fire. They are doing the same now. Hence my call for them in response – recognize Nagorno-Karabakh, recognize it right away. By the way, I have spoken about it quite recently. Let them recognize Nagorno-Karabakh today, but asking other countries to do this once again proves the inadequateness of the Armenian leadership and very low political literacy. That is why if the Armenian leadership knew at least the basics of international

politics, it would understand that the whole world recognizes Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. It is common knowledge that we joined the UN and other international organizations as a state with Nagorno-Karabakh as its integral part. The Non-Aligned Movement – 120 countries – voices unambiguous support for Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. The European Union – 27 countries – our document with the EU states reflects support for the territorial integrity, sovereignty and inviolability of Azerbaijan's borders. Altogether there are almost 150 countries. Should we add the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which, however, includes some NAM members but there are other countries that are not represented in the NAM. There you have it - the entire international community.

Because of Armenia, its whim and caprice to recognize Nagorno-Karabakh, to spoil relations with Azerbaijan, and not just to spoil, as I said this will immediately lead to the rupture of diplomatic relations with any country that will do so, no-one will just do that. Moreover, they don't recognize it themselves. Furthermore, they are aggressors in line with the reality on the Earth and in line with UN resolutions. That is why this is a very indecent attempt to pull somebody's chestnuts out of the fire.

**- Russia has proposed deploying military observers in the conflict zone. Prime Minister Pashinyan in general agreed to deploying peacekeepers to the conflict zone and didn't rule out that these could be Russian peacekeepers. So is it observers or peacekeepers? What is the position of Baku?**

- This issue is reflected in the fundamental principles, but we have never seriously discussed it because we simply didn't get to it. It was planned to dispatch peacekeepers to the region at the final stage of the settlement, when the consequences of the occupation are eliminated, when refugees return to Nagorno-Karabakh, then, yes, in order to ensure that Azerbaijani and Armenian population can live side by side, disengagement forces will be needed at the first stage. But the fundamental principles don't state for how long they should be deployed and what countries they should consist of - simply because we didn't reach it. First of all, all main provisions of the agreement must be agreed on.

As for the desire of the Armenian prime minister to see peacekeepers in the conflict zone, then firstly, this is none of his business, because when we speak about the conflict zone, we should understand that this is Azerbaijan's territory. If we speak about peacekeepers at the border of Armenia and Azerbaijan, this is another issue. But as far as I understand, it is the Azerbaijani territory that is in question now, that is why we should have the final say.

And since this topic wasn't broadly discussed, I think it is premature to speak about it. But for my part I would like to note that when we speak about it, we should firstly understand what mandate possible observers would have and where they would be deployed. One should understand that there is no line of contact, so where will their outposts be? Armenia breaches international law and ceasefire, shelling our cities. Just recently, "Euronews" aired footage that clearly shows a flying missile. And it was flying to our cities rather than military positions. So where they will be, what mandate, composition, numbers, arms, and functions will they have, and who will ensure their

security? These questions require very thorough evaluation, and only then will we be able to say whether we agree to it or not. That is why it is so far premature.

**- In general, do military officials of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia discuss any mechanisms of ceasefire monitoring?**

- No, there are no such discussions now.

**- Are you ready to go to Moscow for negotiations on Karabakh with the Armenian prime minister? And on what conditions?**

- I haven't received such an invitation. I have repeatedly taken part in trilateral meetings between the presidents of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia, but there have been no such meetings since Pashinyan came to power in Armenia. These meetings were with the previous presidents of Armenia, and I have never avoided such meetings. I considered them to be very positive, because Russia as a co-chair of the Minsk Group plays a special role in the settlement, and historically Russia has always maintained close ties with both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Russia is very actively cooperating politically and economically with Azerbaijan and Armenia these days, it is our neighbor. Therefore, it is natural that most of these meetings have been held in Russia, but there have been no such meetings with Pashinyan. I don't know how efficient they are going to be now with regard to the Armenian leadership. But if such a proposal is made, we have always viewed them positively and will continue to do so.

**- Does this mean that you are ready to go if there is such an invitation?**

- Yes, and as you have said - without any preconditions. This is evident from the fact that our foreign ministers will be meeting in Geneva tomorrow also without any preconditions. Moreover, I would like to say that, when the conflict just erupted recently, our foreign minister had plans to visit Geneva to meet with the co-chairs, and he did go there. And the Armenian foreign minister, who had planned to travel there a week before, in early October, refused to go. And when a proposal from Moscow came on a meeting between the foreign ministers to coordinate a humanitarian ceasefire, our foreign minister flew there from Geneva. In other words, we are not setting any terms, but again, I really doubt that the current Armenian authorities are capable of constructively working toward a settlement.

**- Prime Minister Pashinyan has repeatedly said that Turkish troops are directly involved in hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh. It was also said that Pakistani special forces are also involved. Your comment?**

- These are yet more of Pashinyan's lies. I must say that there were no such things in my contacts with previous Armenian presidents. Yes, we are adversaries, we cannot have positive attitudes towards each other, but there have never been such open lies and such allegations at the negotiating table. This is all lies. There are no Turkish special forces there. I have repeatedly said that, and there is no such need. He has now said that some kinds of Pakistani commandoes are present here, and by the way I think he got a note of protest in return. This is nonsense, there is no such thing.

These are all attempts to firstly involve other countries into the conflict, make it international in order to conceal his shameful defeat, saying that allegedly it is not Azerbaijan that defeats them on the battlefield, but Turkish and Pakistani special forces. He has recently made a ridiculous statement – as I was told – that the terrorists Azerbaijan had allegedly brought from Syria to Azerbaijan sneaked into Russia and staged a terrorist attack in Grozny. Just understand that this is absolute nonsense. Russian intelligence services know for sure who staged the terrorist attack. Previously, he said that Turkey's F- 16 brought down Armenia's Su- 25. Everyone knows this is a lie. Such things are monitored by Russia and other co-chair countries. We live in the era of technologies and nothing can be hidden.

It was idiocy when he said that it wasn't Armenia that had launched ballistic missiles against Gandja. Any launch of a ballistic missile is monitored. Russia, America and France are well aware that this missile was launched and what combat mission it had. The combat mission was to hit a residential neighborhood, and another residential neighborhood for the second time. We have no military bases, no military towns in Gandja. He is simply lying.

And he says it was not us, when hundreds of journalists take pictures of these horrific destructions, when foreign diplomats give interviews right from the destruction site, Pashinyan says that it was not Armenia. If it wasn't them then who did? Did we strike Gandja ourselves? Just imagine the level of deceit and, what is more, idiocy. Any reasonable person should understand that this is impossible to hide. It is yet another lie when he speaks about Pakistani and Turkish Special Forces. He will say tomorrow that Martians were brought there in order to liberate territories. Expect anything from him.

**- I would still like to specify Turkey's future role in the conflict settlement...**

- We see Turkey's role in the settlement as effective. Turkey is a brotherly country to us. Turkey is the only country in the world that borders all three South Caucasus countries. Turkey today has a decisive say in many discussions not only on a regional but also on a global scale. Turkey pursues an absolutely independent foreign policy, thus evoking, as far as I know, much irritation among those who have got used to dictating. That is why I think Turkey, as a reliable partner and friend of Azerbaijan, which has also have very close relations with Russia, will definitely play an important role.

It is already playing this role, and the fact that the presidents of Russia and Turkey, the foreign ministers, and the defense ministers are in constant contact with each other discussing these questions proves that Turkey is already engaged, whether Armenia likes it or not. But I am certain that Armenia is forced to recognize and accept this.

**- Is there a risk that the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict will escalate into a regional confrontation involving big powers?**

- Frankly speaking, I cannot fully rule this out, but I must say that for our part we will take no actions that could lead to this, there will be no provocations that would make this conflict international. We don't need this, and I have said many times over the past month that we are

against this, and I called on countries to show restraint and not to interfere. I am glad this is happening this way.

Although Armenia's constant attempts to make this conflict international and constant requests of the Armenian leadership for Russia to almost send its troops to fight on Armenia's side are exactly what I was talking about - to pull somebody's chestnuts out of the fire. That is why I am sure that regional countries and these are the countries that Azerbaijan enjoys close historical, cultural, political and trustworthy relations with – Russia, Turkey, Iran, Georgia – will naturally refrain from any actions that would play into the aggressor's hands.

**- Not long ago President Putin said that the death toll of the current escalation on both side is about 5,000 people. Do you have the same data?**

- I said that we would publish the number of killed servicemen after the war is over. As for civilians, we are making data public. I told you about 69 people killed and more than 300 wounded. As for the losses, I can say what losses Armenia could have according to our estimates. Just look, simple arithmetic, 256 tanks were destroyed as of yesterday, the figure is growing day to day, just multiply it by – how many crewmembers there are, three or four – this is almost 1,000. Next, over 50 infantry fighting vehicles were destroyed, it is roughly clear how many people they carry. Hundreds of artillery guns, and each of them has several people to use it, six S-300 systems, about 40 OSA air defense systems, the TOR, KUB, KRUG systems, more than 400 trucks – and the majority of them carried personnel and ammunition when they were destroyed. If we just calculate these figures... And how many people were killed in trenches? We were in those trenches, the contact lines – the footage is on the Internet. So according to our information, 5,000 Armenian troops may have been killed, and the number of wounded during war, as a rule, is two to three times higher.

As for our losses, I have said we will make them public after the fighting is over. But I have to say that they are a lot less, and bearing in mind the nature of the combat clashes, the difficult terrain, and the fortifications that the Armenians have built for 30 years, I believe that every human life is priceless, but our losses are minimal, bearing in mind all these factors.

**- Military experts believe that Azerbaijan managed to minimize its losses during the active stage of hostilities thanks to the active use of drones. What is the reason for using drones?**

- Of course, the arsenal of Azerbaijan's Army consists not only of drones. We have modern air defense systems made in Russia, in Israel, in Belarus; several air defense systems are integrated, which shoot down the bulk of missiles being sent from Armenian territory. Unfortunately, we can't shoot down all of them.

Our military hardware is the most modern: upgraded T-72 tanks, the most modern T-90 tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, modern long range artillery. This includes Polonez missiles, LORA, Extra, Kasirga, etc. Our approach to the arming of our army was not one-sided.

But modern methods of warfare, of course, are different from those we had back in 1990s, and so unmanned aviation is an important factor of our combat capabilities, especially considering such



fortified areas. The footage that we make available on the Internet is almost nothing compared to what is happening. That is all that we can show.

They dug everything they could there. They have many kilometers of interconnected tunnels, rat holes where they get to as soon as they hear noise. There is a rat hole near every cannon. That is why it would have been very hard to destroy this without modern hardware; this would result in a large number of casualties. We destroyed many “Grad” systems, and in this case unmanned aviation, Turkish and Israeli drones, helped us very much.

By using UAVs, we destroyed at least six S-300 air defense systems. In addition, modern UAVs conduct reconnaissance, apart from independently carrying out strikes. They also coordinate artillery, which strikes afterwards. This is why it is an important factor of our success. But as I said, Azerbaijani soldiers and officers are liberating the lands, raising the flag. This is our heritage, and it is not by accident that Azerbaijan’s Army is considered as one of the most effective. I already know that this experience has been studied. In general, this experience will be useful for many countries in order to plan further military building.

And even for us. I recently held a meeting with the military and said that we should analyze both successes and shortcomings. And in the future, when we buy military hardware, we should be guided by experience in terms of what we need and what ends up lying idle in storage depots.

**- You spoke about Azerbaijan's civilian losses. What is the reaction of the international community to this? Does it condemn it or is it limited to calls on Baku and Yerevan to stop shelling each other?**

- Yes, that is the case. And this is not something new to us. What kind of condemnation of Armenia has there been over these years of occupation? Has it been condemned? There has been none. Has anyone condemned Armenia for occupation? Yes, UN Security Council resolutions were adopted in 1993, yes, we then attained the adoption of UN General Assembly, the Non-Aligned Movement and even the European Parliament resolutions. Of course, they created a judicial framework, a legal framework for the settlement. But we have heard no condemnation. Even when it was clear that Armenia breached the ceasefire, not a single day passed after the ceasefire was agreed on in Moscow when they attacked Gandja.

And now, a day after the ceasefire was agreed on in Washington – and they begged for one, they also begged for a ceasefire in Moscow and for the one reached thanks to the efforts of the French side – not a single day passed before they shelled Barda. And before that they fired at a funeral procession in Terter. Four people were killed there. These are inhumane actions. This proves who we have to wage a war against. This means there are no moral norms, no honor, no dignity, and no understanding of how wars are fought.

You know, everyone, even an adversary, even an enemy, should be respected to a certain extent, because there are rules of engagement, in particular for fighting wars. There is nothing of the kind for the Armenian side. That is why we didn't pin much hope on condemnation. Brotherly Turkey backs us, Pakistan openly supports us. The Turkish president and the Pakistani prime minister have repeatedly voiced their support for us. Many countries support us. When we say international

community, almost every time, it is referred to the Western world. But we haven't expected any sympathy from there.

**- Could attacks on Azerbaijan's energy infrastructure, in particular Mingachevir and oil and gas pipelines, create certain risks for supplies of Azerbaijan's oil and gas to the global market?**

- If they do what they claimed, that is, the bombardment of the Sangachal Terminal, or our oil and gas pipelines, that would certainly pose some risks. I think that they will be condemned in this case. As it is European consumers who need this oil and gas most of all. It is no secret that the gas pipeline from Azerbaijan to a certain extent, certainly not to a large extent, but somehow contributes and will contribute to energy security of some European countries.

As for as the oil supplies are concerned - some European Union countries get 40 to 50 percent of their oil from Azerbaijan today. If something happens to these oil and gas pipelines, Armenia would face serious international pressure. However, this does not stop them. They attempted to bomb the Baku-Novorossiysk oil pipeline. This is a pipeline that connects Azerbaijan and Russia, a country Armenia constantly demands special relations from without giving anything in return - absolutely nothing in both the political sense and international support. One would not expect anything else from the Soros team.

That is why the bombardment of the electric power plant in Mingachevir has aimed to disrupt Azerbaijan's energy system. This, of course, will have an effect to a certain extent, but we have already set up a branched power supply network, and new electric power plants are in place.

This proves the predatory nature of the Armenian side. It is another thing that we have destroyed the majority of these missiles in mid-air, intercepted them, and some of them did not explode. By the way it also speaks of their military potential. But such a threat certainly does exist, and we should respond to it adequately.

I have always said and continue saying that despite the barbaric bombardment of Barda, where a seven-year-old girl was killed and several more children were injured, I say that we are not them. We will respond on the battlefield, we will respond by liberating new lands, by raising the flag in new cities. We will bomb neither cities nor civilians.

Let me give you an absolutely recent example. It is an exchange of dead bodies and prisoners in question. Basically, this subject was first mentioned for humanitarian reasons in Moscow on 10 October. We contacted the Red Cross to say, 'Let's organize an exchange.' Moreover, I will give you another detail. I have ordered to maximally preserve the bodies of Armenian servicemen – in refrigerators or cold storages. We all understand what happens to human bodies...

**- They are decomposing...**

- Yes, absolutely right. And the Armenian side refuses to take them every time. It says every time, let's do it where battles are under way. So, you understand, to put the lives of civilians in jeopardy. We say no. We have a state border. Let's do it in Tovuz district, in Gazakh district. Let's do it there. So yesterday, I decided to unilaterally hand over the bulk of the bodies of the killed Armenian servicemen. Plus, we have two civilians. These are elderly people who we are also handing over.

And so we tried to do it yesterday. We sent cars with the bodies toward the border. We reached out to the OSCE office and the Red Cross. But the Armenian side doesn't accept them. You see, it doesn't take the dead! What are we talking about? How can this even be commented on? What norms of human moral does this fit into? That is why we will transfer the bodies in any case. Currently, we are looking at transferring their civilians and the bodies via Georgia.

But if they refuse to accept them, I just don't know what to do. This is who we are fighting with, you see. Everyone should understand this. These are all their false and whining assurances. Their cries, their moans, these are just crocodile tears. We know this well. That is why the Russian public shouldn't be deceived by these lies and slander. Yes, it is clear that they got incorporated deep into Russia's agencies. But that is not all. They are also there in France and America. They are in the media, they sometimes create a public background. But people should understand who we are fighting against and understand that we are right. We are fighting on our own land, and they are dying on our land.

**- You have repeatedly said that the military phase of the conflict will end sooner or later. If Karabakh and seven districts are returned, how could this affect the pace of Azerbaijan's economic development?**

- It is hard to say. You know, there are different assessments. Of course, the return of large territories under our control is a big potential for growth and development, primarily in agriculture and tourism spheres. The Karabakh region is one of the most beautiful and fertile regions of our country. It is rich in natural resources – gold, zinc, lead. By the way, Armenia illegally produces gold in Kalbajar jointly with some foreign companies. But we, of course, will hold all of them to account through relevant legal procedures.

That is why prospects of this region will be crucial for Azerbaijan's sustainable development and for ensuring food security, primarily. But one should understand that this will entail enormous financial expenditures at the initial stage.

**- Restoration...**

- Yes, of course. The footage that we demonstrate show that there is no house left intact there. When we liberated Fuzuli, we were unable to find a single building intact -just imagine - in the entire city. And tens of thousands people lived there. No building. I was called, and I said raise the flag on a flagpole. Do you understand? This is what they did. And look at the ruins of Aghdam and Jabrayil district. Everything is in ruins. It looked as if barbarians were there, not people. They took everything away, roofs, windows, toilets, sinks. They are just thieves. That is why we will face enormous expenditures - infrastructure, roads, communications, housing, administrative buildings. Let me put it this way, at the first stage from the point of view of the gross domestic product this will probably have a positive impact on the construction industry, employment, and everything related to the production of construction materials. But from the point of view of expenditures, these will run to many billions.

We will calculate the damage. I have already ordered, given instructions to set up temporary command offices in liberated territories. I issued this order just a few days ago. We will take stock

of everything that is left there; we will assess the damage inflicted there. Naturally, later, at the stage when our people will return there, we will employ relevant legal procedures and hold the aggressor accountable.

So I think in the long run, I think, in five or ten years this will add a good impetus to the non-oil industries, while this will be very costly in the short run. But there are no material dimensions that would stop us from restoring Karabakh and make it one of the most beautiful and comfortable place for living on earth.

**- And my last question. What is your vision of the geopolitical development of the situation and alignment of forces in the region after the Karabakh conflict is settled?**

- I believe the situation will certainly be different from what it used to be before the conflict. We have changed the geopolitical order in the region in many respects. It has already been changed, and a lot of stereotypes have become outdated - for instance, such a stereotype as confrontation between Russia and NATO. Now look: Russia and Turkey, a NATO member, have far more sincere and trustworthy relations than Turkey, a NATO member, has with some other country. It didn't use to be this way. This is a new reality. That is why this very structured stereotypic geopolitical thinking is being consigned to history. I think this is a positive factor. So we have to proceed from the reality. And politicians shape the reality by their actions. I think our region today sees a very positive format of cooperation between leading policy-makers, who determine the region's agenda and are focused on cooperation.

After all, we can talk about active cooperation between Turkey, Iran, Russia, and Azerbaijan in both trilateral and bilateral formats these days. I think one day we will start working in a quadrilateral format as well. This would be natural from the historical, economic, transport and geopolitical standpoints, and what is most important, from the standpoint of strengthening security in this region.

That is why Armenia should not remain foreign matter on the body of the Caucasus. It was the last to come here, and the Armenian state was created artificially on the lands that it never owned. I have said many times that the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic gave Yerevan to Armenia. This is a historical fact. On 29 May 1918, a day after the foundation of the republic was announced, Yerevan was given to Armenia. When this issue was being discussed, members of the legislative body from Yerevan were against it, but their opinion was ignored. So this is how Yerevan was given away, as simply as that. But, as they say, what is done is done.

Armenia shouldn't be a foreign body. It must end the occupation and normalize relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey. This would only benefit them, believe me, this would only benefit them. All communications would be opened, and they would become part of energy and transport integration projects, they would become part of the common security system. After all, look, Turkey is buying S-400 systems from Russia. This is an absolutely new security system. This is not just the purchase of an air defense system, but this is a step toward a new security system and mutual confidence. This can't be accomplished without mutual confidence. We bought S-300 from Russia a long time ago, this is also a factor of mutual trust, you see.

Therefore, this arrangement in the region benefits all. Armenia should come to understand that it is being marginalized, and nobody will fight for it. And what's next? If it continues confrontation with us, if it keeps making territorial claims against Turkey, well, it should understand, how can it oppose us? But we don't want this opposition. We want peace, despite all the pain and tragedies that they have inflicted on our people. Therefore, I believe that geopolitical realities should be developing positively. At least as far as we are concerned, we will be doing all we can to make this happen.

**- Thank you for your detailed answers.**

-Thank you

**On 26 October, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by the Italian Rai 1 TV channel.**

**-Mr. President, good afternoon. Please tell us if this new truce, this new ceasefire will hold. If I am not mistaken, this is the third ceasefire.**

- Everything will depend on how Armenia behaves because Armenia disrupted the first two ceasefires. After the first ceasefire, which was declared on humanitarian grounds, Armenia violated the ceasefire within 24 hours and barbarically launched a ballistic missile at the city of Ganja at night. As a result of the first shelling, ten people were killed, and many were wounded. Then they hit Ganja again, and also at night. There were even more victims. So we had to retaliate. As for the second truce, we have a chronology of Armenia's violations of the ceasefire. They violated it literally two minutes after the agreed hour of the truce. Today, at 8 o'clock, a new ceasefire came into force. Now it is 10 a.m. in Baku. At about 3-4 minutes after the ceasefire entered into force around 8 o'clock, several artillery shells were fired at the city of Tartar again. We are not reacting to this. We hope this was an accident, but we will be forced to respond adequately if this continues.

**- Mr. President, what actually caused the outbreak of hostilities at the end of September? Why did this happen?**

- There was a series of events of political and military nature. Armenia's main goal was to disrupt the process of negotiations in every possible way. Armenia's new government has repeatedly stated that the fundamental principles are unacceptable. It will not return a single centimeter of the occupied territories - which contradicts the fundamental principles. The prime minister stated that we should negotiate not with Armenia but with the so-called leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh, which is unacceptable both for the OSCE Minsk Group and for us. He also stated that 'Karabakh is Armenia, full stop', thereby completely undermining the negotiations. In the past year, there were practically no negotiations. To shift the blame on us, Armenia made three subversion attempts – in July on the border, in August when they sent a subversion group, and in September when they bombarded our cities. They probably thought that we would show restraint again, but that did not happen. We answered them in a manner that they are now regretting it.

**- On what conditions you will agree to stop the hostilities then? You have repeatedly spoken about the need for a constructive approach on Armenia's part. What should a constructive approach be like?**

- A constructive approach should be that they must publicly declare, through the prime minister, that they accept the fundamental principles. The fundamental principles envisage the return of seven districts located around the Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous region to Azerbaijan and the return of Azerbaijani refugees to the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, including the ancient Azerbaijani city of Shusha. These approaches are, in principle, based on four UN Security Council resolutions, which require practically the same. But when the Armenian prime minister says that not a single centimeter of land will be returned to us, the Armenian defense minister says that Armenia will start a new war for new territories and when aggression is carried out against us, this is not a constructive approach, of course. He must say that yes, the occupied territories will be

returned to Azerbaijan, that the Azerbaijanis will return to Nagorno-Karabakh, including Shusha. Then, of course, we will agree very quickly.

**-Mr. President, there is one very controversial issue. Some countries, not only Armenia but also France, have somehow accused you and Turkey of sending thousands of mercenaries, jihadists from Syria to Karabakh via Turkey. How will you respond to such accusations, and how will you respond to the allegations that speak of the presence of Turkish troops and Turkish military aircraft on the territory of Azerbaijan?**

- I have already answered this question many times, and I will answer it again. First, such unfounded accusations were brought against us by only two countries – France and Russia. France said that through the President, Russia, through the Head of the Foreign Intelligence Service. These charges were brought against us immediately after the outbreak of hostilities. Although almost a month has already passed, not a single piece of evidence, no proof was presented to us. For the first time, I will say this: I asked the French side for the heads of relevant agencies to meet, discuss the issue, and provide us with evidence. Nothing was presented to us. Therefore, these are all insinuations. All this is an attempt to cast a shadow on Azerbaijan. I regret that such unfounded accusations come from the co-chair countries, which are supposed to be objective. We do not talk every day about how many weapons are supplied from Russia to Armenia. We do mention the fact that Armenia would not have lasted a day in the occupied territories without external assistance. Political support, military support, moral support – all this comes from countries that are supposed to stay neutral. Therefore, we strongly reject these insinuations. It is not necessary. We have 100,000 soldiers in the regular army. If necessary, we will announce general mobilization, which, by the way, we have not done, unlike Armenia. Therefore, this is all lies and slander. As for the participation of Turkish troops in operations, this is another lie. There is not a single piece of evidence. The Turkish F-16s are in Azerbaijan due to our joint military exercises on the eve of the conflict. We do not talk about the number of Russian MIG-29s and Su-30s are in Armenia. We do not talk about the fact that 5,000 Russian troops are stationed at the base in Armenia, in Gumry. According to our data, there are periodic weapons supplies of the Armenian armed forces from there. These are facts, in contrast to what is being said about us. Therefore, I suggest that those who want to accuse us should first deal with their matters before jumping to such hasty conclusions based on false information.

**- Mr. President, my last question, more or less, also concerns our country, Italy. You probably know that there are many successful examples of a peaceful settlement of territorial disputes or separatism in Europe. We have one such model in Italy. It is the Alto Adige/Südtirol. Don't you think that Italy could help you with its experience in resolving the status of Karabakh? Moreover, Italy has very good, close, and strong political and cultural relations with you and also with Armenia.**

- Yes, I believe that Italy can play a significant role in settlement of the conflict. I must say that when the Minsk Group was formed, a very long time ago, almost 30 years ago, it was the Italian representative, the Italian diplomat who was the leader of this Minsk Group. That was before the institution of co-chairs was established. After the co-chairs' institution was created, the Minsk Group as a group of countries did not produce any results because the co-chairs took this activity

into their monopoly. We know what this has led to. For 28 years, there has been no progress, no results, only promises, only bureaucratic procedures. In essence, it seems to us today that the co-chairs' performance was aimed at freezing the conflict, not at resolving it. As for the model that exists in Italy, we have studied it. We also studied the model of the Aland Islands and other successful autonomy experiences. Azerbaijan, unlike Armenia, is a multiethnic state. In Armenia, as you probably know, 99 percent of the population are Armenians. Therefore, this is a very positive experience of self-government, which could be applied in our case. As far as I know, such proposals were made in the mid-1990s. Even groups of representatives of non-governmental organizations and political scientists have visited your country, the region you are talking about, and the Aland Islands. But Armenia has always categorically rejected this. They believed that they would be able to occupy our territories forever, relying on military, political and economic support from leading countries of the world, but they made a gross miscalculation. We are proving our case on the battlefield today. We are implementing UN Security Council resolutions and are restoring international law.

**- Mr. President, the very last question: at what level will we be in this conflict in one year? Or will it already be resolved by then?**

- You know, I communicate with representatives of foreign media almost every day during this month, and in my addresses, to the Azerbaijani people, I always clearly state our position. We see the future of the Karabakh region – not only the highland part of it but also the midland because Karabakh is a large part of Azerbaijan – as a prosperous and peaceful territory. And Azerbaijanis that must return there and the Armenians who now live there will coexist in peace. Our position is this. I believe that this can be achieved with the mutual goodwill of the parties. After all, thousands of Armenians live in Baku and other cities of Azerbaijan today. The Azerbaijanis and Armenians have joint businesses in Russia and Georgia. There are mixed families. Therefore, I think that reconciliation is possible. The Armenian leadership should simply abandon its aggressive policy. And if this happens, with our investments and development experience, we can turn this region into one of the world's most prosperous regions. But for this to happen, the consequences of the war must be eliminated. The consequences of the occupation must be eliminated. The Azerbaijanis must return to the lands they have lived for centuries and live in harmony with the Armenian population. It will not be easy, and it will take time. But we know how countries were reconciled after World War II when European countries were at war – the current neighbors, and many people were killed. But this should not sit in the memory all the time and produce hatred, which is what the Armenian ideologists are doing today. Goodwill must be shown. If that happens, what I am saying will happen. If not, we will return these lands under any circumstances. And the current state of affairs on the battlefield is showing that. We will return them at any cost. Either peacefully or through war, but we will get the lands back. Therefore, I think the Armenian leadership should seriously think about it and take the right step.

**- Thank you very much, Mr. President, and as they say in Italian, Bono Fortuno!**

- Thank you and all the best to you too. Thank you!

**- Goodbye!**



**President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has given an interview to the French Le Figaro newspaper.**

**-My first question would be Mr. President, why did you launch an offensive on September 27 against Nagorno-Karabakh? What are the political objectives of this military attack?**

-We did not launch military attack on Nagorno-Karabakh on September 27th. It was Armenia who launched a military attack on Azerbaijan, and in the first hours of this military attack we had victims, among civilians and among our military servicemen. This was the 3rd military provocation by Armenia against Azerbaijan, within 3 months. First, they attacked us on the state border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, far away from the Karabakh region. And by unanimous opinion of international observers it was Armenia who launched an attack on us. They wanted to occupy new territories. they wanted to take control over the strategic energy infrastructure which situated several kilometres from our state border with Armenia. As you probably know, Trans Adriatic Pipeline is almost completed. And the Southern Gas Corridor project is not only a project of energy security of Azerbaijan but also of Europe. We think that one of the goals of Armenia was to take control of that pipelines and to blackmail us, and maybe European consumers. They got a serious response. We pushed them back. But unfortunately, next month, in August, they send the sabotage group, which planned to commit acts of terror against Azerbaijanis. The head of the sabotage group was detected by our military people, military servicemen, and he gives evidence. So, it is a deliberate attempt to disrupt negotiations and to attack Azerbaijan. As far as political goals of Armenia, which they pursued launching the attack, was to keep the status quo unchanged, to put the blame for this escalation on us, to disrupt negotiations completely, and to involve third countries and to internationalize the conflict. We only gave them adequate response, as a result of that we liberated and continue to liberate part of the internationally recognized territory of Azerbaijan.

**-Azerbaijan has the mission to be a hub not only on energy pipelines but also on internet, fiberglass cables. And there is Azerbaijani company called Neqsol who want to be the connection between Europe and Central Asia, for internet. Do you think that this project is still possible or not to have directly through Azerbaijan in Internet from Europe, to Central Asia?**

-We as you correctly mentioned became already the regional hub for not only for energy, but also for transportation. We are now providing important transportation network for our partners across the Caspian in the eastern part of the Caspian Sea and Europe. Our investments in infrastructure resulted in creation of a very broad international cooperation format on transportation. Of course, everything started with the energy infrastructure, oil and gas pipelines going through Azerbaijan already became very important source of energy security. And with respect to the oil pipelines we already transit oil from Central Asia, through Azerbaijan to Europe. With respect to the internet connection, we invest largely into IT sector, internet penetration in Azerbaijan is about 80 percent. 80 percent of our population are internet users. And we have very developed private companies in this area. Therefore, the company which you mentioned as far as I know is a private company, which has its own agenda, and which invested in the region. And I think their target is to implement

commercially viable project. And definitely, Azerbaijan from geographical point of view and point of view of infrastructure today is very important regional actor.

**-My question now is can you describe us what is after more than one month of war? where is the front? How are the current military operations?**

-It is less than one month, and during this one month as a result of a very successful counter-attack, Azerbaijan managed to liberate part of the occupied territories, cities and villages and every day we report about new cities and villages which have been operated. It was not easy, because during the 30 years of occupation Armenia built on the occupied territories very solid engineering constructions. So, it was not easy to cross the line of contact. But we did it in different directions, in the north, in the south. And this demonstrates the high level of capacity, capability of Azerbaijani Army, and we defeat Armenia on the battlefield. And they have to run away from us. So, we already restored the international border with Iran. More than 130 km of this border was under occupation. So, we did a lot on the battlefield and this continues. Armenia two times violated the ceasefire. If they didn't violate the ceasefire, first on the 10th of October brutally violated it launching a ballistic missile on the sleeping city of Ganja and second time on the 17th of October, today the clashes would have stopped and political solution would have prevailed. That's our position. If they don't stop, we will continue to liberate our lands.

**-They bombed Ganja because there was a couple of Turkish F-16 fighters and one of these Turkish f-16 fighters shut down Armenian plane. That's why they said they bombed Ganja.**

-This is fake news. I think that everybody now understands that was fake news by Armenia. Turkish F-16 are here because they were participating in the joint military training just before the clashes started. And they are on the ground. They are not in the air. Armenian SU-25 hit the mountain. They tried to pretend as if it was hit by the Turkish F-16. But that was in the first days of the conflict. It was in September. But they launched an attack on Ganja with ballistic missile on the 10th of October, first. Second, ballistic missile's launch was made from the territory of Armenia. And you know, big countries can monitor it clearly. They know from where it is launched and what is a task for the missile? The task was to hit civilians. They hit the area of Ganja where people live. So, that was an act of international terror, that was another reflection of the war crime policy of Armenia. These attacks on Ganja, cannot be justified. And they will be responsible for that.

**-By accepting the intervention of Turkey and the arrival of Syrian fighters from Turkey, aren't you afraid of turning local conflict into a regional war?**

-First of all, Turkey is not involved in the conflict at all. There is not a single evidence of Turkish involvement. From the first hours of Armenian attack on Azerbaijan Turkey, Turkish president and other high-ranking officials expressed and continue to express strong political support to Azerbaijan, support to the norms and principles of international law, support to the implementation of the United Nations Security Council resolutions which demand immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian troops from our territories. So, this is first. Second, there are no foreign fighters on Azerbaijani soil. This is another fake news. It was spread by some officials, in some countries. But so far, more than 20 days after the clashes started we didn't get any single evidence

neither from France nor from Russia. Because the French and then Russian officials made this statement and we asked for evidence. We asked for proofs. Only words, no evidence, no proofs. And another thing is that we don't need any foreigners to fight with us. Because we have a regular army of 100 thousand people. We have modern equipment. We have motivated people who were suffering from occupation for 30 years. We did not even announce full mobilization. If we need additional people on the ground we will recruit more. Therefore, this is another attempt to present Azerbaijan as an aggressor, and also attempt by Armenia to diminish the capacity of Azerbaijani army which is beating them on the ground.

**-Mr President, you said you have very modern equipment, it is true. You have all kinds of drones some coming from Turkey but also efficient kamikaze drones coming from Israel Harop. So, is the help of Israeli military equipment very important for you, and allow you to make military breakthrough?**

-We buy military equipment from many countries. And our biggest supplier of military equipment is not Turkey and Israel, it is Russia. But unlike Armenia, from Russia we buy weapons, we pay for them. Armenia gets weapons from Russia free of charge. We also buy weapons from Iran, from Ukraine, from Belarus, and of course, we can afford to buy modern weapons which today help our army to restore our territorial integrity. Our territorial integrity is being restored by us. But any country in our region is buying weapons. Not many countries in the world can supply themselves 100% with military equipment. So, there is nothing strange about that. And of course, we pay for the weapons. We buy good ones and of course they help us on the ground. But liberation of territories is not by drones. Liberation of territories is by soldiers. By people who there on the ground are doing their job.

**-Iran has complained that fighting during a military operation took on the border. Did you settle this dispute with Iran? Did you talk to the Iranian leaders?**

-Yes, we did. And as far as I know, Iranian leaders also talk to Armenian side. Because the clashes were taking place just by the river Araz, close to the border with Iran, and by accident, some of the weapons crossed the border. But today we announced that we cleaned completely the Azerbaijani-Iranian border from Armenian occupants. Therefore, no more clashes take place there, and there will be no more inconvenience for our brothers across the river of Araz in Iran.

**-What is the best possible mediator to bring out to this war? Is it Russia? Is it the best possible mediator?**

-We have three mediators. They have a mandate from OSCE-Russia, France and United States. For 28 years they are trying to mediate. And trying to help parties to find the solution without any success. These three countries are at the same time members of the UN Security Council, permanent members. These three countries adopted those resolutions which I referred to, which demand withdrawal of Armenian troops. But unfortunately, they did not put enough international pressure on Armenia to liberate the occupied territories and to comply with the United Nations Security Council resolutions. Therefore, after the Armenian military attack, we had to defend ourselves, and had to restore justice by force, what we are successfully doing. And among these three mediators, each of them is important and I observe, and I see and I know that on the issue of

Nagorno-Karabakh they have very rare unanimous approach. It is probably the only issue where their interests coincide.

**-What kind of land you want to take back and then be ready to stop this war Mr. President?**

-We are ready to stop today. I was telling that since the 10th of October, when in Moscow both sides agreed on ceasefire. And I said: “the sooner the military part of the solution of the problem is over the better.” We want to move on negotiation table. But unfortunately, Armenia brutally violated ceasefire and launched an attack on Ganja. And on the 17th of October they violated ceasefire two minutes after ceasefire was efficient. Therefore, if they stop today we will stop and then, the rest will be done by diplomats. If they do not stop, we will go until the end to liberate all the occupied territories.

**-So this is your plan. This is Azerbaijan’s plan to get out of the conflict.**

-Yes. If they stop now and behave in a constructive way, if they publicly commit to the basic principles elaborated by France, Russia and the United States which Azerbaijan is committed to, then, of course everything will stop and we will go back on negotiation table. By the way, I am in this process for 17 years. I worked with two former Armenian presidents and we made not a big progress, but we made progress. We were meeting regularly. There have been regular meetings in Moscow, in Paris, in Washington. But after Mr. Pashinyan came to power, he actually did everything in order to destroy negotiation process not only by his statements, but by his military provocations. And since he came to power for already two years or more, there is no process. Therefore, I think the political settlement is possible. But Armenian government should understand that they are not now in a position to dictate, because status quo no more exists, line of contact no more exists. We created a new reality on the ground. And they have to take that into account.

**-What is your vision about the future of Karabakh?**

-I expressed it many times publicly. And I can tell you now. Also, I delivered certain messages through mediators, through Minsk Group co-chairs to previous Armenian government how we see the future. We see Karabakh as a prosperous, safe, secure area of Azerbaijan where people live in peace and dignity, where Azerbaijani and Armenian communities live side by side. The area which we plan to develop as we did in all other parts of Azerbaijan. I can tell you that we have very substantial economic achievements. We have very low level of poverty, it is about five percent. In Armenia it is close to 50 percent. Also very low level of unemployment. Before the pandemic it was around 5 percent, now it is seven. But in comparison with Nagorno-Karabakh which is endemic, it is day and night. So, we can provide much better life, for Armenians who live there, for Azerbaijanis who will return there. And I am sure that the two nations, two peoples will reconcile, because in the 21st century it is not possible to isolate yourself to commit ethnic cleansing and try to transform de facto situation into secession. It is not possible. No one recognized Nagorno-Karabakh so far, including Armenia itself. I am sure no one will recognize it. Therefore, the best way for the future of Karabakh, not only Nagorno-Karabakh, but all the Karabakh is a big region of Azerbaijan, is to live in peace in harmony, and to try to become good neighbors again-Armenians and Azerbaijanis. This is my plan.

**- I remember that in the beginning of 1990s there was an anti-Armenian pogrom in Baku. That's why Armenians do not trust they can live, they are afraid for their lives to live in Azerbaijani territory.**

-Conflict started after separatists in Nagorno-Karabakh, sponsored by nationalists in Armenia launched a secession plan to secede from Azerbaijan. And they could not do it from legal point of view at the time of the Soviet Union. So, they started pogroms in the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and in the territory of Armenia. The first victims of the war and clashes were Azerbaijanis from Nagorno-Karabakh. There have been 40 thousand Azerbaijanis who lived in Nagorno-Karabakh, primarily in Shusha and also in the capital Khankandi who were ethnically cleansed completely. Then, 250 thousand Azerbaijanis who lived in Armenia, many of them were killed and all of them were ethnically cleansed, expelled. What happened in Baku, in those time which you mentioned is a dark page of our history. But, those clashes were taking place everywhere-in Erevan, in other Armenian cities, in Nagorno-Karabakh. Therefore, this should not be a kind of a reason why people cannot reconcile. In Europe how many times France and Germany had wars? How many times you know other countries had wars? We had World War II which costed lives of 30 or 40 million people. But after twenty years, western Germany and Soviet Union became on good terms. And now nobody remembers that. This is how it should happen in the civilized world. The problem is in Armenia, they cultivate hatred. They cultivate historical hatred against Turkey, against Azerbaijan. Former president of Armenia Kocharyan publicly said that Azerbaijanis and Armenians cannot live together. But look. How they live together for instance, in Georgia? In some Georgian villages Azerbaijanis and Armenians live side by side. In Russia it is the same. In Azerbaijan we have thousands of Armenians who live in our country. Why it is not possible in Nagorno-Karabakh. I think that the wounds of the war must be healed by political wisdom, by political will. And after this active, hot phase of the conflict stops, both sides need to invest largely in order to do everything to heal these wounds.

**-This is my last question. Aren't you afraid Mr. President that after a while President Erdogan of Turkey will stop his support and his policy in Caucasus to focus on Northern Cyprus?**

-Turkey and Azerbaijan are brotherly countries. And our brotherhood have been tested in many circumstances. And in this particular case, Turkish President expressed publicly strong support to Azerbaijan. He said that Azerbaijan is not alone. Turkey is side by side. So, this is a very strong political support and we are very grateful for that. This is first thing. Second, what I want to say that what we are doing on the battlefield we do ourselves. Yes, with modern weapons, with modern equipment but it is Azerbaijani soldiers and officers who liberate our motherland. Our relations with Turkey have a great history but even brighter future. Turkey as a country which is the only country in the world having a border with all the three republics or countries of Southern Caucasus-Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia, has, I think, a legitimate right to be involved in this process. Because as a neighbor, as a country which can provide and provides stability, predictability for the region and as a country whose agenda is very clear they defend international law. International law says that our territories are under occupation. So, what wrong do they do? They just demand international law to be implied. Armenia doesn't want to do it. They want to keep our lands for

more than thirty years under occupation by illegal settlement of Armenians from Lebanon, by military operations against Azerbaijanis, by destroying our historical and religious heritage. Turkey's role is very positive. And after the war with Armenia stops, and political settlement is enforced, I am sure the role of Turkey will be very important and very positive.

**-So, you don't think that Turkey has a plan to erase Armenia in order to have a direct connection to the Turkish people of Central Asia.**

-No, this is again, Armenian phobias, and Armenian provocations. In the peaceful plan which I was discussing with leaders of Armenia before Pashinyan came to power, there was a clear reference to communications. After the peace agreement is signed, all communications are opening, including communication between Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan and the mainland of Azerbaijan. And thus, Turkey and Azerbaijan and Central Asia will have a land connection. Today we don't have it. But Turkey still has connections through Azerbaijan. We built couple of years ago Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad. So, Turkish goods through Georgia, Azerbaijan, Caspian go to central Asia and backwards. But the road from Turkey, Nakhchivan, Armenia and Azerbaijan is shorter. So, it is not the fact that Turkey does not have this connection. And as you say, somebody thinks that they will erase Armenia to have it. They have it. We have it. We will have another one. But it is again part of the peace plan. All communications will be open. And I think that Armenian government should not try to frighten its population with Turkey. And should stop this hatred towards the Turkish and Azerbaijani people.

**-How is your relationship currently with Georgia, who is another Christian nation in the Caucasus region?**

-Yes, with Georgia our relations are excellent. We call each other strategic partners. Azerbaijan is the first or second largest investor in Georgia, and the first or second largest taxpayer. I am saying first or second because one year it is Turkey, another year it is Azerbaijan. And we have a trilateral format of cooperation between Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan. We had presidential summits, ministerial meetings, including defense ministers, foreign ministers, economy ministers. We have all our major transportation and energy communication going through Georgia. We have a big Azerbaijani community in Georgia close to 300 thousand people. Therefore, relations are excellent. And I think it could be a good example, like our relations with Turkey, our relations with Georgia they are good examples of good neighborhood. By the way, the fact that Georgia is Christian and Azerbaijan is Muslim does not make any difference. We do not look at this region from this point of view.

**-You don't take religion into account when you do projects.**

-No, religion is separated from the state. According to our constitution, Azerbaijan is a secular country. We respect our religion, we respect religions of all other nationalities who live in Azerbaijan. And I think the best indicator of religious harmony in Azerbaijan would be the words of His Holiness, head of the Roman Catholic Church Pope Francis. When he was in Baku several years ago, he made a public statement highly praising Azerbaijan's role in intercultural and interreligious dialogue. All the representatives of different religions in Azerbaijan live in peace and harmony, including Armenians. In the center of Baku, there is an Armenian church which has

been restored by us and protected by our government. But our mosques on the occupied territories have been destroyed. And Armenians keep pigs in our mosques. Just recent videos were on internet. In Zangilan region, after liberation of one village, it was on internet how pigs walk in our mosque. So, Azerbaijan is a tolerant and a secular country and will continue to be like that in the future.

**-Thank you. It was a very good interview Mr. President.**

-Thank you.

**On October 21, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by Japan's Nikkei newspaper.**

**- About the Karabakh conflict. Now foreign ministers from both Azerbaijan and Armenia are to visit Washington DC on Friday. What do you expect from that meeting. Are you ready for trilateral talk with some conditions?**

-Actually, as you know, the United States, Russia and France are three co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group which has a mandate to facilitate, to find a solution to the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Therefore, it's natural that our ministers meet in these three capitals. These kind of meetings happened before, many times. And you know that there have been a visit to Moscow and meeting in Moscow. So, it is a continuation of the discussions on the peaceful settlement of the conflict. Of course, now situation on the ground have changed. The status quo no longer exists, the line of contact does not exist either. Therefore, of course, I think that now Armenian leadership must be more reasonable, and to commit itself to liberation of the occupied territories. So, our main objective at these discussions will be to find out whether the Armenian leadership is ready to liberate our territories or not, and if ready, then when?

**-Are you also invited to Moscow by President Putin?**

-No.

**-If invited are you ready to go?**

-I have been many times invited by President Putin. And I visited Moscow many times some years even several times a year. Therefore, it is obvious, between partner countries and neighbors these high level contacts are common. And President Putin also visited Azerbaijan many times.

**-If there is any progress on Friday between the ministers, is it possible to have a trilateral meeting in Moscow with Armenian prime minister also joining?**

-Well, of course it is possible. Because this kind of meetings happened before. It depends on what will be the agenda if this kind of meeting is going to take place. Because with this Armenian government unfortunately, the prospects for peaceful settlement are very remote. Because very counter-productive and provocative statements and actions on behalf of Armenian leadership made actual negotiations senseless. Because the main topic on negotiation table always has been liberation of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, in accordance with the UN Security Council resolutions. And when Armenian prime minister declares that "Karabakh is Armenia", when he declares that "Azerbaijan must negotiate with Nagorno-Karabakh's so-called authorities", and when he orders ballistic missile strike on a peaceful city of Ganja and daily attacks on other cities of Azerbaijan, there is not much room for negotiations. Therefore, we had to prove Armenian government that they cannot afford any longer to make these aggressive steps without any punishment. We are punishing them on the ground. We are liberating our territories.

Every day almost I announce new cities and villages which have been liberated from Armenian occupation. Armenia is suffering very bitter defeat on the battlefield. Therefore, of course, they must be more reasonable, and definitely, the matter of liberation of the territories is happening.



We wanted to achieve it through peaceful talks. But due to Armenian unconstructive position and provocative steps it was not possible. Therefore, we are now liberating our territories on the battlefield.

**-Would you say the second ceasefire has already failed or ended? Would you say the battles are still going on?**

-Second attempts to achieve ceasefire failed because two minutes after the time when ceasefire had to be efficient they violated the ceasefire. They again, attacked our peaceful cities, this morning from 6 am until 8 am they launched more than 100 times their shells on peaceful city of Tartar which suffered mostly and they attack our military position. They wanted to regain the territories which have already been liberated. As you know, after the first attempt of ceasefire in less than 24 hours, they attacked from the territory of Armenia with ballistic missile, second largest city of Azerbaijan – Ganja, which is a war crime. And the Armenian government will be responsible for that. So, they violate the ceasefire. I always say that ceasefire cannot be achieved unilaterally. If we are attacked, we must not only defend ourselves, but also launch a counter-attack. And I can tell you after they violated ceasefire second time, we liberated the city of Zangilan, and many villages. So, the more time passes on the battlefield, the more territories we liberate. Therefore, Armenian government should think seriously about their behavior and make a strong commitment if they want the ceasefire to be efficient. First, not to violate it, second, not to attempt to regain the territories which we already liberated, and make a commitment about liberation of occupied territories of Azerbaijan.

**-The ceasefires so far had been for humanitarian purposes, including exchange of captives and bodies. So, do you think that means ceasefire, maybe there will be another one, but it will be over once exchange of captives are done?**

**-Is there a substantial ceasefire that will hold or is it just a temporary one, if there is any?**

-It was announced on humanitarian grounds, and also as you know in Moscow declaration there was a reference to substantive negotiations. And the fact that the format of negotiations is unchanged, which means that there will be no more attempts from Armenian side to try to integrate the so-called “Nagorno-Karabakh authorities” on negotiation table. This was rejected by us, and by the Minsk Group. Therefore, of course, if Armenia commits to negotiations and with a strong commitment to liberate the territories which they so far did not announce then, this ceasefire will be a long-termed. Because we want to resolve this problem peacefully. But if, they will try to use ceasefire in order to mobilize their resources, in order to get additional foreign military assistance and to launch a new attack on us, of course, this ceasefire will not last long. It depends on them.

**-So, in order to get on the table of negotiations would you demand Armenia to agree to withdraw at least some of maybe the seven regions in advance, before any negotiation?**

-They must make a strong commitment that they will liberate these territories. Because, this is the part of the basic principles which have been agreed between two countries with the facilitation of the Minsk Group. Basic principles say that the occupied territories must be returned to Azerbaijan and our refugees and internally displaced persons must return to all the occupied territories,

including territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, and including territory of ancient Azerbaijani city of Shusha. Therefore, the Armenian government must clearly declare that they are committed to this principles, they will liberate these territories, and then of course, negotiations will start. We do not put a pre-condition now that territories must be liberated first and then negotiations started. We, at this moment demand from Armenian side, from prime minister personally, the person who is responsible for this violence and is responsible for war crimes against peaceful Azerbaijanis, we demand from him personally saying Armenia will liberate the occupied territories. After that of course, the resolution of the conflict will be transformed from the battlefield to the negotiation table.

**-Would you be ready for negotiation maybe if Armenia says they are ready to withdraw or liberate five regions first?**

-All the regions of Azerbaijan must be liberated. All of them. Of course we can talk about the timing and in the basic principles there were certain ideas about timing on which stage the first regions on which stage the second part of the regions. So, this can be discussed. But it is obvious that all the occupied territories must be returned.

**-And this has to be announced before.**

-And all Azerbaijanis must return to their ancient lands.

**-What would you say to Russia's proposal of sending monitoring teams, or what about international monitors?**

-International monitors, our peace-keeping forces is part of the basic principles. But it is the last part, one of the last issues, which had to be addressed and definitely both sides Azerbaijan and Armenia should agree on who will be those international observers, or peacekeepers. Therefore, we did not seriously discuss this issue in the framework of negotiations. I think that the Minsk Group co-chairs, three countries will definitely make proposal on their behalf about what composition, the number of so-called observers, when and where they are going to be deployed? Because it is also important from technical point of view. Because now it is an active phase of combat operations. Where these observers or peacekeepers will be deployed? Their life can be under risk. And what will be their mandate? Who will give the mandate to them? And it is clear that when we talk about that we talk about the territory of Azerbaijan. It is not territory of Armenia. Therefore, of course, we must have a decisive say about that. Therefore, of course, all these issues must be addressed. In principle, we are not rejecting it. But of course, we will put our conditions when time will come.

**-Speaking of Minsk Group, Turkey criticizes Minsk Group as brain dead. Would you agree?**

-I said recently that the Minsk Group did not produce any result for 30 years. At the same time, I said that with the facilitation of the Minsk Group, with the previous Armenian governments we managed to make progress, not a big progress but still progress. But if one group of countries for 30 years cannot produce results, it speaks for itself. And also, the co-chairs of the Minsk Group are permanent members of the UN Security Council. And the UN security Council with participation of these countries and with the voting of these countries adopted four resolutions

demanding complete and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian troops from Azerbaijani territories. That's a question why these resolutions are not implemented because the Minsk Group co-chairs and permanent members are the same countries. It is an open question.

**-Among the Minsk Group co-chairs, what would you say to Russia? What would you say to Russia's role as a leading mediator? How would you say has Russia been fair?**

-Three co-chairs of the Minsk Group have the same rights, and the same mandate. Therefore, as far as I know among these countries they did not choose a leader. They are all equal and we look at them as mediators. If any country assumes the role of mediator, this country must be neutral. And, if it is not neutral, it cannot be a mediator. The level of neutrality is another question, which of course, will be addressed at the proper time. But, I think the Minsk group co-chairs will play their role, especially now, when Armenia is almost defeated on the battlefield in order to stop violence, and to implement mandate which was for 28 years not implemented.

**-Do you want Turkey to have more say in the Caucasus affairs and be much more active in this negotiation process?**

-It depends of course on the political agenda of Turkey. I cannot speak on behalf of Turkey. What I want to say is that of course, we always, strongly support Turkish active involvement in the regional issues and actually, this involvement is obvious. Turkey plays important role now not only in our region, not only in the Caucasus, but in a broader region and in the world. It is a reality, and it is a very good reality for us. Because for us Turkey is a brotherly country, our closest ally and friend. And de facto, Turkey is already involved of course, from the legal point of view also as a member of the Minsk Group. I said once in one of the interviews that Turkey could have been even a co-chair. If today, we would have been selecting the co-chairs definitely, Azerbaijan would have supported the Turkish candidacy and I am sure Turkey would have insisted on being a co-chair. In 1992, unfortunately it didn't happen. So, this is a legal part. And then, a practical part, as you know presidents of Turkey and Russia, their foreign ministers, defense ministers talked, met, discussed this issue. Therefore, if somebody says that Turkey should not be there, as Armenia says, it's none of Armenian business, Turkey is already there and must be involved, because it will bring stability. And also, Turkey I think is the only country which has a border with three Caucasian countries. No other country has a border with three of them. Then, of course, Turkey must be actively involved, Turkey is involved and we strongly support it.

**-Karabakh is by international law Azerbaijan's territory. But at the same time there are many Armenian inhabitants. Can you guarantee once Azerbaijan gets back its control, Armenian inhabitants can live safely with equal rights?**

-Yes, definitely. And I already many times during this active phase of the conflict made statements in this regard that those Armenians who live in Nagorno-Karabakh are our citizens and their security, their rights will be totally provided as long as the rights of all other people of Azerbaijan. And I can tell you that today, in Azerbaijan we have thousands of people of Armenian origin, unlike Armenia, where there is no Azerbaijanis and 99% of Armenia are ethnic Armenians. So, no national minority, can live and survive there. So, they expelled all the nationalities which used to live on the territory of today's Armenian Republic. The biggest community were Azerbaijanis. In

the beginning of the 20th century, the city of Yerevan was 70 percent inhabited by Azerbaijanis. They destroyed all our historical, religious monuments. They destroyed the traces of Azerbaijani culture, not only in Yerevan but also in many other regions of today's Armenia. And by the way, Azerbaijani Democratic Republic which was established on May 28, 1918, on May 29th decided unfortunately, that was a big mistake which cannot be justified, to give Yerevan to Armenia as a capital. So, they destroyed all our religious and cultural heritage, they destroyed our mosques, they destroyed our monuments, but here in the center of Baku there is an Armenian church with many Armenian books. And many Armenians, thousands of them live today in Baku and in other parts of Azerbaijan. With respect to the point that you said that many Armenians who lived there, according to our information, the real population of territory which is occupied, including former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous District is around 65 thousand people. It is not a big community. But before the war in the beginning of 1990s there have been more than 40 thousand Azerbaijanis, who lived in Nagorno-Karabakh, mainly in Shusha, but also in Khankandi, in Khojaly, the city which suffered Armenian genocide, genocide committed by Armenians, and many other cities. So, they committed ethnic cleansing against us. We never did it. And even during these clashes, we did not respond the same way. We did not attack with ballistic missiles, neither the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, nor territory of Armenia. And I said that we will take revenge but we will take revenge on the battlefield. So, Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh can be absolutely sure that their security will be provided. And after the criminal junta in Nagorno-Karabakh is thrown away, they, as Azerbaijani citizens will live better. They will live in dignity, they will live in peace, and we will provide all the social and economic advantages for them, as we do for any other people in our country.

**-When you get back Nagorno-Karabakh would you respect their rights of self-determination as stated in Madrid principles. Do you agree to referendum?**

-No, of course not. There will be no referendum, in Nagorno-Karabakh we will never agree on that. We did not agree on that during the time of negotiations and now, when we regained big part of the territory, it is out of question. With respect to self-determination, Armenian people have already self-determined themselves. They have an independent Armenian state. Imagine what will happen if Armenians will self-determine themselves anywhere where they live. How many small Armenias will be in the world? This is a counter-productive approach. Self-determination is an important factor of international law. But it should not violate the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. There are different types of self-determination. There are different types of communities. And they could be cultural autonomy for instance. We see these examples in developed countries of Europe. Where there are certain rights of people in their municipalities, in their communities, as in any part of Azerbaijan of course, Armenians who live in Azerbaijan can have this form of communication. But never we will allow the creation of the second Armenian state on the territory of Azerbaijan. This is out of question. In other words, there will be no referendum, never.

**-Reportedly, Armenia is recruiting Lebanese, Syrian Armenians. At the same time, NGO namely, Syrian observatory for human rights claims that many ethnic Turkmen fighters from Syria are now in the battlefield alongside with your forces, would you say that is true?**

-No, this is not true. First, I would like to say the fact that Armenia recruited mercenaries and fighters from the Middle East is not a secret. And even Armenian prime Minister admitted it. But he said that they are native Armenians. First, nobody knows whether they are native Armenians or not, and we have information that representatives of different nationalities are now fighting on Armenian side. And second, if the person is ethnic Armenian but citizen of other country does not mean that he is not a mercenary. Among those who have been eliminated on the battlefield, there are people with Lebanese passport, with Canadian passport. We have evidence about citizens of France, United States of Armenian origin. But citizens of these countries and citizens of some countries of former Soviet Union are fighting against us together with citizens of the countries of the Middle East. Armenia used mercenaries during the first Karabakh War. This is not a secret. Some of them have been eliminated by Azerbaijan and they erased a big monument in their honor, monuments in the honor of international terrorists. This shows that Armenia is a terrorist state. With respect to Azerbaijan, first this so-called Syrian observatory NGO is not a credible organization. We know about many fakes which they spread over with respect to the war in Syria. So, there is no credibility, trust to this politically motivated so-called NGO. First we need to check who is financing and then understand who is behind these rumors. Second, not a single evidence have been presented to us by any country. Only rumors, only unjustified statements, and I demanded proof. I said okay, now it's more than twenty days that we are in the active phase of the conflict. Where are there proofs? Give us the proofs. No proofs. Therefore, these rumors must be stopped. Azerbaijan is fighting itself. We don't need any foreign fighters. We have enough people, enough soldiers and officers in our regular army. We have ten million population. If we need additional fighters we will announce mobilization, we will recruit. So, there is no need for that and it is absolutely false information.

**-So, as you said repeatedly, no jihadists and even no Turkmen?**

-No, there can be people of Azerbaijani origin coming from other countries. We do not exclude it. Because we have many volunteers, people who voluntarily want to defend their country. We cannot exclude that people of Azerbaijani origin from other countries come but it is not the way how it is presented that Azerbaijan invited terrorists in order to fight. This is false information.

**-Are you aware of those volunteers with Azerbaijani origin?**

-There can be, I said, I do not exclude. There can be. But we receive many requests, many letters from Azerbaijanis who live outside to come and to fight for their historical motherland. But our position is – we don't need it. We have enough people on the battlefield.

**-Japanese companies joined oil and pipe line projects of Azerbaijan. They are investors here. Do you have concerns over the security of five pipelines? Is there any risk of postponement of the TAP pipeline which is going to be opened very soon within this year?**

-No, with Tap pipeline everything is on the schedule, it is already done. It's a matter of maybe some additional weeks, not months for official opening of TAP. Everything is ready, the historical pipeline from Baku to Europe have been completed. With respect to other pipelines which we have and particular oil and gas pipelines on the territory of Azerbaijan during all these years since 2006, when Baku-Tbilisi-Jeyhan was commissioned, we didn't have any accident. Our pipelines on our

territory are duly protected. But of course we heard threats from official Armenian representatives that they will attack our pipelines, they will attack Sangachal terminal which is an important terminal for oil and gas transportation, but this is also part of their terrorist nature. Because they openly declare that they will attack civilian infrastructure. And of course, if they do it, they will regret, because they will be punished by us, severely, and also those countries which today provide part of their energy security from Azerbaijan. What will be reaction of those countries? Billions of dollars have been invested in these pipelines. International banks, all the leading international banks like World Bank, EBRD, Asian Development Bank, European Investment Bank and other banks invested. So, the Armenian leadership should think twice about this kind of option. And of course, as I said, Azerbaijan itself will punish them severely, and I don't think that they will even dare to do this, another war crime.

**-Since it's very rare occasion for us to meet you. Let us ask, a couple of questions about the future of your country in general.**

-Yes of course.

**-So, Azerbaijan is the first commercial oil producer in the world.**

-Yes, that is true.

**-But how do you think the country would transfer to the post-oil era. Do you have any expectations from you know, how Japanese companies might be involved in that?**

-Yes, of course we have agenda of diversification of our economy, and this process is successfully continuing. Even this year, though our GDP is going down not very seriously, it's less than 4% decline so far. In comparison with some other countries it's not a bad result but with respect to non-oil related industry we have a growth. That shows that our diversification program is being implemented very successfully. Industrial development, business opportunities, tourism, of course before the pandemic was rapidly growing. And innovation sector and agriculture, and of course coming back to the main topic, when we see that now Azerbaijan is liberating the territories, first we liberated very important water storage, which will provide water supply for tens of thousands of hectares of land. Armenia actually committed an ecological terror against us. They were closing the water from the river Tartar and thus hundred thousands of hectares of land were not supplied with water. They were closing in summer, when people need it and they were opening it in winter and making floods. So, the terrorist nature of Armenia is on every, every step. So, after we regained the territories back, and this is a very good soil for growing different products, for breeding cattle, of course, our agriculture will have a new boost. We already started to plan our future agricultural development with respect of the liberation of the territories. Of course, we think that investments in human capital will provide for us good opportunities for development, because oil and gas will come to an end once, though, our reserves are huge. We just started to export large quantities of natural gas, and oil production profile will be more or less stable for coming decades. But non-energy sector of course, is priority. With respect to Japanese companies, they are very active here in the area of energy, with the loans from Japanese banks we built two big power stations, in Baku. Their capacity is close to 800 megawatts. So these power stations provide important part of our consumption and our export. We, by the way, export electric energy also, and we want to see

Japanese companies in the area of renewable energy, which is now one of the priorities. We already signed preliminary agreements with some investors. So, we hope that the area which is very promising and has a potential because of a lot of sun and a lot of wind, especially in Absheron peninsula. And in many other areas today Japanese companies provide equipment, machinery, technology also in agriculture. So, we are very satisfied with the level of economic cooperation between Japan and Azerbaijan.

**-What about political reforms? You have criticism, I mean there are criticism from many western countries that you yourself succeeded your father and now your wife is vice president and so, are you ready to promote democracy and to open up power to oppositions?**

-I think that the democratic development in the country is going in a positive direction. We have all the major freedoms in Azerbaijan. Freedom of political activity, media freedom, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, religious freedom. So, there is no restrictions on that. We have free internet, by the way, and those who tried to criticize us they should look to the substance and not spread rumors and use the so-called democratic shortcomings of Azerbaijan for political purposes, for the purposes of political pressure. Now, I introduced the new program of political reforms which was supported by absolute majority of all political parties. And that was done by the way before this clash. Now, of course, absolute majority of political parties strongly support my policy on return of the occupied territories. Only two parties are not part of this process. Only two parties are going against national interests of Azerbaijan. This is a Popular Front Party, and Musavat Party. And by the way, these two parties rejected my proposal for political dialogue. I made this proposal several months ago. I said, we need to have a political dialogue, we need to have normal, civilized relations between the government and opposition, between a leading party and other parties. And now I think 50 parties or more supported that. We are in a very active phase of the political dialogue. Only two parties, which have a direct financing from outside, which always were acting against national interests of Azerbaijan, these two parties are responsible for the loss of the territories. Because they were in power in 1992-1993, when Armenia occupied our territories-Popular Front and Musavat. And those people who are responsible for the loss of the territories today are the leaders of these parties for almost 30 years. And nobody talks about democracy, nobody talks about how they keep this position for almost 30 years. Therefore, those who want to criticize us better look at the mirror. In front of our eyes, in front of the international community eyes we see how demonstrations are brutally suppressed in the so-called democracies. How people are being killed at the rallies, wounded, injured. Every week we see it. How police is using you know dogs and horses in order to suppress protestors. You will not see it in Azerbaijan. Never. Therefore, those who criticize us better take care of their own business. With respect to what you said about me succeeding my father, yes it is true. But before I succeeded my father, I was for many years a Member of Parliament, since 1995 until 2003. I was the president of the National Olympic Committee since 1997. I was a deputy and then senior deputy of the leading political party – Yeni Azerbaijan Party. And I was a prime minister. So, my political career is known to international observers and of course, they know that it was not like they want to present. And talking about succeeding, why nobody talks about Bush family. How they succeeded each other. Why nobody talks about Clinton family. When the wife became the Secretary of State and then was a presidential candidate. And many other cases like that. Let them look at themselves

before raising this issue. With respect to my wife, my wife was a Member of Parliament since 2005. She was very active on the issues related to the social and humanitarian area. She was and is the head of the biggest NGO in the Caucasus – the Heydar Aliyev Foundation. She has a strong support among Azerbaijanis, you can ask any person on the street and you will see how they love her and support her. And she was and is a deputy chairman of Yeni Azerbaijan Party. Therefore, her political career also was not a kind of sudden event. And I can tell you that she was not very happy when I suggested this position to her. I can tell you, maybe I tell that for the first time, it took me a lot of time to persuade her. And I had arguments and she didn't want. She is totally involved in social, humanitarian issues. And she wants and she helps tens of thousands of people, tens of thousands. But she does it without any PR, without advertisement, without announcement. So, she is a person our people are proud of.

**-You mentioned freedom of speech and the internet. But I believe there are some restrictions on the social networking systems.**

-These are temporary restrictions, these restrictions have been imposed after these clashes have started. And we made announcement to our people that this is for the issues of national security. Because, we need to protect at this time our information system from Armenian provocations. So, this is temporary. As soon as this active phase of clashes stops, all these restrictions will be lifted. But I can tell you that the level of penetration of internet is very high, and more than 80 percent of Azerbaijanis are internet users. So, it is only temporary.

**-Let me close with the one final question your highness. Let's finish it with the hopeful note. Are you hopeful for a peaceful solution? And what will peace can bring Armenia and Azerbaijan also because Armenia is landlocked. Borders are closed here, borders are closed on Turkish side, their economy is on decline, what can peace bring to both countries?**

-Of course, peace will change the situation in region completely. And I hope to see the time when the three countries of the Southern Caucasus will have cooperation. Now for instance, level of cooperation between Azerbaijan and Georgia is very high. We are strategic partners, and with current Georgian government we have excellent relations. We support each other and we are good neighbors and good friends. And we implemented look, how many projects together. Oil transportation, gas transportation, energy transportation, railroad connection, Baku-Tbilisi-Kars, Baku-Tbilisi-Jeyhan, Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum, TANAP and many others. Azerbaijan is, I think, first to second largest investor in Georgia along with Turkey. First to second largest taxpayer and by the way, in the middle of 90s the issue of construction of pipeline was discussed. There were some proposals from the West to have these pipelines through Armenia. But Armenia should have then liberate the territories and then, the pipeline could have gone from Azerbaijan to Armenia and then to Nakhchivan and to Turkey. And that was a shortest route. If you look at the map you will see how the pipeline goes. It is because to bypass Armenia. But Armenians thought that we will not be able to implement this pipeline. Therefore, they said no, and I think now they seriously regret. They became deadlocked because of occupation. They thought that we will not be able to build pipelines, they thought we will not be able to build railroads, they were always advocating for how to say functioning of the Kars-Gumru railroad which existed. But it was closed because our brotherly country Turkey closed the border because of Armenian occupation. So, now Armenia is



not landlocked but they don't have border with Turkey, because of aggression against Azerbaijan, and because of territorial claims against Turkey. Maybe you don't know, but in their constitution they have territorial claims against Turkey. One must be crazy now to have claims to such a powerful country as Turkey. But that's substance of their ideology. During the time of negotiations, there have been messages sent to previous Armenian government that if they put an end to occupation, Azerbaijan can implement different social and economic projects in Nagorno-Karabakh. These messages were sent through the Minsk-group co-chairs to former Armenian president and they rejected. Today in Nagorno-Karabakh people live in poverty, you know total unemployment, poverty and destroyed infrastructure. We were ready to invest, but we said liberate the territories and we will help you. Today when we liberate the territories, ourselves, definitely will help those people those Armenians who live in Nagorno-Karabakh and of course Azerbaijanis who will return to rebuild this area. But if Armenia makes the constructive steps and liberate the territories of course, we will open all the communications. I know that, I heard about the position of the Turkish government that they will also open communications if Armenia liberates the territories. Then the situation in the southern Caucasus will completely change.

**-Has Mr. Erdogan mentioned you about this intention?**

-Well, maybe we did not discussed it directly. But of course, we know that this is the position that the reason why Armenian Turkish border is closed, because of the occupation. If occupation is lifted, the border will be opened it is official position of Turkish government and Armenians know that. And without normalization of relations with Turkey and with Azerbaijan Armenia has no future. Because the market is small, and is getting smaller. Population is shrinking, migration is very high. According to our information today, real population, how many people there are in Armenia, less than two million. Less than two million. It will go down. Because of no job, especially now when they are deprived of those very productive lands in the occupied territories. If you look at these images from the sky, you will see how they use our land for illegal products. They not only use our land, they use our gold mines in Kalbajar. There are foreign companies whom we will sue, if they don't stop. By the way, soon I think they will stop anyway. So, they will suffer even more problems, because they will be deprived of this important agricultural segment. They will just decline and we will develop. Our population is growing. Turkish population is 83 million, Azerbaijani population is 10 million. Armenian population is less than two million. They should think how they are going to live here in 10 years, in 20 years, in 50 years if they don't be reasonable, if they don't put end to aggression. And they cannot afford this aggression any longer, and we showed them on the battlefield who is who. All their mythology about their brave army, was a kind of fake. Their army is running, we defeat them. We beat them, and we will continue to do it, until they get out of our land.

**-Thank you very much for this opportunity and it has been always a pleasure to be in Baku.**

-Thank you.

**President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has given a video interview to the Russian TASS news agency.**

**- Good afternoon. We are in Baku today to meet with President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev. My name is Yulia Sharifulina and, on behalf of TASS, I will ask the President several questions on the situation around Nagorno-Karabakh.**

**- Hello, Mr. President.**

- Hello.

**- Thank you for agreeing to receive us. I understand that you have recently given several interviews to the media but the situation is changing fast and we observe it literally every day. We would like, of course, to dwell more on some basic issues, which, perhaps, are beyond time and which will help our audience to better understand the position of your country. We all witnessed the 11-hour negotiating marathon in Moscow. Do you think it is still possible to return to the fulfillment of the achieved peace or has it failed completely?**

- We remain true to the commitments within the framework of contacts with our partners. From the very beginning and in the process of negotiations on the settlement of the conflict, we have always relied on international law, on our adherence to the resolution of the conflict by peaceful means, including the commitments Azerbaijan took upon itself after the talks in Moscow, which we aspired to and were going to implement. Unfortunately, Armenia flagrantly violated the ceasefire. Less than 24 hours after the talks, the city of Ganja was attacked. Residential areas of the sleeping city of Ganja were targeted deliberately. After the first attack – and there were two of them – the death toll was very high. In other words, Armenia violated the ceasefire in a defiant manner. Thus, it demonstrated disrespect for mediators, disrespect for the commitments it had assumed after such long negotiations in Moscow. Prior to that, after the terms of the ceasefire for the exchange of bodies, prisoners and hostages had been agreed, Armenia had also violated the ceasefire on the battlefield. However, this seemed insufficient for them and they attacked the city of Ganja. In fact, two days ago, they did the same and again at night. This is a very heinous crime. This is international terrorism. The unanimous condemnation of this bloody crime by the world community means that they will not get away with it. The UN Secretary General, the European Union and many countries at the national level have condemned this act of international terrorism.

It is not our fault that the situation is still in the hot phase. I have repeatedly said that Azerbaijan is committed to the principles of settlement. These principles have been developed over the many years of negotiations. I have confirmed in my speeches and in recent contacts with the media that if Armenia acts constructively in the process of negotiations, we are ready to suspend military operations as early as tomorrow. However, the statements we have been hearing from Yerevan completely contradict the fundamental principles developed by the OSCE Minsk Group. The Armenian leadership has recently made very dangerous statements that effectively refute the fundamental principles. In principle, all the activities of Armenia's new leadership are aimed at disrupting the process of negotiations. Not to undermine this process, but to disrupt it. I have already talked about their numerous statements, provocative actions and attacks on Azerbaijan's civilian population. Therefore, if the Armenian side finally realizes that the path of military

provocations leads them to disaster, we are ready to suspend military operations and resolve the issue at the negotiating table.

**- Would your country agree to the need for an urgent military meeting, as Russia says? If so, what format and with the participation of what parties could this meeting be held?**

- You know, the political will of the leadership of Armenia and Azerbaijan is paramount here. There is political will on our side. I confirm our position again today. And I confirm it when we have announced the liberation of 13 more settlements in the occupied territories, when the Armenian army is essentially suffering a defeat, when Azerbaijan demonstrates its advantage on the battleground. Nevertheless, not wishing to continue the bloodshed and wishing to save people's lives, we are ready to resolve this issue by political means.

With regard to military-to-military contacts, the fundamental principles explicitly define this, and we are committed to the fundamental principles I have already mentioned. I think there is no point in repeating – it is the return of the territories occupied by the Armenian side, negotiations on the future of Nagorno-Karabakh, the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their places of origin, including Nagorno-Karabakh, Shusha. All of this is written in fundamental principles, and the Armenian side agreed to all of this at different stages. Therefore, the question you have just asked is covered in the fundamental principles at the end of the agreement – when all the issues related to de-occupation have been settled, the presence of foreign peacekeeping forces is envisaged. But since the key issues requiring settlement were not agreed on, the parties did not approach this issue. Therefore, there was no clear understanding of who these forces would consist of, what international organizations and what countries would be represented there. Therefore, all this has not been discussed. One thing was clear: the composition and location of these peacekeeping forces should be agreed upon by Azerbaijan and Armenia. This has not been defined either. Therefore, there is no line of contact today, the status quo has been removed, we removed it ourselves and did it within the framework of statements by the presidents of Russia, the United States and France, the repeated statements by the heads of state that the status quo was unacceptable. We were hearing these statements but did not see their implementation. Therefore, we implemented it ourselves. So there is no status quo and there is no line of contact. How can some military observers be deployed there technically and where exactly can they be deployed? After all, the situation on the battlefield changes every day. So there will be some foreign observers but where will they stand – on mountains, in valleys, on bridges? So all this requires a very detailed study. This is also a huge risk for those who deem it necessary to send their military contingent there. So all this must be agreed upon: composition, mandate, timing, goals. Of course, all of this should be done within the framework of the fundamental principles, which, as I said, are accepted by us and rejected by the Armenian side.

**- But if the situation does require it, will your country agree to the introduction of Russian military observers? And if not Russian, what other countries could take part in this mission and what countries would you strongly object to?**

- You know, Russia, like the United States and France, is a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, and within the framework of this mandate, the countries have very close interaction with each

other. During the hot phase of the conflict, I observe both in the Western and Russian media that the Nagorno-Karabakh issue is probably the only issue where there are no disagreements between these countries. And perhaps this is actually the case. Wherever we look, there are sanctions, confrontations, claims, etc., and they are also mutual. Therefore, of course, I am sure that this issue should be agreed upon within the framework of the co-chairmanship format among these countries and, after it is agreed upon, it should be presented to the parties. So it was all stated in the fundamental principles. After all, it is not us who should determine who the peacekeepers, or observers, as they prefer to be called now, will be. This will be a proposal from the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, and Azerbaijan and Armenia, for their part, can either veto this or that country or agree to it. Therefore, I do not think that a unilateral decision would correspond to the spirit of cooperation among the three co-chairing countries in determining any kind of military contingent. And most importantly – where? This is the question. The point is not whether Azerbaijan would or would not agree. We need to know the mandate: who is the sponsor, what are the functions, location and activities? Are they going to stand on the mountains or in an open field and watch who shoots first? This is dangerous in the first place. Secondly, the way it is described to us, they will be there to observe who breaks the truce. But even if they determine who breaks the truce, what next? Will these people be held accountable? Will there be criminal cases?

Therefore, first of all, it is necessary to determine the order for the implementation of fundamental principles. The Armenian side through its prime minister must clearly reaffirm its commitment. However, the Armenian side represented by the prime minister talks about everything but this. Within the framework of our parallel contacts with representatives of the Russian media, I clearly stated that we are committed to the fundamental principles that imply de-occupation, joint residence of the Armenian and Azerbaijani population in their places of residence, the return of Azerbaijanis to Shusha and other settlements of the former Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous region. The Armenian prime minister only spoke about self-determination. So if he does not accept this and makes statements like the one he made earlier, saying that “Karabakh is Armenia, full stop”, as well as other counterproductive statements that essentially disrupted the process of negotiations, then are we being offered? To return to the status quo which lasted 30 years and did not yield any results? If the Armenian side says that they recognize the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, secondly, they are committed to the fundamental principles, thirdly, they agree to the withdrawal of troops from the occupied territories, then we can discuss the issue of observers. I think it can be agreed on quite quickly. But when this is not the case, what we are being offered? To stop? Not to continue the de-occupation of our territories? We are offered to make a concession to Armenia, a unilateral concession, while nothing is being offered in return. This is not fair. I believe that this is a wrong approach in relation to Azerbaijan. Let the Armenian side say, let the prime minister of Armenia, who loves to talk a lot and what he says often costs his country dearly, say: yes, there will be de-occupation, there will be withdrawal. I also suggested that they should provide a timetable for the withdrawal from the occupied territories. But then, realizing that it was technically impossible to do this within the framework of one-day negotiations in Moscow, we moved away from this position. Nevertheless, we did not hear the Armenian side say that it was ready to withdraw troops from the occupied territories. As soon as this happens, the issue of the so-called observers can be considered.

**- If we talk about consistency in principle, would Azerbaijan agree to start a settlement with a phased transfer of seven districts to Azerbaijan, but keeping the Lachin corridor with Armenia until the final status of Karabakh is determined?**

- You know, all this is stated in fundamental principles, and we have accepted it. Our position has always been very constructive, we have always said that yes, we proceed from the understanding that there should be contacts between people, and the Lachin corridor is a part of fundamental principles. At the same time, the fundamental principles also state that all communications are to be opened. This includes not only the Lachin corridor but also the communications between the main part of Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan, and the Armenian side is to provide security guarantees for this corridor. Communications on the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan are to be opened. It was also envisaged that Armenia would have unhindered ground access to the territory of the Russian Federation, which it is not without now but it would be much more convenient to do this through Azerbaijan. In this case, it would not depend on weather conditions, snowfall in the mountains, etc. So all this is part of a compromise package which envisaged de-occupation of Azerbaijani territories, the return of Azerbaijani refugees to all the lands they were expelled from – not only to seven surrounding districts but also to the territory in Nagorno-Karabakh. Before the start of the conflict, Azerbaijanis accounted for 25 percent of the entire population there. And, of course, unhindered access between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia through the Lachin corridor. We reaffirm this position.

**- Mr. President, it is no secret that Russia has expressed concern over reports on the transfer of militants from the Middle East to the conflict zone, in particular from Syria and Libya. How can you comment on this?**

- I have repeatedly said in my public remarks that such concerns are unfounded. So far, we have not been provided with any facts from any side. After all, such statements were made not only by Russia but also by France, and we asked for specific facts, concrete evidence that would prove that we have invited terrorists here. So far, apart from words, no facts have been provided. Not to me as President, not to the heads of our secret service, not to the leaders of the Ministry of Defense – not a single fact. If there are such facts as this is being declared, why isn't this provided to us? They refer to some newspaper publications, but you can write whatever you want now. Therefore, this is not exactly the approach we accept and approve. This is first. Secondly, as I have already said, the Azerbaijani army has proved its combat effectiveness both on the battlefield and in terms of technical capacity. We have practically destroyed most of Armenia's military-technical potential located in the occupied territories. I have provided these figures. More than 230 tanks have been destroyed mainly by drones but also by modern anti-tank warfare systems – the self-directing Spike missiles. I do not conceal that. As of yesterday, we captured 36 tanks as booty. A huge amount of other equipment has been destroyed, including the most modern anti-aircraft missile systems "S-300" – in fact, not just one launcher. About 40 anti-aircraft missile systems "OSA", "TOR" installations, which should actually work against drones, but the drones have destroyed them. Did terrorists do that? Have they come from somewhere in Syria? Today, when our army is liberating territories, where are they? Who saw these terrorists? These are our soldiers and officers. We have 100,000 soldiers in the regular Azerbaijani army, not counting the reservists. We did not

even announce mobilization. What for? We do not need that. We have announced a partial mobilization. I do not want to provide any figures of how much we have attracted, but we mainly use them for monitoring and control over the already liberated territories. We are not letting reservists into battle. We are using them in the territories we have liberated in order to prevent sabotage attempts of the Armenian side. So there are no facts and there is no need. There are only gossips, rumors. Frankly speaking, I regret that this is being circulated. Thus, an attempt is made to cast a shadow on Azerbaijan. On the other hand, we understand the Armenian side's humiliation. It had been boasting and bragging of its invincible army all these years, but when we drove them out of our lands so fast that they fling up their heels, of course, they want to imagine that this is not done by the Azerbaijani army but some terrorists or some other countries.

Not a single country is involved in the conflict on our side. There are no terrorists on our side. As for the opposite side, the Armenian side, we have conveyed to the Russian side our concerns that during the active phase of the confrontation a huge amount of weapons has been transferred from Russian cities to the territory of Armenia. We have data, we have flight maps, we have the listing of weapons. All this was brought to the attention of the Russian side. This, of course, raises a lot of questions and bewilderment in our society. Therefore, the situation is like this. If necessary, we can also publish the list of supplies Armenia has received from Russia during this time, specify what transport vehicles were used to deliver them, and which airlines delivered them. These were mostly illegal supplies. We have officially applied to ICAO. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan has appealed to ICAO. We have provided information about the transport vessels of certain companies. In fact, there have also been media reports that lethal weapons are being delivered to Armenia under the guise of humanitarian cargo and cargo of the Ministry of Emergency Situations. Since both Georgia and Iran have closed their airspace for military cargo, such smuggling methods are used. We suggested to the Russian side that this was being done by means of smuggling because it is hard for us to believe that Russia, a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group and a country that must maintain neutrality, just like France and the United States, is arming the Armenian side during the active phase of the conflict. According to our information, large Russian entrepreneurs of Armenian origin are involved in this scheme. Well-known arms dealers who are under international sanctions are also involved. Our appeal to the Russian side was, among other things, aimed at sorting out this issue. Because if Russian weapons are smuggled and paid for in cash, then we need to figure out how this can be possible. These are the concerns we have, and our concerns are based on facts. As for the so-called terrorists, these are just words.

**-Ilham Heydar oglu, in the past 26 years the world could not understand what the final agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan on Karabakh might look like. How do you see this, and are any concessions still possible for the sake of peace?**

- You know, I want to say again that although the Minsk Group co-chairs have not achieved any result and are rightly criticized by the Azerbaijani public for that, I have to say as a person who has been dealing with this issue almost on a daily basis for the last 17 years and spending a huge amount of my time on finding solutions that the Minsk Group has been trying. It was providing proposals and did not stay idle. Therefore, I reject such unfounded accusations. This is not the case. During my contacts with the previous leadership of Armenia, with the previous two presidents, we

took major steps forward. We made progress in agreeing on issues that seemed completely impossible to agree on. This was all based on the desire to achieve a result, the desire to reach a settlement through a compromise. It is a different matter though that at a certain stage, when we came too close to a settlement, the Armenian side took a step back. This is also a fact although they have always tried to blame us for this. But at the last moment they refused to return Kalbajar and Lachin. The other five districts had been agreed upon long ago and we were already discussing when Kalbajar and Lachin would be returned. So we were discussing the timing. Neither me nor the Minsk Group had any doubts that this issue had been resolved. I think the former co-chairs of the Minsk Group who were involved in this at the time can confirm this. But then the Armenian side took a step back, and the issue of transferring Kalbajar and Lachin hung in the air. In other words, a mechanism was proposed that involved these two districts forever remaining under Armenian control, which I categorically could not agree to.

Therefore, returning to what you asked, the Minsk Group has created a basis for a settlement. It consists in the de-occupation, the return of refugees, the opening of communications, the joint residence of the Azerbaijani and Armenian communities, which fully complies with the norms of both international law and human morality in general. Because when one of the Armenian presidents spoke about ethnic incompatibility of Armenians and Azerbaijanis, he once again demonstrated his fascist essence. Then how can Azerbaijanis and Armenians live together in Russia, have a common business and mixed families there? How can Armenians and Azerbaijanis live together in some Georgian villages and celebrate both Muslim and Christian holidays? How do thousands of Armenians live with dignity in Azerbaijan as our citizens? Therefore, such theses of fascist nature did not contribute to a settlement, of course.

So all the fundamental principles I have talked about plus the opening of communications form the basis. The Minsk Group co-chairs support the Azerbaijani position. But the current Armenian leadership took a different path. The prime minister said that not a centimeter of land would be given to Azerbaijan. They have published maps of the so-called “Nagorno-Karabakh republic”, which also included seven districts outside Nagorno-Karabakh. They have changed all the names of our cities and our villages. What we saw on the battlefield – it was not easy to break through these defense lines they had been building for 30 years – we saw that they were not going to give up these territories. Because so much had been invested there, so much had been invested in engineering communications and fortifications! This did not at all mean that they were going to leave these lands. When the hot phase of the conflict ends, we will provide full information about what they had built there.

Therefore, I want to say once again that full responsibility for what is happening now lies squarely with Pashinyan. This is someone who not only happened to come in power by chance, but also brought a lot of suffering and grief to the Azerbaijani and the Armenian people. He is a foster child of Soros. This is a person who, in his previous life, has always opposed Armenia’s cooperation with Russia. His party was called “Exit” – exit from the CSTO, exit from the EurAsEC. Pashinyan's team is almost entirely made up of representatives of non-governmental organizations funded by the West – the Soros Foundation, Amnesty International, Transparency, Human Rights Watch, Freedom House. People represented in Armenian government today used to throw eggs at

the Russian Embassy and chanted slogans like “Get out, Russian invaders”. Therefore, to be honest, I am surprised that a certain part of the Russian political establishment supports this criminal terrorist regime. The fact that they hit the sleeping city of Ganja twice with ballistic missiles and deliberately targeted residential areas in order to kill as many people as possible is a bloody crime. They are being brought to account for this crime on the battlefield, and if they don’t change their minds, their end will be very deplorable. Therefore, returning to your question, we are committed to the fundamental principles. We believe that a settlement is possible, but for this to happen the Armenian side must, before it is too late and while it is only on its knees before us, accept these principles and move the conflict from the hot phase to the stage of political settlement.

**- In conclusion, it would be logical to ask if are you ready to come to Moscow to meet with your counterpart from Armenia with the mediation of the Russian Federation?**

- You know, I have been to Moscow many times. In this case, I have not received such an invitation, so this question is not for me. President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin personally and Dmitry Anatolyevich Medvedev before him have repeatedly held trilateral meetings between the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan. But ever since power in Armenia passed into the hands of the conditional Soros, such contacts have ceased. Russia has always played an important role in the settlement of the conflict, and I have spoken about this. There are objective reasons for this – both historical and geographical in nature. And also because Russia has been active in our region for many decades and there is a high level of interaction. Therefore, we are ready for any contacts. In fact, when the suggestion was made to organize a meeting of foreign ministers, we agreed immediately. After all, this also speaks of our position. Then the Azerbaijani army had already successfully liberated a part of strategic territories. The conflict had already been under way for more than 10 days and it was quite clear to everyone who was capable of doing what. So it was not too difficult to guess the further course of developments. Despite this, we did not give time or refuse. We said – yes, we are ready. And I said when speaking with the President of Russia that I was sending our minister. By the way, the Minister of Foreign Affairs was in Geneva at the time. He was negotiating with the Minsk Group. During the hot phase, our minister was in Geneva while the Armenian minister never got there although he should have been there too. Therefore, we are always ready to meet in Moscow or elsewhere in order to put an end to the confrontation but also to find ways of settlement. We also want peace but, unlike Armenia, we want territories that rightfully belong to us.

**- Mr. President, thank you for your answers.**

-Thank you.



**President Ilham Aliyev gave an interview to Director General of "Rossiya Segodnya International News Agency" media holding Dmitry Kiselev for Russian RIA Novosti agency**

**- Mr. President, thank you very much for this opportunity to ask you questions at such a difficult time for Azerbaijan and the whole world. How would you assess the results of military action since 27 September? What are the losses of the sides, according to your estimates, and are there many prisoners?**

- On 27 September, Azerbaijan was subjected to yet another attack by the Armenian armed forces. It was not the first attack in the past three months. Something similar but on a smaller scale took place at the state border in July. That attack was repulsed. In August, a subversion group was sent from the Armenian side to commit terrorist acts against the civilian population and the military. The head of this group was detained and is now giving evidence. At the end of September, our settlements were also subjected to artillery fire, and in the very first hours, we had casualties both among the civilian population and the military. To date, we have 43 civilian deaths and more than 200 wounded, about 2,000 houses in villages and towns adjacent to the line of contact are either destroyed or damaged. Unfortunately, artillery shelling by Armenia has continued after the agreement on the parameters of a ceasefire was reached, including the barbaric bombing of the city of Ganja that killed ten and injured about 40 civilians.

As for the losses on the battlefield, according to our data, the losses of the Armenian side are far greater than ours. We will announce our losses among servicemen after the active phase of the conflict. As for the results of the military action, they have been very successful for Azerbaijan's army. We have managed to break through the deeply echeloned defenses of the opposing side. In some areas, there were even four lines of defense. The mountainous terrain, of course, makes the defense much easier than the counteroffensive. To date, dozens of settlements have been liberated from the occupation, including the city of Jabrayil and most of the villages of Jabrayil district, the vast majority of villages in the Fuzuli district, and the settlement of Sugovushan, which is of strategic importance. We have driven the occupiers out of strategic heights on the Murovdag mountain range and continue our successful operation to restore our country's territorial integrity.

**- Mr. President, we have heard from different sources about the participation of mercenaries from Syria or Libya on the side of Azerbaijan's army. To what extent is this true?**

- I have already spoken on this topic many times. There is no need for any foreign military involvement in Azerbaijan. Our army has more than 100,000 fighters and, if necessary, with mobilization, this number can be increased several times. Today, the armed formations available to us are fully capable of completing any task. Footage of the destruction of Armenian military equipment is available on the Internet. Of course, no mercenary possesses such qualifications and such technical capabilities. We have destroyed more than a billion dollars' worth of military equipment of the opposing side using unmanned attack aircraft alone. This does not include other resources at our disposal. The potential of Azerbaijan's army is well known – what we possess is no secret. Therefore, we do not need additional military forces. Azerbaijan has always been a consistent fighter against international terrorism. We will never allow any terrorist organizations

to build cells on our territory, even more so to pose a threat to our people and our neighbors. We will never allow this. No-one has provided us with any evidence on the presence of foreign armed formations on the territory of Azerbaijan in the current clashes. Our official position is that we have no foreign mercenaries.

**- The Moscow agreements of 10 October mention the fundamental principles of the settlement. Can you please decipher these principles the way you understand them?**

- These principles have been developed over many years, over more than ten years, I would say. In my work with Armenia's previous leadership, we actively moved forward in the process of coordinating positions. It was challenging. Negotiations are a difficult process in themselves, and even more so on such an important issue. Nevertheless, both sides showed a desire to follow the path of a political settlement. Unfortunately, after the current government in Armenia came to power, everything accumulated before was thrown into the wastebasket by the Armenian side. There was also an attempt to change the format of negotiations; to involve the authorities of the so-called "Nagorno-Karabakh republic" in the talks - something that the OSCE Minsk Group and we rejected. As for the fundamental principles, everything is explicitly spelled out there. The liberation of the occupied Azerbaijani districts is to be carried out in a phased manner. At the first stage, it is the south-eastern part of the occupied territories – five districts. The second stage is the territories located between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia – Lachin and Kalbajar districts. Then the opening of all communications, including communications situated in other parts of the Armenia-Azerbaijan border, the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their places of the original residence, which implies the return of Azerbaijani refugees to Shusha and other parts of the former Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous region. Then negotiations on the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh to be agreed by the parties should follow. In a nutshell, these are the fundamental principles for which Azerbaijan has always expressed respect –we have developed them. But the new Armenian government has repeatedly stated that they were unacceptable and that they would not return a single centimeter of our lands. The prime minister said this. The Armenian defense minister said that Armenia was preparing for a new war for new territories. There were incessant threats and insults addressed to us, which resulted in such confrontation. I think that the Armenian side should soberly assess the current situation and be committed to the ceasefire, which Armenia violated in a barbaric manner a few hours later by bombing the city of Ganja that was asleep.

**- Mr. President, if we talk about compromises, what kind of compromises would you still be ready for? Is there a red line you will not cross under any circumstances?**

- Our position has always been very constructive and consistent. It also stems from the norms of international law regarding the implementation of four UN Security Council resolutions, which demand complete, immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian forces from our territories. Our position has always been based on a pragmatic approach. I think that the options that exist at the negotiating table clearly show this. As for the "red lines", we have stated this very clearly, and the Minsk Group co-chairs are well aware of this. Under no circumstances can Azerbaijan's territorial integrity be violated. Under no circumstances will Azerbaijan give its consent to the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh. At the same time, our proposal proceeded from

the fact that the Armenian community and the Azerbaijani community should live peacefully and coexist on the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh in the future. By the way, this is the case in Azerbaijan's other residential areas, including Baku, where there is an Armenian community of many thousands of people. It is also the case in Russia, in Georgia, in other countries where Armenians and Azerbaijanis sometimes live and work in the same village, and there are no contradictions between them. Why can't this be achieved here? We are committed to this, but, of course, the consequences of ethnic cleansing must be eliminated, and all our internally displaced persons must return to their own homes. I have explained a little more than the fundamental principles and our approach to possible compromises in principle.

**- Mr. President, the brutality of this war has already gone down in history, and you are already a part of the war's history. How would you like to be remembered in history?**

- You know, any war is about cruelty, sacrifices, human suffering and loss of loved ones. The difference is that it is a liberation war for the Azerbaijani people, while for Armenia, it is a war of occupation. It is no secret to anyone, and this is a fact the international mediators already know, that the so-called "Nagorno-Karabakh army" does not exist. Today, the entity the Armenian side refers to consists of citizens of Armenia by 90 percent. They are called up for military service by Armenian military registration and enlistment offices and sent to Azerbaijan's occupied territories: to Aghdam, Fizuli, Jabrayil, Kalbajar, Gubadli, Lachin, Zangilan. It begs the question: what are they doing there? Today, Armenian occupying forces sit on internationally recognized territories of Azerbaijan. There no way to justify this: neither from the international law perspective nor from the point of view of human morality. It is impossible to pursue a policy of preventing Azerbaijanis from entering their ancestral lands for 30 years. These are the territories the Armenian population had never lived on before. Another question is that everything there is destroyed, and it will take a lot of time and effort to return there. But this position cannot be justified in any way. Therefore, our servicemen and we are fighting and dying on Azerbaijani soil, while Armenian soldiers die on the land their government wants to keep under occupation.

As for the role in history, you know, I have never thought about that, especially now. My primary mission is to live up to the trust of the people of Azerbaijan, to keep the promises made throughout the years I have been in office, lead the country along the development path, and restore its territorial integrity. The way my role will be assessed in the future will depend on the will of the Azerbaijani people and what we achieve. Therefore, I think that this issue should be left to those whose opinion has always been of primary importance for me in making certain decisions, including those related to the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh.

**- Mr. President, thank you! I have asked all the questions I wanted to ask. Perhaps you would like to add something?**

- I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude for this chance to address the multimillion Russian audience. I want a little more understanding of Azerbaijan's position because sometimes there are different opinions on the conflict, its history and its current state. Based on facts, I want to bring to the attention of our viewers what actually happened and is happening. At the beginning of the 19th century, Ibrahim Khalil Khan of Karabakh and Shusha, that was his exact

status, signed an agreement with Tsarist Russia, represented by General Tsitsianov, on the incorporation of the Karabakh Khanate into Russia. The agreement's text, called the Kurekchay Treaty, is available online, and everyone can look it up. So this agreement does not say a single word about the Armenian population of the Karabakh Khanate. Large-scale resettlement of the Armenian population to this region began after the two Russo-Persian Wars of 1813 and 1828. Since then, Armenians' mass resettlement to the Karabakh region started from the territory of present-day Iran and partly Eastern Anatolia. This is about whom this land belongs to historically.

After the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1918, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic and the independent Armenian state were established. The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was found across all these territories. Moreover, the day after establishing the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, it decided to transfer the city of Yerevan to Armenia as the capital. It is also a historical fact. In 1921, the Caucasian Bureau decided to leave Nagorno-Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan and not transfer it to Azerbaijan as some pseudo-historians interpret it. This is the history of this region.

Well, I think everyone knows what happened on the eve of the collapse of the USSR. After all, the collapse of the USSR also began with separatism in Nagorno-Karabakh. It became the trigger. Many people forget those rallies, who masterminded them, who was behind them. I often say that Pashinyan is a product of Soros. And I think everyone will agree with me. But Soros is no longer even a person; this is a concept. I do not rule out that even then, to destroy the great country, such instruments were put into operation: implode from within, sow discord, pit people against each other and destroy states. And this, by the way, is precisely what happened. Therefore, I would like to bring these historical facts to the Russian public's attention and say that Azerbaijan and Russia are linked by centuries-old bonds of friendship, cooperation, and mutual understanding. I am sure that no force can influence this, although we see attempts from different directions to bring discord and some mistrust. But thanks to the consistent policy of both the Russian and Azerbaijani leadership, not only do we not fall back, but we actually move forward. Today Russia and Azerbaijan refer to each other as strategic partners. The interaction level between our countries can serve as an example to any neighbors. And I am sure that after the military phase of the conflict ends, and we move on to a political settlement – and we are ready to do this even tomorrow if the Armenian side abandons its attempts to forcefully return what it has lost and what does not belong to it – I am sure that Russia will continue to play a leading role in stabilizing our region. Therefore, I would like to convey my greetings and best wishes to all the Russians through your channel. Last year, one million Russians visited Azerbaijan. Hopefully, this dynamic will be restored after the pandemic. We are always glad to see our guests from Russia. They also know that when they come to Azerbaijan, they feel at home.

**- Mr. President, thank you very much for this sincere interview.**

- Thank you.

**President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has been interviewed by France 24 TV channel.**

**-Hello and welcome to the France 24 interview. Today brought you from Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan. I am in the presence of the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev. President Aliyev, thank you very much for accepting to answer our questions. Of course, I will be asking you about the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. Since the ceasefire which was supposed to be a humanitarian truce was signed, there has been continuing violence, continuing acts of war. I'm asking you today, is that ceasefire officially now dead, over and null and void.**

-It depends on the behavior of Armenia. Because we are always committed to our responsibility and the decision to announce the ceasefire on humanitarian grounds as you know came from Russia and we supported it. Because I think it was a right decision in order to exchange the bodies of the dead soldiers and also hostages. Also to continue the activity on the negotiation table. Because the declaration which was announced in Moscow actually provided that negotiations will be based on the basic principles. That was always our position. Armenian side always tried to disrupt the process and was trying to introduce new approaches on negotiation table, which we rejected by us, and by the Minsk Group co-chairs. The most important part of the declaration along with other issues was that the format of negotiations will be unchanged. And that's very important because for broad international audience maybe it's not very clear what it means. I will probably give some more information about that. Because for the last two years after the new government in Armenia came to power, one of their activity was to bring the so-called "authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh" to the negotiation table and thus, to change the format. Because for more than 20 years, negotiations are being held between Armenia and Azerbaijan within the framework of the Minsk Group process. So, the attempts to bring the so-called "Nagorno-Karabakh authorities" was an attempt to change the format. So, when both sides commit that the format is unchanged that means that everything just is within the framework of what has been agreed before. We were observing the ceasefire. But as you know Armenia brutally violated it and not only in Ganja. Attack on civilians in Ganja was reflection of their aggressive policy. And also, they everyday violate ceasefire. I was informed this morning that since 7 o'clock to 9 o'clock in the morning they more than 150 times shelled the city of Tartar and Aghdam. And unfortunately, we have one victim today among civilians in Tartar.

**-But Azerbaijan has also continued to fire has it not? The world has been seeing pictures of civilians under shelling in Stepanakert inside Nagorno-Karabakh.**

-First, since the ceasefire was announced all the shelling from Azerbaijani side was stopped, second we never deliberately attack civilians in any city or village on the occupied territories. Our targets were only military installations. Our military targets have been identified very carefully. Therefore, we only hit those targets which was a threat to the life of our people and our soldiers. But unfortunately, Armenians are using the tactics to install military equipment in the areas of the cities where people live. So, we had to protect ourselves. But since the ceasefire was established we were committed to that but Armenia violated it, so we had to respond.

**-So you are saying that there have been no strikes by Azerbaijan since the ceasefire was announced. Even on military targets?**

-No, on military targets there have been strikes, we do not deny it. But that's natural, because we have to defend ourselves. Ceasefire cannot be achieved unilaterally. Otherwise, Armenia will get advantage and will achieve its goal and actually what they are trying to do. They are trying to regain back the territories which have been liberated. Particularly, they try to regain back the city of Hadrut, but they failed. My advice to them and I already publicly addressed Armenian leadership and also Armenian people, that they should stop trying to regain what has been liberated back. That will only cause new victims and will lead to bloodshed.

**-What about the pictures of bombings on churches inside Nagorno-Karabakh there is not military targets, surely.**

-Yes, you are right. We are investigating that issue, I'd like to say that Azerbaijan is a country with a very high level of religious tolerance, which was reflected by all the major international organizations, including United Nations. During the visit of His Holiness head of the Vatican, Pope Francis to Baku, he publicly declared that the level of intercultural dialogue, interreligious dialogue in Azerbaijan is very high. You have probably seen the Armenian church in the center of Baku, which was restored by us. And we protected it as the heritage of Armenian people. In that church we keep more than 5,000 ancient books in Armenian language. But what Armenia has done to our mosques? What have they done to the mosques of Aghdam, mosque of Fuzuli, mosque of Shusha? They not only almost destroyed them, but they keep animals there. They keep pigs there, thus insulting the feelings of all the Muslims not only us. I am not saying that we did it in revenge, no. We need to investigate this issue, we are not sure about what happened. We have doubts that could have been done by Armenians in order to blame us. If it was done, if it was done by Azerbaijani military units, that was a mistake and we don't have any historical or religious targets among those targets which we have.

**-I want to ask you about the diplomatic process now. Mediation has been ongoing with the OSCE Minsk group, the co-chairs at the moment France, US and Russia. Do you think that structure, should remain that France should remain a co-chair in those negotiations?**

-We are receiving the some contradictory statements and messages from the very beginning of the outbreak. But I think that due to our mutual diplomatic efforts we managed to keep the situation under control. As you know, I received several phone calls from president Macron. And our last conversation was very positive. We are committed to our efforts to find a political solution to the conflict. I was informed that France as a co-chair will remain neutral, because that's the mandate for a co-chair. This morning I was informed that the French foreign minister issued a statement that due to the fact that France is a co-chair of the Minsk Group it must be neutral. We fully support this position and our position always was that all the co-chairs must be neutral. They should not take sides, because it's contradicting their mandate. In a national capacity, every country has allies friends, with some countries more active relations, with some countries less active relations. This is normal and no one is objecting that. But if some countries have a mandate to be a mediator, of course, both sides, I am sure, Armenia and Azerbaijan expects neutrality, and we see this neutrality

now. Therefore, I think the issue which you are referring to now is over. So, we have closed that page.

**-In previous interviews you've called for an apology from Emmanuel Macron, after his remarks saying that 300 fighters from Syria have been brought to fight for your side. When you last spoke to him, did you speak about this issue-him accusing mercenaries are fighting for your side?**

-Yes, of course. Yes, we spoke about that and I was still waiting for evidence. No evidence was presented to me. No evidence was presented to our other officials. I asked the French president to give evidence and to organize contacts between the heads of corresponding state units in order to talk, in order to exchange this information and this contact happened. And I can tell you that no evidence was presented to us. Therefore, if there is no evidence, I think these rumors should also be left back in the history. We don't have mercenaries. This is our official statement. Since the outbreak, already more than two weeks passed, not a single country presented us a single evidence of that. Moreover, we don't need that. We have an army of more than 100 thousand fighters. And what we are doing now on the ground demonstrate that our army is capable to liberate its lands itself.

**-France's foreign minister Jean-Yves Le Drian has said that there is Turkish military involvement which risks internationalization of this conflict. Is he wrong about that?**

-Yes, he is wrong about that. Turkish military involvement is another fake news. There is no military involvement of Turkey. We are using Turkish military equipment. This is true. But we are using military equipment of Russia, military equipment of Israel, military equipment of other countries. And we buy this military equipment unlike Armenia which gets it free of charge. Turkey is in no way other than political, is present in the process. There are no Turkish forces, Turkish F-16s are here but they are left here after the joint military training. By the way, last year we had ten joint military trainings with Turkey, including air force. This year due to pandemic, we had only two and it happened that just after the military training this outbreak happened. So we decided to keep F-16 on the ground and they are on the ground. They are not on the air.

**-How many Turkish drones are you deploying?**

-We have enough in order to achieve our targets. I think that you can understand me that this is the information which I prefer not to disclose.

**-But are they making the difference in this conflict?**

-Of course, they are very modern, sophisticated weapons and I can tell you, only by the drones which we acquired from Turkey, we destroyed Armenian military equipment worth 1 billion dollars. Only by the drones and of course, we are using other drones as you know from other sources. We are using artillery, we are using broad range of military equipment. But only the drones made the damage to Armenia worth 1 billion dollars. That's a serious damage for them. I wonder, where did they get so much money to buy all this equipment. Probably, they got them free of charge.

**-I am afraid we will have to leave it there. So many more questions of course we could ask you, but thank you very much, President Ilham Aliyev for answering our questions today. And thank you at home for watching. Do stay tuned to France-24 for more international news coming right up.**

-Thank you.

**-Thank you very much. It was very interesting to talk to you.**



**On 13 October, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by Turkish Haber Türk TV channel.**

**- We are with the President of Azerbaijan, Mr. Ilham Aliyev. Mr. President, you have a busy schedule, both at the front and in diplomacy. Thank you very much for your time with Haber Türk.**

- Thank you.

**- Mr. President, a meeting between Armenia and Azerbaijan took place in Moscow, which lasted 11 and a half hours. But after that meeting, Armenia bombarded the city of Ganja and targeted civilians with particular cruelty. It is noteworthy here that Armenia aims at Azerbaijan from its own territory. Why did Armenia need this attack at a time when the meeting was held at the diplomatic level? Have you received the desired support from the world community or any messages on this issue?**

- This dirty policy of Armenia is understandable because they resort to such heinous actions whenever they are defeated on the battlefield. The display of cruelty towards civilians and unarmed population is a common thing for them. The Azerbaijani people saw this on the example of the Khojaly genocide. This time the Azerbaijani Army, having carried out a successful operation along the entire front, liberated several cities and villages. Our operation to liberate us from the occupation continues successfully. This morning, I was informed that the Azerbaijani Army has achieved even more impressive successes in this direction. We will provide this information at the right time.

The reason for this treacherous attack by Armenia is that they are trying to expand the geography of this conflict and involve the Collective Security Treaty Organization of which they are a member. This is why they bombard Azerbaijani lands, civilians and provoke us to retaliate. But as I said, our revenge would be on the battlefield. We never take any action against civilians. All our goals are military. From the first days of the operation, military targets were reviewed again and we eliminated them with precise and aimed fire. The Armenian army suffered a lot of damage. We have destroyed more than 200 tanks, two S-300 anti-aircraft installations, numerous other pieces of equipment. A total of 33 tanks and other hardware have been taken as trophies.

This is another terrorist act on the part of Armenia, but it cannot break the will of the Azerbaijani people. We will fight the enemy with even greater determination, we will liberate our lands with even greater zeal, and we will raise the flag of Azerbaijan in all the occupied lands.

As for the reaction of international organizations and the international community to this, as always, Turkey has openly and unequivocally supported us on this issue again. The statements of my dear brother Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the statements of other high-ranking officials were further manifestation of the position of brotherhood. Pakistan and its Prime Minister have made a very positive statement, showing great solidarity. Other countries have made similar statements. But I can't say that it was widespread on a global scale. However, it is as clear as day. A statement is made about a ceasefire, but such a cowardly attack is organized less than a day later. This shows yet again who is not interested in a ceasefire.

I said that our goal is to return the citizens of Azerbaijan to all the occupied lands. I said that the ceasefire would allow things to move from a military onto political and diplomatic levels. At the diplomatic level, this issue should be resolved around the negotiating table, Armenia should withdraw from the other occupied territories, Azerbaijani citizens should return there and peace should be established. But it seems that Armenia's plans were completely different. They believed that by using this ceasefire, they could reduce their military losses, gain time, mobilize new forces and thus continue their attacks on Azerbaijan. They were wrong. I said that if Armenia did not act positively, they would regret it, and I was right.

**- Mr. President, your Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov and Armenian foreign minister held a meeting that lasted 11 and a half hours. When this meeting was underway, you said that you have one condition – they should provide a timetable, in other words, a timetable for Armenia's withdrawal from Karabakh. Was the timetable provided at the Moscow meeting? Did Moscow submit any project or plan related to the future of Karabakh?**

- No, the timetable was not provided, but we did not particularly insist on that because we were satisfied with the provisions of the Moscow agreement, the Moscow statement that met our interests. I should also say that the Moscow discussions dragged on because there were plans to include articles that did not suit us in this statement. We didn't know about that. When our foreign minister arrived in Moscow and sat down at the negotiating table, proposals were presented to both ministers. Naturally, I was informed as we were in constant contact. I set out our conditions outside of which no arrangements were possible.

This is why, given the situation, we have slightly softened our position in relation to the timetable. But this does not mean that there will be no timetable. There will be one. When? This will be established during the discussions. It was indicated in the statement that the discussions would be resumed on the basis of the fundamental principles, i.e. the Madrid principles, which confirm the return of our occupied lands to Azerbaijan. At the same time, the format of negotiations remains unchanged. In particular, negotiations will be held between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The participation of any representative of the so-called "Nagorno-Karabakh republic" in these talks is not negotiable. We are satisfied with that. Our expectation was that negotiations should start immediately and the timetable should be presented to us within these negotiations. We must be satisfied with this timetable. In other words, it cannot be a long process. We have waited for 30 years. The patience of the Azerbaijani people has already run out. I am sure that if negotiations resume, this timetable will be provided to us. However, the violation of this agreement, of this statement on the part of Armenia shows that they simply intend to gain time and continue attacks on Azerbaijan.

**- Mr. President, Armenia is making attempts related to the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenia is trying to solicit political pressure from France, Russia and other countries with a strong Armenian diaspora. You are taking a decisive position on the issue of liberating Karabakh from occupation. What is your model related to Karabakh after its liberation? Will it be an autonomous region or an independent entity? What will be the process related to Karabakh like?**

- First of all, I have to say that the attempts currently being made by Armenia are inappropriate and very harmful for themselves because no country will ever grant independence to Nagorno-Karabakh, which is an integral part of Azerbaijan and belongs to it from the point of view of international law. No country will recognize it. This being the case, all such attempts will be fruitless. The territorial integrity of Azerbaijan is recognized by the whole world. Notice that the Minsk Group co-chair countries recognize our territorial integrity. We have initialed a document entitled "Partnership Priorities" with the European Union. It expresses support for the territorial integrity, sovereignty of Azerbaijan and the inviolability of our borders. So I do not believe that any country will recognize the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh because an hour later we will cut off all diplomatic ties with such a country. Definitely! Therefore, all attempts by Armenia are designed simply for the internal audience, i.e. its own public, as if they are engaged in some kind of diplomatic activity too.

As for the post-war period, there will be no changes in our position. Our position is based on historical justice, international law and best international experience. In other words, at the first stage the Armenian armed forces must withdraw from the occupied territories. In principle, this issue has already been reaffirmed within the Minsk Group – five districts, then two districts, then Nagorno-Karabakh itself, Shusha, Khankandi – the Azerbaijanis lived in many villages there. Azerbaijani citizens must return there and discussions on the future of Nagorno-Karabakh in a new environment, in a new climate will be continued. We will get even closer to peace. Therefore, there is no change in our position on the Armenians living there. Azerbaijan is a multiethnic state. Thousands of Armenians live in different parts of Azerbaijan, especially in Baku, and they are our citizens. There are many ethnicities living in our country and this increases the strength of our country. Therefore, the Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh should not be worried at all. Once we save their lives from that criminal junta, they will live better, safer, in a more secure environment and their well-being will improve because they live in poverty now. We will invest in it, we will implement social programs there, we will have programs to create jobs. All this will be a new stage for the Armenians living there and the Azerbaijanis who will return there.

This is our position. And Armenia's position is to expel the Azerbaijanis from there, carry out ethnic cleansing, raze the historical and religious sites of Azerbaijan to the ground, and then declare that this is ancient Armenian land. The Armenians were resettled there by tsarist Russia at the beginning of the 19th century. This is history. We know this history. Therefore, this is our position. The Azerbaijani people know and support this position.

**- Mr. President, as far as I understand, you have explained not only the operation but also the period after it, provided a phased concept. However, we know that during the conflict, sad events took place in Karabakh, 30,000 Azerbaijani Turks were killed, became martyrs. Will the two peoples be able to live together again in this geographic space? Or will Armenians and Azerbaijani Turks live in separate districts? What is the plan?**

- You know, the Azerbaijani people are very kind. That is exactly why representatives of dozens of other ethnicities live in Azerbaijan peacefully and with dignity. Therefore, I am absolutely convinced that Armenians and Azerbaijanis will be able to live together in these regions. Just like they live in other places of Azerbaijan today, just like, for example, they live in Georgia. More

than 300,000 Azerbaijanis and about 200,000 Armenians live in Georgia. In some villages, they live together, in the same village. There are no problems between them. They live like normal neighbors – in Russia, in Ukraine and other countries. Why can't we do it here?

I believe that we must be ready for that. We must prepare our peoples for this. Everything I have told you today is accepted by the Azerbaijani people and receives their support. At the same time, this is my appeal to the Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh today. Let them know that the Azerbaijani people are not their enemy. The Azerbaijani people simply want to live in the land of their ancestors. They have the right to do so. Let them live there alongside us. But to drive us out of there so that they could live there on their own is unfair. We can never agree to that.

Of course, any war ends in peace. Therefore, we must also look at the post-war stage now. If both sides show a firm will and international organizations help us in this matter, then I think this can be achieved. It won't be easy but we must try to achieve this.

**- Mr. President, Armenia is currently shelling the settlements of Azerbaijan. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan takes aim only at military sites in the course of operations, conducts operations only in the territories of the Karabakh region. At the same time, Armenia is shelling Ganja, Mingachevir, Barda and other places with dense population centers. What is the goal: to sow panic, chaos and fear? What is the psychological state of the Azerbaijani people at the present time?**

- You are right, the goal is exactly this – to sow panic, chaos and fear. Azerbaijan is a completely different country today. A new generation has grown up. New people have been raised in the conditions of independence – patriots, both morally and physically strong. At the same time, the older generation has a completely different world outlook today. Our state has a strong determination. We have a powerful army. That is why the heinous attacks failed to break our resolve. The city of Tartar suffered the most from the Armenian vandalism. Thousands of shells fell on Tartar. Tartar is a small town. Not as big as Ganja. I was informed this morning that from 7 o'clock to half past 9, over a thousand shells fell on the city of Tartar in two and a half hours. But the people of Tartar stand as firmly as a mountain, united in a single fist, do not go anywhere and say: we will die but we will not retreat. The same holds true for Aghdam, Goranboy, Aghjabadi and all other regions located close to the frontline. They are used to living face to face with the enemy. In 2016, after the famous April battles, I went to the regions affected by Armenian vandalism. I visited one village. The distance from that village to Armenian positions was 100-150 meters. Our servicemen told me: don't go there, don't go, it is dangerous there. I replied that our people live there, isn't it dangerous for them? Imagine how brave and proud these people are to live there, create and raise children under enemy fire. Such are Azerbaijani people!

So these treacherous attacks will not force us to deviate from the chosen path. Another goal of Armenia is to stop us. They think these mean strikes will stop us. Nobody can stop us because our cause is fair. We are going along this path and we are following it successfully. We raise our flag, free our lands and we will go all the way to the end!

**- Mr. President, regarding the Minsk Group. Although the conflict has been going on for 30 years, no solution has been found. Yesterday, in an interview with one of the media, you**

**spoke about the possibility of revising the format, more precisely, the possibility of changing the composition. What should this composition be like? Should Turkey get a seat at the negotiating table? The fact is that a message came from Russia in the morning that they did not really want Turkey's presence at this table. What is your attitude to this issue? I would like to ask you another question in this regard. Mr. President, if Russia wants to send peacekeepers to Karabakh, how will you react to this? If I am not mistaken, one of the media outlets has already asked you this question.**

- First of all, I must say that the dispatch of peacekeepers to the region should take place on the basis of the consent of both countries – Armenia and Azerbaijan. The dispatch and composition of peacekeepers. In other words, who will be there and what countries they will represent. If one of the countries vetoes it, then, of course, this will not happen. The second question is that everyone should understand: when people talk about sending peacekeepers today, they talk about Azerbaijani lands, the territory of sovereign Azerbaijan. Without our permission, no country will be able to send its peacekeepers to our lands. This is against the law. This runs counter to international law. This is unacceptable.

Therefore, we are not worried about that. There may be such efforts and intentions. I do not rule that out but all questions should be decided at the table. I must also say that the fundamental principles that are the topic of discussion envisage the dispatch of peacekeepers at the final stage. First of all, it is necessary to resolve the issues I have noted - the liberation of our lands, the return of internally displaced persons, the opening of borders, the establishment of transport and trade communications. After that, the dispatch of peacekeepers is not rule out. But since we have not come close to a positive result in the 30 years of negotiations, this issue was not discussed at all. So there may be various assumptions and interests on this issue but it is impossible without Azerbaijan's consent.

As for the question related to the activities of the Minsk Group, I have already said several times that the Minsk Group was established in 1992. We do not know what groundwork there was at the time. There are countries in this group that are not interested in this region at all. They have no interests and no influence in this region. Therefore, if they want a solution to this conflict – we do want this – then there must be countries that could contribute to peace in real life.

Of course, we see fraternal Turkey in this process. We welcome this. We know that the Minsk Group was established by the OSCE, which has its own rules. There are probably some legal procedures involved in changing the composition of this group. We don't want to go too much into detail. Therefore, I said that it did not matter whether this would be de jure or de facto – the main thing is that Turkey should be at this table. It is already there because my dear brother, dear Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has repeatedly met and talked with respected Putin about the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. For many years now, i.e. for more than 10 years, this issue has been on the Turkish-Russian agenda. I am aware of this. Both the President of Turkey and the President of Russia told me about this. Turkey is already there. There is an even larger volume, an even larger scale now.

You know, the Turkish Foreign Minister, Mr. Mevlut Cavusoglu, speaks on the phone with Mr. Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister Mr. Sergey Lavrov, the Turkish Defense Minister Mr. Hulusi Akar, speaks with Mr. Shoigu. Who can say that

Turkey is not in the process. If there is no Turkey, then why are you saying this? Turkey is there. And we will do everything possible to keep it this way because this issue cannot be resolved without Turkey's participation. Everyone should understand this. As for the formal side of the issue, I repeat that the Minsk Group may remain, it has not achieved any result in 30 years anyway. But the sooner this issue is resolved, the sooner the Minsk Group will become unnecessary.

**- Mr. President, on the one hand, the prime minister of Armenia Pashinyan danced in Shusha before the operation and tried to cheer up his people. On the other hand, suffering defeats in this war, he began to blame Turkey. He accused Turkey of transferring foreign fighters here. At the same time, we see that international media also devote a lot of attention to this topic. Among other things, one of the American newspapers circulated reports about foreign fighters and Turkish planes in Azerbaijan. How do you assess that dance of Pashinyan? Is the current situation obvious? Secondly, I would like to know your opinion regarding Turkey's position and the topic of these aircraft.**

- Pashinyan's dance in a drunken stupor and his other insults aroused legitimate anger among the Azerbaijani people. We are avenging these escapades of his on the battlefield. Azerbaijani soldiers are showing on the battlefield who is right and who is not. We demonstrate our power, the will of the people on the battlefield. Pashinyan's other provocations also do not and will not remain unanswered. The dignity of the Azerbaijani people is being restored. The blood of our martyrs does not and should not remain unavenged. The cities and villages we have already liberated are our best response to the likes of Pashinyan. He already understands who is who. I warned him. I told him that this path would lead them to disaster. I told him not to play with the dignity of the Azerbaijani people, to be attentive and careful. He thought that Armenians of the world would protect him. He thought that big states would fight in his place, and he still wants it today. In the course of one day, he telephoned the President of Russia, esteemed Vladimir Putin, several times. Some of these calls were reported on in the media, others were not. We have information that even after the latest ceasefire, Pashinyan called Putin. These actions of his, of course, demonstrate that this person is in panic, he is confused. The Azerbaijani army is inflicting such a crushing blow on the enemy that they have found themselves in an awkward state. This is one side of the issue.

As for the involvement of Turkey here or the transfer of some foreign forces, this is an absolute lie. I have already expressed my attitude to the issue related to the Turkish F-16. Turkish F-16 aircraft are here. They flew here during the exercises, stayed here afterwards and after the Armenian attacks. But they are on the ground, not in the air. None of them took part in this war. Not a single person from Turkey participates in this war. As for foreigners, this is also a lie. This is slander. We were not provided with any evidence. There were just statements from France and Russia, and that was all.

**- Has any specific evidence been provided?**

- There is no evidence. No statements were made. Our intelligence is not informed of anything.

I can tell you now that our intelligence agencies contacted the countries that slandered us and asked for evidence. They did not give any. Only words. Let them write whatever they want in the media, we are not concerned. Western media have always been on the side of Armenia. They treated us

negatively before. Therefore, we are used to this kind of slander. But statements of certain officials are unacceptable. Either prove it or take your words back. This is not the case. And this is not necessary. Azerbaijan has a strong enough army to resolve these issues on its own.

Besides, as for the participation of foreign citizens, let them look at Armenia and see how many terrorists there are there. There are RKK camps there. They also exist in Nagorno-Karabakh. After the liberation of this region from the invaders, we will destroy these camps too. So many foreigners are taking part in these battles against us today. The terrorists killed there have passports of Canada and Lebanon. Whether they are of Armenian origin or not is another matter. A citizen of another country has come here and is fighting against us. They are mercenaries.

They also say that Turkey is providing military assistance to Azerbaijan. You know, Turkey is our brother. Our fraternal relations have already gone through great trials. We buy military equipment from Turkey, but we also buy it from other countries. We buy it from Russia, Israel, Belarus, Iran, Ukraine, Eastern European countries, including Turkey. Turkey has a developed military-industrial complex today. Why shouldn't we buy it from them? Notice what Armenia is doing. We buy everything with money. I have a complete list and it will be published later, but I want to draw your attention to several issues. During these two weeks, more than 200 Armenian tanks were destroyed and 33 tanks were taken as trophies. In other words, we have destroyed 233 Armenian tanks. Two S-300 installations were destroyed. Everyone knows the cost of each one. In addition, the OSA-35 air defense systems were destroyed. "TOR", "KUB", "KRUG", trucks, anti-tank weapons. If you count all this, the cost of equipment we have destroyed and taken as trophies is estimated at 1-2 billion dollars. The question is where poor Armenia found the money to buy all this. Did it buy it with money? No! They received it for free. Everyone knows who gave it to them. They give and continue giving them weapons. After the clashes in Tovuz District, the conflict ended on 16 July and starting from 17 July cargo planes began delivering weapons to Armenia every day. Are these items in Armenia's budget? No! Armenia's foreign exchange reserves amount to \$1.5 billion. That's all. It has no more money. The external public debt of this country is approximately \$8 billion. So it is a failed state. Where does so much of destroyed equipment come from? And much more equipment will be destroyed. If the war continues, we will destroy their entire army, all of their army! Therefore, the sooner they stop the war, the more tanks and guns they will be able to save. There is so much more of this is on the territory of Armenia. Russia has a military base in Armenia and there are 5,000 soldiers there. Does Turkey have a military base in Azerbaijan? No! Armenia's border with Iran and Turkey is protected by Russian border guards. Are there Turkish border guards on the border of Azerbaijan? No! So no-one should accuse us. Otherwise, we will have to reveal all the unpleasant moments.

**- Mr. President, you have mentioned RKK camps in Karabakh. Is there information in what districts they are located?**

- We have intelligence about this. I don't want to talk about this in more detail. Most of all, they are present in mountainous regions. A part of the occupied territories is in the mountains and a part is in the lowland. Most of all, they are located in forests and mountainous areas. We have repeatedly contacted international organizations in this regard. Even when I was in my previous capacity, as a Member of Parliament and head of the Azerbaijani delegation to the Parliamentary

Assembly of the Council of Europe, I raised the issue there too. I drew the attention of European parliamentarians to the fact that they should apply sanctions to Armenia. Armenia is a terrorist country, a country that encourages terror. Therefore, this kind of intelligence is available. At the same time, this was confirmed in a statement of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service. For some reason, this statement was not published in any media. It said that foreigners were fighting in Azerbaijan. Even though Armenia is not mentioned in that statement, it says that RKK is also involved in the battles. It is clear that there can be no RKK in Azerbaijan. Why isn't there a single word about this in the Western media? They want to conceal this, to divert attention from it. But after the flag of Azerbaijan is hoisted on all these lands, not a single terrorist can remain there alive.

**- Mr. President, issues of energy security are being discussed today. Armenia has carried out attacks that targeted TANAP or pipelines going to Turkey. How will you ensure security in this direction? Europe needs energy resources. What do European friends think about this?**

- They are a little worried. Of course, we take this into account because anything can be expected from Armenia. One of the reasons for the clashes that took place in Tovuz district in July was also to approach this pipeline or to establish control over it. That was why they wanted to enter our territory and occupy new lands. But they experienced the bitterness of defeat. Since 2006, when the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline was put into operation, to this day, there has not been a single problem on the territory of Azerbaijan related to the security of pipelines, not a single one – neither technical nor due to any provocation. Because on the territory of Azerbaijan we have a fairly sophisticated security system. Monitoring, physical protection and electronic protection are carried out. The location of the pipeline deep under the ground provides a certain degree of protection from air attacks, of course. But if Armenia implements these dirty intentions, i.e. plans to put the pipelines out of operation, then the response to their actions will be very tough. We have already warned them about this. I believe that European countries that will receive gas through TANAP next year should also warn them because TANAP is not only our project. It also has other shareholders. TAP has European shareholders. This is a project of exceptional importance for the energy security of Europe. Therefore, we should all be interested in this project not sustaining any damage.

**- Mr. President, I want to ask one more question. Pashinyan is confused now. He has endangered not only himself but also the Armenian people. The 3 million people living in Armenia are in danger. Did any of the Armenians living of Europe, some businessmen working there act as an intermediary, saying that the Armenian people are not to blame, he is crazy. Have there been any phone calls from people interested in speaking about that?**

- No, we have not received any phone calls or messages in this regard. But this wasn't something unexpected. You know, every leader, every manager must have some experience. Knowledge also matters, but you need experience, managerial experience. The people who have now come to power in some countries have no experience whatsoever. He did not even run a small collective farm. He didn't even manage a small company or a shop. He probably didn't even manage five people. How can he lead a country? It is difficult to lead a country, especially in our region. This is not so difficult in established European countries because there are countries where people do not even know who is leading them. People are not interested in this, they live their own lives,



there is an established system, everything is systematized. In our region, a lot depends on the person leading the country – life, security, well-being of people, international authority. Pashinyan is a man from the street. Who was he before? Nobody! A writer, not even a writer but a correspondent for a newspaper. He came from the street and became a leader. What did he do after that? He is leading Armenia into an abyss. Look, there is absolute dictatorship in Armenia today. Criminal cases have been initiated against both ex-presidents. One of them served a couple of years, then he was released, but the criminal case remains open. The other was forbidden to travel outside the country. Two days before these clashes, the chairman of the main opposition party was arrested. Then Pashinyan crushed the Constitutional Court, dissolved it. He blackmailed the chairman of the Constitutional Court, threatened him with arrest and placed his own people there by force. He imprisons journalists and media representatives. One of them went on a hunger strike and died in prison. There are problems in the international arena, with traditional allies. He has created problems with Russia, Belarus and other traditional allies. Now Pashinyan pins most of his hopes on the Collective Security Treaty Organization. In Russian, this organization is called the CSTO. Its Charter says that in the event of an attack on one of the countries from the outside, the other member-countries must save it. But the general secretary of the CSTO was an Armenian, a man of the previous regime. He threw him in jail, thus insulting this organization too. He has done so much. Everyone already knows that Pashinyan is a product of Soros. He is someone managed by Soros. The source of the coups and "revolutions" that took place in post-Soviet republics is one and the same. Soros has already become a household word. I don't mean only him. Look for photos of Pashinyan with Soros on the Internet. They stand hand in hand, pressed against each other. A disgusting photo. This is who his father is. Therefore, Soros controls him. The events that took place in Armenia are yet another defeat for Soros.

In 2005, they wanted to do the same in Azerbaijan – the Orange Revolution. But I stood in front of them, crushed them, drove them out of here and then closed the Soros foundations. I drove other non-governmental organizations out of here. I said that we know what to do ourselves. Go and make revolutions somewhere else. They settled in Armenia, money started flowing there through non-governmental organizations and people were brought up in that spirit. Today, 90 percent of Pashinyan's team are representatives of Soros, Transparency International, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and other similar dirty organizations. Therefore, in an interview with one of the Russian channels the other day, I said that our goal is not to create problems for Pashinyan. The longer he stays in power, the better for us. You know what I mean.

**- Mr. President, last question. Frankly, I didn't plan to ask it but I want to ask it as well. How will events develop after this? There is very serious public support from Turkey. In other words, speaking about the public, I mean people, everyone watches your speeches and supports them. I have been in Azerbaijan for 15 days, I have visited Barda, Mingachevir, Ganja. People provide you with tremendous support. Wherever we have been, I ask people, and they say: "Never mind, let my house be destroyed, let my car burn out, that doesn't matter, the main thing is to return Karabakh". Immense support! We see this when we ask each of them a question. Everyone here supports you – both the opposition and the government. How will this process develop now? What do you expect? How long do you think this process will last? You are the son of an experienced father, the son of Heydar**

**Aliyev, the most experienced political figure in the Caucasus and the region. Do you remember what he told you about Karabakh, Turkey and this region?**

- You know, we will solve the problems of people whose houses have been destroyed. Let them not be worried. And in the shortest possible time. I remember when Armenia attacked us in April 2016, more than 1,000 houses were destroyed. During my meetings with the owners of these houses, I said: don't worry, we will restore all the houses. About eight months later, I visited them again, I visited Aghdam and other front-line regions, and handed them the keys to their houses.

An earthquake occurred in the city of Shamakhi a year and a half ago, and thousands of houses were destroyed. I went there and said: don't worry, we will restore all the houses. We did that too. There are several houses left, but they will also be restored. About 10 years ago, a flood occurred in our country, a large area remained under water. More than 5,000 houses were destroyed. All of them were restored by the state. My approach is this: if you had a house with an area of 100 square meters, you will get a new one with an area of 120-150 square meters. If you had a shack, then you will get a new beautiful and well-renovated home. Therefore, people who have lost their home and property will receive help. In addition, many people in our villages have also lost their livestock. It was a source of income for them. I have already issued an instruction, they are calculating how many animals have been lost, and this will also be reimbursed. We will definitely resolve this issue. The Azerbaijani people know that they will not apply to any insurance company, that there will be no red tape, that some official will not create problems for them because all this is under my personal control. Everyone knows this, and my instructions will be fulfilled.

These events demonstrate the greatness of the Azerbaijani people again. They say, let my house be destroyed, let my property be gone if only Karabakh is returned. We all live with this idea, everyone. For 30 years, we have lived with this dream, in separation – for 30 years. Wasn't there supposed to be an end to that? We will put an end to this and are doing exactly that.

Therefore, we must only go forward in this matter now. We gave Armenia a chance. We did not have to agree to this ceasefire. We could have said that we disagree. Who could have forced us?! No-one! We agreed to this so that people would not die on this and on the other side. I feel sorry for them too. They are also being driven. Our Ministry of Defense has circulated video footage of Armenian soldiers being chained, chained to iron, to each other's feet so that they do not run away. So many such bodies have been found. This is horror. They are not humans. On top of that, punitive battalions have been following Armenian soldiers in recent days. If someone retreats, then they shoot them on the spot. So there is such atrocity, such fascism.

Since we have lived with this dream, we want to return there, but in a peaceful way. Therefore, we gave Armenia a chance – observe the ceasefire, do not violate it, sit down at the negotiating table, resolve this issue, return our lands to us. We don't need your land. We do not claim the lands of Armenia. I told you that the Armenians can live on where they lived. We have no problems with them. So our policy fully consists in this at the current stage.

As for the post-war period, of course, not only the region but also the whole world will change. It is already changing. Everyone saw our power. We will be reckoned with even more. The role of Azerbaijan in certain regional issues is already very significant, and it will grow further. Of course,

the Turkish-Azerbaijani unity will become even stronger. This is vital for both Turkey and Azerbaijan. The unity of Turkey and Azerbaijan brings stability and peace to the region because our intention is to secure our interests.

Turkey plays a very important stabilizing role in the region and in the new geography today. The support my dear brother Recep Tayyip Erdogan has provided since very first hours of these clashes has maintained stability. Some may not understand this. If it were not for these words, if my brother had not said that Azerbaijan is not alone and that Turkey is next to Azerbaijan, then the situation may have deteriorated. Someone else may have tried to fish in troubled waters here. Therefore, we must now create a new strategic picture, a strategic vision in this region. We have already started thinking about this, but we do not want to get ahead of ourselves. First, we need to solve this job, complete this work, restore our territorial integrity, after which a new period will begin for Azerbaijan, a new period will begin for the region, the balance of forces will change, and I believe that the power of Turkey and Azerbaijan will increase even more.

**- Mr. President, thank you very much. You have taken your time despite the busy schedule, in particular when news comes from the frontline. On the other hand, you are in the thick of diplomatic processes. Of course, during the conversation with you, during this interview, I saw again that you are actually very well aware of what is happening in Armenian society. On behalf of Haber Türk, I express to you, Mr. President, my deep gratitude for your time.**

- Thank you! Many thanks.

**President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has been interviewed by Turkish Haber Global TV channel.**

- Welcome to Haber Global TV channel. We have an extremely important guest. As you know, Azerbaijan is waging a patriotic war. There is a rapid but sustained advancement of the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan on the battlefield. A ceasefire, tense diplomatic processes, especially after the attacks Armenia committed yesterday, immediately after the announcement of the ceasefire, activity on the battlefield and at the negotiating table. All, of course, is closely watched by President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev who has agreed to talk to us today despite the tensions. Welcome, Mr. President.

- Thank you.

- First of all, I would like to start with yesterday's attack, the latest situation on the battlefield and at the negotiating table. On the one hand, we know that you are carrying out intense diplomatic activities. Thank you again for taking the time to talk to us despite such a busy schedule. Yesterday we saw the reaction to the attack on your civilian population. However, a completely different approach is observed in foreign media, a kind of propaganda war of the diaspora. First of all, what is the current situation like?

- Of course, we have been facing black propaganda for many years. There are several reasons for this, one of which is the activity of Armenian diaspora organizations in some countries. Azerbaijan is the target of this activity. Their agenda always includes such goals as denigrating Azerbaijan, spreading lies about Azerbaijan and, thus, undermining the image of our country.

Armenian diaspora organizations and their patrons, Armenians of the world have unleashed an information war against Azerbaijan in connection with the recent battles. As a result of that, distorted information is often published in world media these days. Therefore, we must make great effort to communicate Azerbaijani realities to the world community. In this regard, I want to express my special gratitude to representatives of the Turkish media, because leading TV channels and other media outlets in Turkey circulate the truth about this conflict to the world every day, day and night.

It is possible to say that immediately after the introduction of the ceasefire, Armenia continued its vile actions. We paused for a while because we are true to our word. Since a ceasefire was announced, we were hoping that the Nagorno-Karabakh issue would be resolved politically because we thought that the military stage was over, the aggressor had learned its lesson on the battlefield and would now take into account the realities and show a positive approach at the diplomatic level. Unfortunately, we did not see that and the ceasefire, which came into force at 12 o'clock, was violated by Armenia.

As you know, a horrific crime was committed against civilians on the following night. The city of Ganja was bombed. The city came under fire with "Tochka-U" missiles, as a result of which civilians were killed and injured. This is another manifestation of the ugly face of Armenian fascism.

Armenians of the world, Armenia's supporters, their benefactors and Islamophobic circles will no longer be able to conceal this crime because everything is already obvious. There were statement for the press at the scene yesterday and representatives of foreign embassies who are visiting the site today see everything with their own eyes. Once again, they see who is causing this conflict, who pursues an aggressive policy, who is committing crimes against the civilian population. The Armenian state is a state of terror, a fascist state, and this crime against humanity has shown this once again.

**- The factor you have just mentioned is very important. We have worked in many areas where Turkey is fighting terrorism. For example, the PKK subjected our cities to rocket and artillery fire. We knew that this was the work of a terrorist organization. I said this in our broadcast yesterday – an action that is incompatible with humanity, conscience and logic. Earlier in your address to the people, you said that you were receiving calls, in particular, from Russia, asking for a ceasefire. The ceasefire has been reached, but then with what logic and why is this attack being carried out? How would you answer this question?**

- First of all, we must take into account the terrorist nature of Armenia because they are being defeated, they are losing on the battlefield. The victorious Azerbaijani Army achieves new military successes every day. Either a city or a village is liberated from occupation almost every day, or the territory of these villages is taken under control. Today I can say that several settlements are now fully under our control. We simply haven't entered these settlements yet because there is no need for that from a military point of view. But we will make further announcements after some time. Therefore, Armenia is being defeated in all directions of the front, and this being the case, it wants to avenge its pain and defeat on civilians. This is their nature. The perpetrators of the Khojaly genocide have now carried out an attack on Ganja.

The military-political leadership of Armenia is guilty of the attack on Ganja. According to the information we have, this decision was made personally by Pashinyan. We have accurate information that Pashinyan is currently experiencing very severe psychological upheavals. His moral and psychological state is very tense and he makes inappropriate decisions. For example, they have made several attempts to re-occupy Hadrut. This morning, I was informed that last night a large group of commandos who arrived from Armenia tried to re-occupy Hadrut although from a strategic point of view, this is not particularly important for Armenia – just to take a selfie there and report to its population. The Azerbaijani Army neutralized this unit, and the losses Armenia suffered there that night are exclusively victims of Pashinyan's irresponsible and predatory policies.

This is their tactic, as they are accustomed to the fact that they will always be supported on the world stage. Unfortunately, the world's Armenians, their patrons, Islamophobic circles have the most powerful positions in the world. They have always supported Armenia and their aggressive policy against us, defended them. They spread utter lies about Azerbaijan, tried to portray Azerbaijanis as aggressors. But today, in the age of the Internet, it is very difficult for them to do this because there are already non-traditional media outlets, there is the Internet, and communicating information is not very difficult. Therefore, they no longer have the same positions in the information war now. We are on the right track. We are right in terms of both international

law and historical justice. We are on our own land, we are fighting on our own land. If Armenian soldiers leave our lands, then this conflict will also end.

**- You have mentioned the international community. The West did not express a particular reaction to this attack. Did you expect a protest? During the meeting held by Mr. Hajiyev with the attachés yesterday, we also witnessed such a picture. He said three times: ask questions and we will answer and explain to you the real state of affairs. No answer.**

- We didn't really expect anything, and there is no need for that because over the years we have seen that they do not want to hear the truth or try to disguise it, distort information and real facts. There are many reasons for that. Therefore, our main goal was to resolve this issue, restore historical justice and our territorial integrity. We have enough strength to do this.

Of course, the support provided from the very first days, from the very first hours by fraternal Turkey, the clear statements of my brother, esteemed President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, as well as statements of other high-ranking officials provided Azerbaijan with moral support and also showed the whole world that Turkey is next to Azerbaijan. Otherwise, this conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan could cover a wider geography.

**- Do you expect a sustainable ceasefire? It is constantly violated although it was reached after 11 and a half hours of negotiations in Moscow. Yesterday, we, journalists, witnessed that Baku is showing great patience.**

- Yes, we are showing patience. Of course, after such a barbaric shelling of Ganja, every Azerbaijani is outraged and an adequate response is required. But we are giving an answer on the battlefield. We avenged yesterday's victims on the battlefield. Our attitude is this: we have never fought and are not fighting civilians. This is one of the qualities that distinguish Azerbaijan from Armenia. Therefore, in order to ensure a sustainable ceasefire, Armenia must, first of all, understand that they will no longer see the lands liberated from occupation and will not return there. For them, this is completely impossible. Whatever they say and whatever support they have, this will not happen. We came to these lands, these are the lands of our ancestors. No force can drive us out of there. The sooner they understand this, the better for them because for a lasting ceasefire to be reached, both sides must be committed to it. We are committed to it. We observed the ceasefire, which came into force at noon, but when we saw that Armenia was violating it, naturally, we could not but react. We have to protect ourselves. Thus, it is possible to say that the ceasefire entered into force but did not happen in real life.

**- Are you receiving signals to retreat, at least at this point, from your lands?**

- No, we are not receiving such signals and no-one can give us such signals. This is contrary to international law and historical justice. There were no such signals. There have been signals to stop. There have been signals not to move forward anymore. There have been signals to ensure a ceasefire. And we say: well, let there be a ceasefire, but in parallel it is necessary to resolve the issue peacefully.

I believe that the agreements reached in Moscow fully meet our interests, because, first of all, it provides for the exchange of bodies of those killed in the action and prisoners on a humanitarian

basis. We wanted this from day one. But Armenia did not go for it. There are also other very important political moments. One of them is the restoration of negotiations, discussions, continuation of substantive negotiations based on fundamental principles. And the fundamental principles meet our interests, because they provide for a withdrawal of Armenian armed forces from the occupied lands. It is stated in them that the Armenian armed forces will withdraw from five districts at the first stage and from two more at the second stage. After that, of course, all internally displaced persons will return to the places where they lived before. This means that our internally displaced persons will return to both Shusha and Khankandi, after which a political solution to this issue can be provided.

Another issue – Armenia has always had a negative attitude to this – is that the format of the negotiations remains unchanged. The Armenian leadership and prime minister Pashinyan have always said that Azerbaijan should negotiate with the so-called “Nagorno-Karabakh republic”. But we were opposed to this. The inclusion of such an item there is also in our interests.

Therefore, there are already all the possibilities and all the grounds for the transition from a military stage to the diplomatic and political stage. As for the issue of Armenia's observance of the ceasefire, I hope that the new successful operations of the victorious Azerbaijani Army yesterday and this night will force them to do so.

**- Since 27 September, when this patriotic war began, you have been talking about the possibility of resolving this issue within the framework of a new format, with more active participation of Turkey, that this issue can be resolved jointly by Russia and Turkey. But Lavrov's statement did not mention Turkey. It followed from his statement that the negotiations would again be continued within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group in the future. In what way and when will Turkey be at the negotiating table? Has this been spoken about?**

- Of course, this is our position. I have said this many times. I want to reiterate that Turkey must definitely play an active role in the political settlement of this issue. I also know that some Turkish media outlets are wondering why Turkey was not in Moscow. Naturally, this was not envisaged at the current stage. Neither was Turkey faced with such a task. This is not a process of negotiations. This is just a ceasefire on a humanitarian basis. In other words, it was not an event organized for negotiations. So far, negotiations have been conducted within the framework of the Minsk Group. However, these negotiations have been ineffective and have yielded no result. For nearly 30 years, we have not received a single centimeter of our lands back through negotiations. Therefore, I also said quite correctly that the Minsk Group was established in 1992, and we have no information about the basis on which it was established. If you look at the composition of the Minsk Group, you can see that it also includes countries located far from this region, which have no connection with it and have never been interested in the conflict. Their presence here a formality. Well, if we want to resolve this conflict – and we do want this – then there must be countries that would have both strength and influence and this composition should not be one-sided. Notice the activities of Armenian diasporas in the countries that are now co-chairs of the Minsk Group now. In all three countries, Armenian diaspora organizations have great political influence. Thanks to these political opportunities, they influence the officials of these countries. So how fair is it? Why shouldn't

Turkey also be a co-chair? It is already a member of the Minsk Group. Therefore, our policy is quite logical and we have a result-oriented approach.

Geopolitical realities have changed. The situation in 1992 cannot be compared to the current situation. Turkey today is a powerhouse not only in the region but also on a global scale. Many in the West do not want to accept this. This annoys them. They are used to the fact that, unfortunately, their words sometimes had a high value in Turkish politics last century. But Turkey is pursuing an absolutely independent policy today and has turned into a force to reckon with on a global scale. What issue can be resolved in our region without Turkey? Look, Turkey has its say in Syria, Libya, the Middle East, our region, and this is a reality. It must be reckoned with.

I cannot say when the negotiations will begin, but since Armenia is violating the current ceasefire, I do not believe that it will be sincere in the negotiations. In any case, de jure or de facto, Turkey must definitely participate in the settlement of this problem. It is already participating because it is no secret that we hold regular consultations with Turkey. Since the beginning of these processes, since 27 September to the present, we have been in constant contact. High-ranking representatives of Turkey are in close contact with the heads of state and government of many countries. Therefore, it is already a reality. We just have to turn de facto reality into de jure reality.

**- You have said, “why shouldn't Turkey be in the system of co-chairmanship, it should be”. I will ask for more clarity but quote you. Earlier, in your address to the people, you used such expressions, “we have changed the status quo, the line of contact is no longer there, we have broken it”. Could you please dwell in detail both on Turkey's participation in the new negotiations and on these words of yours, what did you mean? What status quo will be created by Baku from now on?**

- You know, for many years, we made great effort to get a statement from co-chairs in this regard. Finally, about seven to eight years ago, several statements were made at the level of the presidents of America, Russia and France that the status quo is unacceptable and must be changed. We welcomed that. I have also stated several times in this regard that this is a very positive approach. In other words, it means that Armenian armed forces must leave our lands. Armenia should change the status quo because we have not occupied Armenian lands. How can we change the status quo? This became a kind of message, a signal to Armenia. Unfortunately, this and other statements – there have been several – hung in the air. What did we hear after that? Recently, the co-chairs backed down from these words. What are they saying now? They are saying that the status quo is not sustainable. But there is a big difference here. The status quo must be changed, i.e. Armenia must leave our lands. The status quo is not sustainable, i.e. it is unstable, which means that they simply state this as a fact. This being the case, Azerbaijan changed the status quo itself, on the battlefield. The status quo is gone. The settlements and villages of Aghdara, Fuzuli, Jabrayil, Hadrut have already been liberated. What status quo can we talk about now? None. Line of contact? It is gone. It is clear that the existing line of contact was created on the basis of deep military knowledge. Armenia did not have any military knowledge at that time. This must be admitted openly. The low authority of Armenia creates a very serious problem for them. For them, the line of contact had to be very short and straight. And this was done. They are smart enough for that. This was done by their advisers. If you look at the old line of contact, you will see that it has a



horizontal-vertical shape. Like this, a smooth one. In other words, it is very easy to defend it. Their positions were mainly based on the hills. It was very difficult to take them, to destroy fortifications. Now there is no line of contact. We broke through it from several directions – from the north, from the south and then from the east. What line of contact can we talk about now? It is gone! The salvation mission of the Azerbaijani Army continues. We liberate new positions every day. It doesn't matter if these positions are a village or a city. Let there be a hill, a mountain – they are more important than a village or a city. We will return to the cities anyway. The main task for us is to occupy strategic heights. Today, all the neighborhoods of Hadrut are under our control. The city is also ours. A completely different question is whether to enter the city or not. At present, we are not faced with the political task of declaring the liberation of one place today and another tomorrow. No! In some cases, we liberate villages and towns and announce that after a day or two. This tactic also exists.

Let me say again: there is no status quo and there is no line of contact. There is no myth about an invincible army the Armenians had been inventing over the years. We showed who is who. Therefore, these realities must be taken into account by Armenia, its patrons and the whole world. Those who tell us to “stop” should know: well, we can stop, we do not want bloodshed either, but after that a political process must begin. If the political process does not start, we will not stop. I said that we would go all the way. To the end. But how? In military or political ways? This is another question. We want the military stage to end, so that no blood is shed, there are no martyrs and we liberate our lands peacefully.

**- The political and military side of the issue is one thing. Today, more precisely from the moment we arrived in Baku, we have met with people who were forced to leave these places. Among them were people from both Khojaly and Jabrayil. We visited the villages built by the Azerbaijani state, by you. Everyone we met is filled with a sense of gratitude to you and to the state. They say, “we live here, we do not need anything, but we want to return to our lands.” The people of Jabrayil, answering the question, “What will you do on the lands liberated from the occupation?”, told us, “Just let there be a roof over our heads and that would be enough for us.” What will you do for these people? Will there be new construction work on these lands?**

- We will build not only roofs there, we will build entire cities, we will return life to those places. We will restore all the destroyed places. Today they are under the control of our army. Some of the liberated lands are already being visited by representatives of our media. In others, our servicemen shoot videos themselves. We can see that there is not a single building there. In other words, these are the actions of the fascists. The world must and will see this. Look at the state of Aghdam and Fuzuli today. They have destroyed all our villages. They thought the Azerbaijanis would never return there. But they have no idea about the determination of the Azerbaijani people. We have rebuilt Jojug Marjanly in just about eight months. The village, which we liberated from occupation in 2016, was rebuilt in six to eight months. People live there today, there is gas, water, electricity, a mosque, a hospital, a school, houses – everything. In addition, we provided them with agricultural equipment and this village has revived. We must turn all this land into paradise. The nature there is already like paradise, and even though these lands were under the heel of the

Armenians for many years, they will be reborn. Life, children's laughter and people's smiles will return there. The citizens of Azerbaijan will live on these lands with dignity.

Our internally displaced persons know that their problem is the number one problem for me, for the President. You, too, know how much help we provide. This year, we will provide 7,000 families with new apartments. About 35,000 people receive free housing from the state every year. The state pays them a monthly allowance. Therefore, of course, they are satisfied with the care of the state. In our meetings, they always express their gratitude and say: everything is fine here, we live in new houses, we have not seen such conditions, but please take us back there, we want to go there. And they will go.

Therefore, we must work on plans for the development of these regions now. Relevant instructions have already been given. Planning will be carried out for the population of Azerbaijan to return to these regions and settle there as soon as possible.

**- Mr. President, thank you very much for meeting with us despite such a tight schedule and diplomatic tensions.**

**On October 10, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by the Russian RBC TV channel.**

**- First of all, thank you very much for agreeing to speak with us. Before we start, I want to mention the principles of RBK. A few days ago, there was an extensive interview with the prime minister of Armenia. Now we are here in Azerbaijan, in Baku, to speak with President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev. One more remark, before I ask the first question, condolences to the relatives of all the victims on both sides. I have heard a lot that no-one needs war, and the sides could have done without it. And now the most difficult but also the most interesting task begins. The negotiations have ended. How would you assess what happened in Moscow? We need to understand what it all means.**

- In general, I have a positive assessment because the statement released after the talks said that a ceasefire was declared for humanitarian reasons and – what is of fundamental importance, this was Azerbaijan's position, and I am glad that this was reflected in this document – substantive negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan would begin, and the format of talks remains unchanged. These are the two positions the new Armenian government tried to undermine. It is no secret that the statements we heard from Yerevan were essentially aimed at undermining the negotiation process that had been in place over the years, including its fundamental principles, at undermining the format of negotiations. Therefore, it was crucial that the Armenian side – of course, this happened due to what we have on the battlefield – was forced to accept that the fundamental principles form the basis for a settlement. They clearly state how the conflict should be settled and in what sequence the occupied territories should be returned to Azerbaijan. Secondly, the format of the negotiations remains unchanged. It means that negotiations have been and will be conducted only between Azerbaijan and Armenia. All attempts by the Armenian leadership to shift this responsibility onto the puppet regime in Nagorno-Karabakh have failed. Thus, after that I am sure that we will no longer hear from Pashinyan that "Karabakh is Armenia". Also, we will not hear his statements that Azerbaijan should negotiate with the so-called leadership of Nagorno-Karabakh. If he makes such statements, it will mean that he shows disrespect for the mediators and for his delegation, which approved this text in Moscow, which will again undermine the negotiation process. What did it lead to this time? I think everyone can clearly see that. I don't think he can afford to step on the same rake twice.

**- The ceasefire – how long will it last? How fragile is this truce? What will it depend on?**

- This ceasefire lasted for many years until the current escalation, for decades. There were certain clashes on the line of contact; there were provocations of the Armenian side on the state border in July this year. But such large-scale action has never taken place in the last almost 30 years. Therefore, everything will depend on the Armenian side, whether it will observe the ceasefire. In the early hours of today, I was informed about a large-scale counter-offensive attempt by the Armenian forces in many directions. An attempt to recapture Hadrut, an effort to recapture the territories we have liberated in Jabrayil district and a movement in the northern direction. In other words, understanding that the parties can agree in Moscow, they tried their best to return what they had lost and what never belonged to them. Therefore, the critical factor for the ceasefire's durability will be that Armenia must come to terms with the fact that we have these territories, that it will

never see them again and will not make any attempts to recapture it by military means. The second equally important factor is precisely what I have just mentioned. At the negotiating table, we must see a constructive approach from the Armenian side so that they stop trying to imitate the process of negotiations, refrain from provocative actions and statements, and commit to finding a settlement. All we have seen from the Armenian side over the past year was precisely undermining the negotiations and blaming Azerbaijan. So we will see. We are committed to our statements. Azerbaijan is a country that has always fulfilled its obligations. I have always said that our word is as valid as our signature. But the ceasefire is not a unilateral process, so we will see how the Armenian side will behave.

**- In Azerbaijan, as far as I understand in the two days I have been here, the public sentiment is that we must go to the end. How can you explain to the Azerbaijanis now that Baku has agreed to negotiations again?**

- We are going to the end. We did not stop. Suppose the Armenian side is committed to the ceasefire regime. In that case, as I said yesterday, the phase of political settlement will begin, and the stage of coercion to negotiations will end. Therefore, we will go to the end under any circumstances. Our goal remains unchanged - the restoration of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, which the entire international community recognizes. Return of Azerbaijanis to the places of their original, traditional residence, including Shusha and other settlements of Nagorno-Karabakh, and, of course, to all other territories outside the former NKAO's administrative border. Therefore, our goal remains unchanged. The question is, how we will move towards this goal? We have always tried to follow the political path and have always heard that there is no military solution. We have proven that this is not the case. We showed on the battlefield that this is not the case and that these negotiations would have lasted another 30 years without a military component. What happened before that - Illegal settlement? It is an international crime and a violation of the Geneva Convention. Unfortunately, no-one ever reacted to this – the Minsk Group, the European Union or the UN. The destruction of Azerbaijan's historical heritage, the destruction of our cultural, historical and religious sites, the change of place names, the change of our regions' administrative boundaries, the change of the names of our mountains, rivers and cities. In other words, we would have had to wait another 30 years and then we would have been told - it is what it is, so put up with it. We have already been told that. Therefore, I think that the military component, or its first stage, has come to an end. We have now reached a political deal that will secure that we reach the end and get what is rightfully ours. Therefore, I think that Azerbaijani society will perceive what happened yesterday and tonight correctly and continue to support our policy. We have always told our people the truth. We have always defended our people's interests. What happened on the battlefield proved it to everyone again.

**- You have met with Armenian prime minister Nikol Pashinyan several times before these events. After these events, are you ready to sit down at the same table or talk to him?**

- You know, it is difficult to speak with a person who is not very trustworthy. I had to negotiate with his predecessors, whom I consider war criminals, because they have committed a bloody genocide in Khojaly. They are responsible for killing the peaceful Azerbaijani population, for the destruction of our historical and cultural heritage. But I had to negotiate because we had to find a

solution to this conflict. When the new government came to power, first contacts with the new leadership were quite encouraging. I have already spoken about this once and do not want to repeat myself. But then the opposite happened. In other words, we felt deceived. We understand that we are negotiating with the enemy, but we must remain honest, even with the enemy, honest at least to ourselves. We must respect our word. When this happened, we lost any desire to continue this senseless activity. What can you talk about with your opponent if every word is a lie, if their falsehoods are circulated in the world media and if lies are broadcast worldwide? They are probably accustomed to lying in their own country. But when you lie about history and the essence of the conflict in the Internet age, it is very quickly exposed. Therefore, I do not rule out such a possibility, but this requires certain conditions. At this stage, I do not think it would be productive – quite the contrary. The Armenian leadership should finally understand that it is impossible to speak to Azerbaijan in the language of ultimatums, insults and blackmail. I have never allowed myself such a tone of communication with anyone – neither within the country nor abroad. But when Pashinyan put forward seven ultimatums to us, he should have been punished for this when he insulted the Azerbaijanis' feelings. And we did that! Let him thank Putin for the fact that Russia has once again come to Armenia's rescue.

**- You have mentioned the role of Russia. That is, it was decisive in these negotiations.**

- Russia as a co-chair of the Minsk Group, of course, has the same rights and powers as the other countries of the OSCE Minsk Group. Of course, as our neighbor and a country with a shared history with both Azerbaijan and Armenia, Russia plays a special role. This role is based on our peoples' history and interaction and Russia's weight and position in the world and our region. Therefore, due to these objective reasons, Russia's means to influence the conflict's settlement are incomparably more significant than those of any other country. Consequently, we have repeatedly appealed to the Russian leadership to engage the levers of political influence on Armenia and urge the Armenian side to end the occupation. This topic has been discussed many times. I can tell you that in all of the numerous meetings I have had with my Russian colleague, this topic was discussed in one form or another, either in detail or not very extensively, but this did not happen. It is no secret that Armenia entirely depends on Russia today. Russia provides security; Russia provides free weapons. We have destroyed Armenian hardware, probably worth billions of dollars. Right now, in a matter of two weeks. Where did they get this money? They don't have it. These are all free deliveries from Russia. Gas supply at preferential prices from Russia, electricity to some extent too. Railways, communications, a military base. Russian border troops guard even the Armenian border with Turkey and Iran. If it weren't for this, it would be empty. What other country has so many levers to influence Armenia? None! And there are probably no other two countries in the world, one of which would be so utterly dependent on the other. Therefore, of course, I am convinced that if there is persistence on Russia's part, given that we have changed the status quo, broken the line of contact and brought Yerevan to its senses, I think that Russia certainly has many tools to quickly convince Armenia that the only way out of the situation – and not only in terms of military confrontation but also for the future of Armenia in general – is to find a solution together with Azerbaijan. And it is quite simple – leave the territory, withdraw the troops, our people will return there, and we will try to live side by side again.

**- I will now ask you about another country – Turkey. Azerbaijan and you personally have been repeatedly accused these days of the fact that everything, including this conflict, is controlled by Turkish authorities. Yesterday and tonight, we did not see Turkey at the negotiating table. Why?**

- This shows that all these opinions were false and that it was deliberate media speculation. There were several goals. First, to further demonize Turkey, unfortunately, it is becoming almost a norm in the so-called modern political fashion. It is entirely groundless. Turkey is defending its interests, defending its right to live its own life. Under the leadership of President Erdogan, Turkey ceased to be an obedient ally of the West. It dictates its will in its region and the world. Turkey is reckoned with now. Turkey's relevance has grown. The Turkish army is the second-largest army in NATO, and it can solve any military-political problems. Therefore, of course, there is such open pressure from the West. It is even fraught with some unique and negative emotional background concerning Turkey. So this is the first reason – the demonization of Turkey. The second reason is the underestimation of Azerbaijan's potential, including military-technical, an attempt to introduce things so that it was Turkey or someone under the influence of Turkey that solved a military issue. No! We have liberated our lands ourselves. The myth about the so-called victorious Armenian army has collapsed. It never existed. Those who know the history of the conflict are well aware that our lands were also occupied by the 366th motorized rifle regiment of the Soviet army stationed in Khankandi. I think 70 percent of its servicemen were of Armenian origin. So it was Soviet weaponry and Soviet command with an Armenian composition, and they took an active part in ethnic cleansing and genocide.

**- When? The events of the early 1990s?**

- Of course! Without the support and active participation of the 366th regiment, Armenia would not have seized our territories. Therefore, a myth was created afterward that the Armenian army was victorious, and the Azerbaijani one would not be able to confront it. This was why it was necessary to preserve this myth. Apparently, acknowledging a bitter defeat at the hands of Azerbaijan is beyond Armenian society and leadership's capacity. Third, it was necessary to belittle the role and importance of Azerbaijan in the world arena. It is not easy to do because Azerbaijan today has very extensive economic and political ties with the world's countries. Today we chair the Non-Aligned Movement, which brings together 120 countries, and we were elected unanimously. If our country did not have an independent potential, would we have won such respect? Therefore, all the insinuations Turkey is directing Azerbaijan and that we are acting at its behest are wrong. Another aim is also to disrupt or undermine the Turkey-Azerbaijan brotherhood, but it will not succeed. By the way, if all this information hype around Azerbaijan and Turkey had a basis, then there would not have been today's statement. This statement was agreed with me and no-one else. If someone controlled us, this issue would probably not have been resolved so quickly. Therefore, Turkey plays a stabilizing role in the world and the region. The active and unequivocal position of the Turkish leadership, personally its President and other officials during the escalation, essentially prevented third countries' intervention in this conflict. Therefore, I believe that Turkey's role is extremely positive, and it should play an even more significant role in our region, including the settlement of the conflict.

**- Many in Russia will hear the phrase that "Turkey should play an even greater role". What is hidden behind these words? What do you mean?**

I think it is too premature to talk about this because I am expressing the Azerbaijani side's position. But I said in one of my recent interviews that the Minsk Group was formed many years ago, in 1992, with entirely different geopolitical realities. And if we were to start a contact group of mediators today, the composition would be different. The composition should reflect the intentions and wishes of the parties to the conflict, but the composition of the Minsk Group practically does not reflect that. The composition of a new contact group or a working group, whatever you call it, should reflect the existing balance of power in the region, the current interests of the region's countries and should be result-oriented.

Otherwise, what is the point? It doesn't make any sense. If we want to resolve the conflict, it must be resolved within a new format. Notice how many new configurations of cooperation – trilateral, quadripartite – have been set up recently to coordinate countries' positions in many hot spots. After all, they are being created now; they are not built based on any dogmas, based on the real balance of power. Therefore, of course, there can be no doubt that Turkey should and will play an essential role in settlement of the conflict. In what form – legal or de facto – this is already a technical question.

**- About the role of Russia. When I walked around Baku, I saw many Azerbaijani flags and slightly fewer but still quite many Turkish flags, but I did not see a single Russian flag. Does this mean that Russia's influence in Azerbaijan has decreased, or has the attitude of people in Azerbaijan changed towards Russia?**

- I don't think it has changed. The fact that there are many Turkish flags is natural. We are brotherly peoples. Today there is such a level of trust, mutual support and relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan that, in my opinion, cannot be found between any other countries in the world, even the closest allies. It is a reality. And this reality was created by us – the leadership of Turkey and Azerbaijan. And it is not about our common roots and our shared history. There are also peoples with close ethnic roots in the world, like Turkey and Azerbaijan, who are at war. And you know that very well. Or they are engaged in intrigues against each other. Therefore, the presence of Turkish flags in Azerbaijan is a reality. Also, if you go to Turkey, you will see Azerbaijani flags in many places. As for the attitude towards Russia, I can give you one fact. Before the pandemic, the annual growth in the number of Russian citizens visiting Azerbaijan was around 15-20 percent. Last year it approached a million people. I have always said that Russians are attracted to Azerbaijan not only by the cuisine but also by the beaches, not only by history but also by the fact that they feel comfortable here, feel at home, speak Russian with our people. You probably know that nowhere else are there as many schools with education in Russian as in Azerbaijan – more than 300. There are Russian universities and their branches in Azerbaijan. Russian musical and theater groups were here almost every week before the pandemic. Therefore, the attitude towards Russia and the Russian people is extremely positive in Azerbaijan. But you have already spent several days here, and you know how the Armenian occupation factor influences the mentality of the people. People catch every word; people catch every gesture, every facial expression. I will tell you quite frankly, during this time, during these days when some Russian channels run rabid

anti-Azerbaijani propaganda, falsification, manipulation, with the unbalanced composition of talk show participants, when the Azerbaijani people are insulted, when the President of Azerbaijan is insulted on leading Russian channels, this, of course, does not add credibility to Russia. I brought this issue to the attention of the Russian leadership. Not in terms of the fact that we are concerned about it – the Azerbaijani society and public opinion are shaped within Azerbaijan - but this may someday lead to certain difficulties in our plans. We have projects with Russia for the further development of cooperation. We are now actively working on five roadmaps for economic and other cooperation. But the information attack we encountered in the Russian media during this time, of course, caused great harm to the public perception of Russia. I think it will take time and effort for the leadership of both sides to rectify this situation.

**- I will ask two more questions. On September 27, in the night or morning, do you remember how the decision was made that you need to retaliate that you need to start this war?**

-Well, in practice, decisions are made automatically. There are specific instructions for the servicemen of the Azerbaijani army. I think it is valid for every military. What your actions should be in case of a threat, in case of attack. That is, we had no hesitation in how to act. Moreover, we were expecting this attack. I spoke about this from the UN platform a few days before the escalation. You can see the text of my speech – I said that Armenia is preparing for war. Armenia must be stopped. There were many arguments in favor of that. First of all, the Armenian defense minister's statement he made in America last year when he said that Armenia was preparing for a new war for new territories. Then, Pashinyan's comments such as "Karabakh is Armenia" and so on. Further provocative actions in the form of Armenians' demonstrative settlement from Lebanon to Shusha, which is a war crime. Moreover, the Azerbaijani people's insult by holding the so-called "swearing-in" ceremony in Shusha – in fact, for the first time in the entire existence of the occupation regime there. An attempt to move the parliament of the so-called "Nagorno-Karabakh republic" from Khankandi to Shusha, and much more. All this was a provocation against us. Then came July. An unprovoked attack on military positions and we lost four servicemen and then a civilian in the very first hours. Then August. A subversion group penetrated Goranboy district on the line of contact. The leader of this group is now giving evidence. We anticipated it. We were ready. Naturally, the decision was made automatically, including myself, without any hesitation. We had to show the aggressor its place. In July, Azerbaijani society demanded that we continued. You probably know about this.

**- Yes, there was a rally.**

- Yes. In July, the main slogan at the rally was "Commander-in-Chief, give us weapons!" It is what people were saying. In July, we could have easily crossed the state border with Armenia and seized vast territories of the Republic of Armenia. But we didn't.

**- This did not happen in Karabakh.**

- Quite right. We did not do that. There were no obstacles there. We showed this now when we broke their defense that was deeply echeloned for 30 years. The local terrain there is an element of defense in itself. We were going from bottom up. We were breaking these concrete slabs thanks to the incredible efforts of Azerbaijan's Army, the heroism of our soldiers and officers. What would



it take us to cross into Armenia at that point? But I stopped it; I said no, we would not go for that, we were not them. We would not enter the internationally recognized territory of Armenia. We reached the border, drove out the invaders who entered our territory and stopped there. In other words, after that, we had to punish the aggressor and discourage it from even looking in our direction. And we did that. Look at what a miserable situation Pashinyan is in now. He humiliates himself, calls, begs. There is hardly anyone left he hasn't called yet. For instance, the European Union heads of government. And what does he demand? He demands that they recognize Nagorno-Karabakh. It speaks of a complete inadequacy of the Armenian leadership. There is an agreement between Azerbaijan and the European Union, which was initialed two years ago. It states that the European Union respects the territorial integrity, sovereignty and inviolability of Azerbaijan's borders. We have documents on strategic partnerships with seven EU member states. All of them recognize the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. Only someone entirely far from politics and devoid of any knowledge in the international sphere can demand recognition for Nagorno-Karabakh. It is where they are now. And we had to punish them. We had to show them their place. They should know that they cannot talk to us in such a manner, and they won't get away with it. And they didn't. He will be held accountable for mothers' tears for the deaths of innocent young citizens of Armenia they are sending to the frontline.

**- What will happen to the territories Azerbaijan has returned? What will they do there now?**

- We will return our refugees to their homes. You can imagine the joy of these people, the joy of the residents of Jabrayil, the villages of Fizuli, the inhabitants of Terter district, Hadrut, who will return to their lands after almost 30 years. There is nowhere to go back to now. The video footage we aired from the liberated territories shows that everything there has been destroyed. We knew that it was worse than Stalingrad. Everything that was not destroyed was plundered. They even stole window frames, stole toilets. It is just looting elevated to public policy. Therefore, we will restore these territories.

**- Will you rebuild them?**

- We will rebuild them, of course. We will help. This year, according to our construction program for internally displaced persons, we are commissioning 7,000 apartments. Can you imagine? If we multiply that by five people on average, we accommodate 35,000 people a year. In other words, even by our standards, it is a fairly medium-sized city. We have already accommodated more than 300,000 people. Every year we allocate significant budget funds to create the right conditions for internally displaced people. Each person receives a monthly allowance from the government. We will do it there. We will rebuild Jabrayil. We will rebuild all the villages. People who will live there will be involved in construction work. They will receive a land parcel to rebuild their homes. Life will return there; children's laughter will return there. People will have a sigh of relief. People will feel that they have regained their dignity. Can you imagine what it is like for Azerbaijanis to live in such a situation for so many years? Imagine my feelings when I looked at our destroyed cities through binoculars on the line of contact. Let the Armenian side give this a thought. They will not understand what it feels like. But they should have thought about it earlier. They should not have hurt the feelings of the Azerbaijanis. We are peace-loving people, but we will not allow

our dignity to be trampled and insulted. When Pashinyan, in a drunken stupor, danced in Shusha on Jidir-Duzu, he signed up for what happened today.

**- Are you going to visit these territories yourself?**

- Of course! When we liberated Jojug Marjanli from the occupation in 2016, I told our State Committee for Refugees and IDPs to ask this village's residents if they would like to return. Because many years have passed, many of them are in Baku. Many have jobs, children, schools, many of them live in other regions of Azerbaijan. Changing your place of residence, especially where everything is destroyed, is not so easy. You know, after some time I was informed that there was a queue - even young people who had never been there, who were born afterward, wanted to return. They all asked to be returned there as soon as possible. And in less than a year, we rebuilt a village of 150 houses, built a school, a medical facility, a mosque, all the infrastructure, installed gas lines and built roads there. It has become a symbol of our return. When I arrived there and saw those people's faces, their joy, tears of joy in their eyes, I said to myself again that we would definitely return to our homes. We will restore these places so that these people who suffered for so many years, many of them did not live to see this happy day, they died longing for their homes, so that those who have survived them live happily and those who did not live to see this day have their souls in paradise.

**-Thank you very much!**

-Thank you!

**Sky News TV channel has broadcast an interview with President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev.**

**-Thank you very much President Aliyev for agreeing to do his interview with Sky News. The French President seems confident that the truce will be agreed in the coming days and that you will be able to resume negotiations. How likely is that and on what terms?**

-It depends on the position of Armenia. Azerbaijan has always been very supportive to negotiation table, and frankly speaking for 28 years since the OSCE Minsk Group was established we are involved in negotiations. We had hopes and still have hopes that negotiations will lead to progress, and will lead to political settlement. But unfortunately Armenia's position was opposite. They used negotiation only as a pretext in order to make this process endless. In other words, they wanted always to seal the status quo, to keep status quo unchanged, and not to return the territories back which they have to according to the UN Security Council resolutions and according to the basic principles which are on the table, which were elaborated by the OSCE Minsk Group. Therefore, I hope that after this bitter defeat which Armenia is suffering on the battlefield, they will be more reasonable, and they will listen to the advises of the mediators, and will be sincere on negotiations table. Negotiations should leave to the political settlement, and to the liberation of the occupied territories.

**-But what territories exactly are we talking about? Are we simply talking about Nagorno-Karabakh or we talking about the seven occupied Azerbaijani territories that they call their security zone? Because clearly you are not getting all of it back.**

-Our territorial integrity is recognized by the whole world. All the countries recognize territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, which includes Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenians' position, actually was also a pretext that we are using these seven regions surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh as an excuse to occupy a security zone. But today's clash shows that there is no security zone in modern world. Modern military equipment does not provide security even for long distance. The security must be provided by political means. Therefore, we were always saying that political settlement will provide security guarantees for all-for Azerbaijanis, for Armenians, for other nationalities who live in the area. And the basic principles which Armenia rejected to support and clearly says how the territories are going to be returned back. In the first stage five regions of Azerbaijan which are situated on the south eastern part of Nagorno-Karabakh. Then two regions of Azerbaijan which are situated between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia. Then Azerbaijanis return to Nagorno-Karabakh. There have been 25 percent of Azerbaijanis in Nagorno-Karabakh their rights must also be provided. And they go back to where they lived in the ancient city of Shusha and other places and we restore normal communications, we restore people-to-people contact, and slowly and slowly I am sure people will reconcile. That's the plan of the mediators and we support it.

**-Would you recognize Nagorno-Karabakh's independence if you're allowed to have 25 percent Azerbaijani population there?**

-No, no, never. And that has never been the issue on negotiation table. Our position was very clear, that Azerbaijan will never recognize Nagorno-Karabakh's independence, because it's our ancient land. The history of Nagorno-Karabakh is now well-known. Second, it is an integral part of

Azerbaijan and why should we give independence to small number of people? Azerbaijan is a multi-ethnic country as almost all the countries in the world. National minorities live in peace and dignity in Azerbaijan and in many countries in the world. Being national minority does not mean that you have a right for secession, have a right for separatism. Separatism is a big threat to international community and all the countries in the world condemn separatism. What has been done against us was separatism of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh and military aggression of Armenia's state against Azerbaijan which led to the situation which we are facing now. Occupation, a million of Azerbaijani refugees, ethnic-cleansing against Azerbaijanis, destroyed cities and villages. Now when we are liberating our territories, there are video about what happened there. Everything is destroyed, it's as if like Stalingrad. It's even worse than Stalingrad after World War II.

**-But that is exactly what you are doing now to the regional capital Stepanakert. That is what you are doing to Shusha which yesterday was targeted not once but twice. A double hit on the cathedral there when it was very clear that civilians and journalists were sheltering inside.**

-That was first of all a provocation from the Armenian side. We never did that in the past, we have Armenian church in the center of Baku. You can send someone, or when you come...

**-It's not that the Armenians targeted their own cathedral. How can that be?**

-That's probably their provocation in order to present us in such a way but I can tell you that they are shelling our cities. Do you know that we have 31 killed civilians as a result of Armenian bombardment? 170 wounded people and more than 1 thousand houses totally demolished or damaged because of Armenian attack on our civilians. And they use ballistic missiles. Ballistic missiles!

**-With all due respect, that is also what you are doing with your shells on Nagorno-Karabakh and you have very sophisticated drone technology which should allow you to see precisely what you are targeting. So, why the civilian structures are getting hit?**

-No, no. We never attack civilians. What we did in the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, we attacked their tanks, we attacked their guns, we attacked their artillery systems, and also we attacked their military infrastructure. It is not our fault that these military infrastructures sometimes is situated in the city center. But we never on purpose, we never attack civilians. Yes, we have sophisticated weapons but not all of them are sophisticated. There could be some mistakes. Therefore, there was never a deliberate attack on civilians on our side. On the contrary, every day the city of Tartar which is very close to the line of contact is being bombed. We have 2 thousand shells a day on the city. It is almost destroyed and nobody talks about them. So, please let's be fair about that, we didn't start it, and we don't need to attack civilians. We need our territories. Why should we attack civilians with whom we plan to live side by side after the war is over. People of Armenian origin in Nagorno-Karabakh are hostages of a criminal regime which is there. They will, I am sure, live side by side with us in peace and dignity after the war is over.

**-You have said that you would like to see Armenia withdraw its troops. But you have also said that you are not prepared to accept peacekeepers there. How else can you reassure your counterparts, the Armenians, that you will not then retake the whole lands?**

-If you can tell me when I said that I don't want to see peacekeepers, I will answer you, but I never said that. That's wrong information I am sorry, I never said...

**-But you won't accept peacekeepers on that territory.**

-Peacekeepers is one of the elements which is provided in the basic principles for the settlement, which was elaborated by the OSCE Minsk Group and there is an item about peacekeepers. But we did not come to this item to discuss it properly. Because it's premature. Because first, we need to resolve the core issue-the occupation, liberation of territories and then, when Azerbaijanis will return, then of course peacekeepers should come. It is in the framework of agreement, if it is signed by both sides. Then both sides will select who these peacekeepers will be. So we are not against it, but we actually were not in active phase of negotiations on this item.

**-It doesn't sound as though your terms of negotiations have changed since before this latest vast outbreak of hostilities. So, I am just wondering, why weapons should be placed down now if negotiations have never succeeded before?**

-You know, negotiations are taking place since 1992. Since that time there have been zero progress on the ground, zero progress. Armenia always was using some manipulation tools in order to disrupt negotiations. This year, starting from July they launched three times a military attack on us. On July, they attacked our civilians and our military positions on the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan far away from Karabakh region. That lasted for four days, we pushed back, they could not occupy territories, and we stopped because we don't have any military purpose on Armenian side. On August 23, they send a sabotage group to commit a terror act which was detained and the head of the group gives evidence. At the end of September, they launched the artillery bombardment of our cities and killed immediately innocent people. We had to respond, we had to push back, that's what we did. Therefore, we are in favor of negotiations. I can give you two examples, Armenian prime minister last year announced that "Karabakh is Armenia". What does it mean? It means the end of...

**-I asked him what he meant.**

-What he meant?

**-He said that he meant that ever since the 4th century there have been Armenian churches, there has been an Armenian population and there has ever since the beginning of the Soviet Union much larger Armenian population, ethnic Armenian population in Nagorno-Karabakh than Azerbaijani.**

-You know, he is telling, mildly speaking, not truth. The Armenians' settlement in that area started in the late 18th and early 19th centuries after the treaty of Kurekchay was signed by Azerbaijani Ibrahim Khan, and Russian general. As a result of that treaty Karabakh khanate became part of Russia, and Russia started...

**-I am sorry.**

-That's how it was. That's how Armenians came to Nagorno-Karabakh. It's only two centuries, less. He is telling about 4th century.

**-You have been in power since the beginning of this century. And yet, there has been no progress made on this issue. It is all very well to blame the Armenians. But do you take some personal responsibility for the fact that your soldiers are now dying on the frontline because you politically have not been able to resolve this?**

-Our soldiers are dying for our land. Our soldiers are dying on Azerbaijani soil, historical and internationally recognized. On which soil now Armenian soldiers are dying? They are dying now in Fuzuli, they are dying in Jabrayil, they are dying in other Azerbaijani territories. What they are doing there? You should ask Pashinyan what his soldiers is doing there? 90 percent of the so-called "army of Nagorno-Karabakh" consists of Armenian citizens. They are on our land. It is just enough to look at the map. For us it is a patriotic war. We are defending ourselves. We want to restore our territorial integrity to allow one million refugees to go back. That's what we are doing. For 28 years we were patient to believe that negotiations will lead to progress. As a result, we got what we have got now. When we pushed back and punished the aggressor, you know we are attacked politically. I accepted the basic principles, Pashinyan rejected it. I accept the format of negotiations which is between Armenia-Azerbaijan, Pashinyan says no, Azerbaijan should negotiate with Nagorno-Karabakh. This is acceptable not only by me, but also by Minsk Group. So, he is to blame for what is happening now.

**-The French and the Russian say that they have intelligence that Syrian mercenaries are being used on your frontlines. Do you categorically deny that?**

-Absolutely, categorically. So far I haven't been provided with a single document which testified this intelligence. Let them show this intelligence to me. Our intelligence representatives had contacts after these accusations have been made. During this contacts with their counterpart no evidence was provided. If there is evidence why is it not on the newspapers? Why is it not on your channel? Where is this evidence? Show it to me. There is no evidence. We don't need mercenaries we have 100 thousand fighters, well-prepared, well-trained. We have modern equipment, we have all the necessary military components in order to liberate our land and that's what we are doing. This is fake news.

**-One final question, what gesture of good will could you put on the table to try and start negotiation at this stage?**

-We already did that. By the way, I can tell you one more thing about who is against negotiations. Foreign ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia were invited, even before this outbreak, to Geneva to meet Minsk Group co-chairs. Armenian foreign minister was supposed to go in the beginning of October, our foreign minister was supposed to go on the 8th of October. So, Armenian foreign minister ignored that, he didn't go. Our foreign minister yesterday was in Geneva, met with the co-chairs. And when we received the proposal from Russia to organize the meeting between foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan in Russia, we agreed. So our foreign minister just an

hour ago landed in Moscow, and he will be meeting with his Russian counterpart. And I don't know what will be the program. Will he meet Armenian minister or not? But he is there. We want peaceful settlement, but settlement. We want solution, not imitation, not another 30 years of etceteras, practical steps, time-table. When our people are going back home? What will be the security guarantees for them? And how we will reconcile? Two nations must reconcile. We are neighbors, we cannot live in hostility forever. This must be stopped, but stopped on the basis of historical truth and international law.

**-And a question about journalists operating in Nagorno-Karabakh. Your presidential spokesman has said that because they are there illegally on what you consider to be Azerbaijani territories, they are effectively fair game. Is that something that you believe also?**

-Our position is very fair, clear. Nagorno-Karabakh is an integral part of Azerbaijan and our position is that, if any foreign citizen, any-not only journalists- if he wants or she wants to visit Nagorno-Karabakh, please, let us know. We do not expect some kind of special attitude, just inform us that such and such person wants to visit and when we have this information, when we have this sign of respect to our territorial integrity we never object. So, those who go there without this, how to say, procedure, they are being put in the black list of our foreign ministry and the entrance for them to Azerbaijan is forbidden. But if those people write a letter to our foreign minister that we made a mistake, or next time we will inform you, we remove them from the black list. This is fair, the only thing we need is just respect. Therefore, for those journalists who want to go there and cover events, I'd like to use this opportunity to deliver messages to them. Please, inform our foreign ministry by e-mail and go there. No problem.

**-And you will not target them.**

-We never do it. We never do it. Why should we? We are interested that journalists are coming. I am everyday on TV, everyday I give interviews, because we want to deliver our point. We want to deliver our case, we are not aggressors. We are victims. It is Armenia who is an aggressor. We want the territories back. That's all.

**-President Aliyev, thank you so much for talking to us today.**

-Thank you very much.

**“The Connect World” program of CNN International TV channel has broadcast an interview with President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev.**

**-Sir, I spoke to the President of Armenia, and he told me that this conflict is dramatically different from the previous clashes, because of the open support that Turkey is providing Azerbaijan. Specifically, he told me this. Turkey with its military officials, generals, mercenaries, terroristic jihadists brought in thousands to Azerbaijan to fight Nagorno-Karabakh. Turkey with his military might pretending they are there in order to protect some international logistic structures. Are there any Turkish forces or Turkish equipment in Azerbaijan right now sir?**

-Turkish equipment yes, Turkish forces no. And frankly speaking, I regret that Armenian president is using this opportunity to address the world through CNN to spread rumors. I cannot call it otherwise, because what he said as you presented to me I didn't see his presentation but what I heard from you is absolutely wrong. It is false information. Turkey is supporting us, but this is a political support. This is a diplomatic support, and if not for this support if not for very open position of the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan saying that Azerbaijan is not alone, Turkey is with Azerbaijan, probably today Armenia would have achieved its goal, which is actually to spread the geography of this conflict and to involve as many countries as possible so these countries help them on the battlefield. And I would also like to remind Armenian president who was behind Armenia when Armenia in the beginning of 90s was occupying our territories We have enough evidences who was helping them to occupy our territories. Therefore, from Armenian side to say that somebody is helping Azerbaijan is absolutely wrong, is false information and we reject it.

**-You have said that there is Turkish equipment in Azerbaijan. What Turkish equipment sir?**

-Weapons, Turkish weapons, not only Turkish weapons, Russian weapons, Israeli weapons, Belarusian weapons, Ukrainian weapons, you name it. Because today the geography of our purchases of military equipment is getting broader and broader, and we pay for that. If you look how Armenia gets their weapons and from where, you will see that they could not afford to pay for those weapons which they have, because that's billions of dollars. For a poor country it's impossible. They get weapons free of charge from their ally, we get weapons paying for them.

**-Okay, let me put this to you sir. We have seen satellite imagery that would suggest Turkish F-16s are on at least one of your bases. You haven't bought F-16s. So, is that correct? Are there F-16s on the ground that would suggest significant support for Azerbaijan?**

-I agree with you when you say on the ground. F-16s came to Azerbaijan for military exercise. Last year Azerbaijan and Turkey had ten joint military exercises. Turkey is our ally and it is common here to have military exercises, including air force. By the way this year due to the pandemic we had only two military exercises. One of them was just before the Armenian attack on Azerbaijan happened. So F-16s are on the ground, they are not flying. They are not in any way participating in any kind of battle. And by the way...



**-You are categorical about that. That F-16s are not in use.**

-I am categorical and even more I want to tell you about one Armenian fake in the first days of the clashes they said that Turkish F-16 shot down Armenian SU-25. This is fake and those who are accusing us of this now should apologize. Because everybody knows that this is a fake. F-16s are here, but they are on the ground as you correctly mentioned.

**-OSCE's Minsk Group which has sought a solution to this long-standing dispute since the 1990s is co-chaired by France, by the US and by Russia. The French foreign minister has specifically warned that Turkey's backing of Azerbaijan risks fueling the internationalization of this conflict. You say you are supported by Turkey. But what do you say to the French when they say this support risks this conflict getting worse?**

-I do not agree with that. As I said, Turkey plays a stabilizing role in the region and in particular in the situation with respect to Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Every country can afford to have a partner, and an ally. And Azerbaijan and Azerbaijani people are happy to have such a partner, such an ally and such a brother like Turkey. We do not object when Armenia considers France their ally and France is a country which at this moment supports most of all Armenia. At the same time we see that it's up to countries themselves to choose allies. For instance, French foreign minister is not concerned about Russia supporting Armenia with weapons free of charge and he doesn't think that it is internationalization of the conflict. But when Turkey expresses legitimate, political support it becomes a concern and I, frankly speaking, cannot understand that how one NATO country can act in such a way against another NATO country? NATO members are supposed to be allies. But we don't see it.

**-Can you explicitly lay out the goals of your campaign at present?**

Our goal is to defend our people, to defend our country and to defend our right to live on our land. It was Armenia who on September 27th launched an artillery attack on Azerbaijani military position and on our villages and cities. During these days of clashes we have 31 victims among civilians, almost 200 wounded, and more than 1,000 houses demolished, or seriously damaged by Armenian army. We had to respond, had to defend ourselves. Our respond was very sensitive to Armenia, was very painful. They suffer very serious defeat, they run away from us, we liberate part of our territory, we install our national flag on the occupied territories, we restore our territorial integrity and we are right. We are fighting on our soil, Armenia is fighting on the soil of another country.

**-How many military casualties have you sustained sir?**

-With respect to military casualties I already referred to that, we will disclose this information after the active phase of the clashes is over.

**-Do you intend to retake all of Nagorno-Karabakh, all disputed lands?**

-We are talking about Nagorno-Karabakh and seven districts which surround former Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous district. Because Armenia not only occupied Nagorno-Karabakh and expelled all Azerbaijanis who were about 25 percent of the population of autonomous district but

also occupied seven districts of Azerbaijan with the population of 700,000 people. So, our main objective is to liberate those territories and to allow Azerbaijani refugees and internally displaced persons to go back. As far as Nagorno-Karabakh is concerned we think and that was officially declared many times that after the war is over, after occupational forces are withdrawn, Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Nagorno-Karabakh will live side-by-side as in any other country with a multi-ethnic population, and one day, I am sure, they will again become good neighbors to each other.

**-The Armenian president told me that your demand that Armenia set a time-table for withdrawing troops should be put to the “Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh” because your dispute is with them. He added though that in Nagorno-Karabakh 95 percent of the population were Armenians, because they are living there for thousands of years. You say that Karabakh is Azerbaijan. But how would you address the fears of ethnic-Armenians there?**

-First of all...

**-Hold on sir, that they might be ethnically cleansed if the government of Azerbaijan retakes the territory.**

-I understand, today in Azerbaijan thousands of Armenians live in different cities of our country primarily in the capital city of Baku. One of the Armenian long-range destructive missile, ‘Smerch’, which they use to attack our second largest city of Ganja hit the house of native Armenian woman. So, today in Azerbaijan there are thousands of Armenians who live in peace, and dignity. But in Armenia, all Azerbaijanis have been expelled. Armenia’s population is 99 percent Armenians. They committed ethnic cleansing against us. What Armenian president said, he is lying again. Today it is not 95 percent, today it is 100 percent Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh, because 25 percent of Azerbaijanis who lived there were ethnically cleansed by the Armenian regime. I regret that such a person with such an important position is spreading lies. Look in the internet, look at Kurekchay Peace Agreement, which was signed in the beginning of the 19th century, between Azerbaijani khan of Karabakh and Russian general. Nothing is said about Armenian population. Armenian population was resettled to our land by Russian Empire in order to change the religious composition of the region after the Russo-Persian wars. This is a historical fact and what Armenian president says is fake, absolutely fake.

**-I must point out that as you suggest that the Armenian president is spreading lies and fake information so he has said the same thing about Azerbaijan and yourself.**

-Look at the internet, look at the documents and you will see who is telling the truth and who is lying.

**-I have to make the point that each side is trading insults at this point. How would Azerbaijan accept international mediation and stop military action? What are your bottom lines here?**

-We have international mediation for 28 years. OSCE Minsk Group is in “action”, actually is passive form for 28 years since 1992 and this mediation led to nothing. This mediation led to what is happening today. This mediation was not enough in order to press Armenia to leave the territories which do not belong to them.

**-Have you been in touch with Washington on this? I mean what is the Trump administration telling you? US, of course, is one of the co-chairs of the Minsk Group.**

-We have very diverse relations with the United States, relations are developing very successfully in many areas. As far as Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is concerned, three countries of the Minsk Group co-chairs have the same right and the same responsibility to mediate and when representatives from these countries come, they come altogether, representatives of three countries. Therefore, there is no distinction in their performance. But of course we understand that some countries are more pro-Armenian some countries are even more pro-Armenian.

**-So, can I just ask you who are you speaking to in Washington? Is it state or is it the Trump administration? The Armenian president certainly told us that they have spoken to Robert O'Brien, for example.**

-Well, Armenian prime minister I think the only person whom he did not speak during these days is a head of a tribe in some far away you know remote island. He called everyone. He called President Putin five times, he called President Macron, I don't know four times. He called Chancellor Merkel. The only one left is a tribal chief. I advice to call him and to complain on Azerbaijan and to send some people from his tribe to help poor poor Armenia whom Azerbaijan is destroying.

**-So, that wasn't the question, the question was who are you speaking to in Washington is it the state or is it the Trump administration?**

-We speak with administration, we speak to State Department. Actually, they contacted us. I gave instructions to our foreign ministry, to my administration to be in touch with all those who call us, who want to express their position and express their view on how to move forward. But it is actually doesn't make any difference whether it is State Department or White House because for us it is US Administration anyway.

**-What's the position as you understand it in Washington?**

-The position in Washington is not different from the position of other co-chairs. They are supporting the principles based on which the solution must be found. It is Armenia who is against those principles. Those principles say that territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh should be returned to Azerbaijan in time and when you were referring to my statement time-table, that is exactly what is in the documents. It is not me who invented them. It is Armenia who is against.

**-Let's have a look at Russia's position then, because it is not clear to me what Washington's position is from what we have just discussed. But let's have a look at Russia's position. Let me play out some sound from the Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov. He said we remain deeply concerned by the situation in the region and we believe that the sides must stop the fire and come to the negotiating table. They are asking that you go to the negotiating table. The Russian president has described the fighting as a tragedy. You personally spoke to Vladimir Putin as I understand it on Wednesday. What did he tell you? What are Russia's red lines here?**

-I called President Putin in order to congratulate him on the occasion of his birthday on the 7th of October. I do it every year and so does he. So every year we congratulate each other on our birthdays. And that was a coincidence that his birthday is coincided with the events. Therefore, of course, we discussed this issue and our press service has issued a press-release about that, I think it will not be right for me to say something more than it was released in the press.

**-I wish you would, I mean are you prepared to defy Moscow's appeal? For peace talks?**

-We are for peace talks. If you allow me, I will just give you two examples. Azerbaijan is a constructive partner to negotiation table. We think that the principles which have been elaborated by the United States, Russia and France should be basis for settlement. Armenian President rejects them, I am sorry, Armenian prime minister rejects them. Because the person who is in charge in Armenia is not a president, but prime minister, and with whom I had negotiations. So he said that "Karabakh is Armenia". That makes negotiations senseless. Because how you can say "Karabakh is Armenia" and negotiate to return the territories back? He said Azerbaijan should negotiate not with Armenia, but with Nagorno-Karabakh which is a change of format. So we are ready for negotiations if Armenian prime minister returns back from the skies where he is flying, back to earth.

**-That is not the position, as I understand it, from the Russians who said both sides must stop the fire and come to the negotiating table.**

-Those who started fire, should stop first and we will do the same. But to go back to negotiation table. Pashinyan regime did everything to destroy negotiations. They made the statement, they attacked us in July, they attacked us in August, they attacked us in September. They do everything in order to disrupt negotiations. We are ready. But they are not.

**-If you won't stop, and they won't stop. What happens next? Where does this leave the conflict which so many people are now concerned could escalate into much wider, regional war?**

-It should not escalate wider, I call all the countries to stay away from this situation. It is our bilateral issue with Armenia. Mediators they have, they have their mandate. Their mandate is not to interfere on the ground, their mandate is to facilitate to find the solution. So, they will continue, I am sure within the framework of their mandate. Armenians' attempt to make this conflict international is very counter-productive, destructive and dangerous for many countries. So, Armenia should understand that occupation cannot last forever. Status quo must be changed. And by the way presidents, former presidents of France, former presidents of United States and President of Russia made a statement, when all of them were in charge, status-quo is unacceptable and must be changed. I support it but Armenia is against.

**-I want to get your response to a new report from Amnesty International claiming they have identified Israeli-made MO-95 DPICM cluster munitions. That appear to have been fired by Azerbaijani forces. Now CNN cannot independently verify those claims nor the apparent video of the explosions. But sir, how do you respond to Amnesty's claims?**

-I would say that we don't have any contact with the organization which you named, because of their pro-Armenian and anti-Azerbaijani position. First, it is wrong, it is false and second, I would recommend them to see how cluster bombs are being used against our civilians. How they use "Smerch", how they use "Elbrus", "Tochka U", ballistic missiles on our cities - Ganja, Goranboy, Naftalan, Yevlakh and other cities are under Armenian bombardment. Why does Amnesty International see or want to see only one side? Why they do not see another side? That's a question.

**-Let me just push you on this. Are you categorically saying that cluster munitions have not been used by Azerbaijani forces? And if so, are you prepared to allow independent observers to verify that?**

-Yes, we are prepared to do it, also we are prepared to see how Armenia will allow independent observers to see what they have been doing. And though it should be not unilateral, it should be bilateral. We defend ourselves and we must do it. But our targets are only military objectives. And almost all of what we have destroyed, we destroyed from the very modern equipment. You can find it on internet. It's Turkish brand new, excellent, marvelous fighter drones. It is other equipment which destroys you know tanks, guns, military positions. So we don't need to use these kind of weapons in order to achieve our goal. Our target are not civilians. Our target are occupants, we must return our land to those whom it belongs to.

**-Sir, Armenia can and will speak for themselves. I am asking you specifically, you categorically deny do you, that cluster munitions have been used by Azerbaijani forces.**

-Yes, I deny it and I want to ask you. Did you ask this question to Armenian president?

**-We didn't have the information at the time.**

-That's the point, that's the point. You ask me, ask him, ask him. Let the Amnesty International ask him what they do.

**-We will certainly ask him for a statement. I'm asking you.**

-Ask him. I already answered. No. Ask him.

**-I will. Thank you, sir.**

**President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has been interviewed by Euronews television.**

**-Joining us now is the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev. Thank you for your time. There has been strong and repeated international pressure for a ceasefire and to de-escalate tensions. Fighting is ongoing, if not escalating. What is your objective now in the conflict?**

-Ceasefire cannot be achieved unilaterally. It must be a bilateral decision and also it must be implemented on the ground. As you know Armenia attacked us on the 27th of September, attacking our military positions and damaging our infrastructure, attacking civilians. So far we have almost 30 civilians killed as a result of Armenian attack, including the ballistic missiles, and the cluster bombs. So, our counter-attack was successful. We managed to liberate part of the occupied territories and our main objective is restoration of territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. Armenia must give us the time-table for withdrawal of their troops from the occupied territories and this time-table must be approved by the Minsk group co-chairs, the countries which are mediators. And after that I think the effort must be imposed on achieving the ceasefire.

**-The countries that you're referencing have repeatedly asked for a ceasefire. Why isn't that happening now? Why aren't you pushing for that to happen immediately?**

-Because we have been a subject of attack for many times. During the last three months there have been three attacks on Azerbaijan. One in July, on the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, far away from the region of Nagorno-Karabakh. The goal of Armenia was to occupy new territories of Azerbaijan. They did not manage to do it. Our army defeated them. Then, on August 23, they send a sabotage group to commit terror acts against our civilians and military personnel. That also was a failure for them, because the head of the sabotage group was detained and he gives evidences exactly about what I am saying. And in the end of September they launched a massive attack on our villages and cities. I can tell you that up to today we have almost 900 houses totally demolished, or damaged and many casualties and wounded people among civilians. And now after Armenia is suffering a very bitter defeat, they are pleading for a ceasefire. They made violation of ceasefire themselves. They ignore United Nations Security Council resolutions which demand full, complete, immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian troops. They want to keep status quo unchanged, and the Minsk Group co-chairs United States, Russia and France, their presidents many times made the statements that the status quo is unacceptable. Armenia ignored it, but now Azerbaijan itself is changing the status quo, and I think that will be an important step towards the soonest resolution of the conflict.

**-Mr. President, civilians have been killed on both sides of this conflict. How do you reconcile that with your aims?**

-Of course, we regret that civilians are being killed and of course, we were not the purpose, we were not the source of this attack. Because it was a first thing in the morning on the 27th of September, what they did, they attacked our cities and villages. And we had to respond. But our response mainly is and primarily is on their military positions, on their tanks and guns and what we are doing on the battlefield is available in internet. Our drones and our other equipment demolished only military objectives on the occupied territories. Unfortunately, Armenia is using

civilians in order to have more people on the ground, because their demographic situation is very bad, and we have video about these civilians being just next to the guns, and of course...

**-I'm sorry to interject Mr. President, that civilians on their side have been killed in this fighting and they would dispute exactly why it was on the 27th of September this violence flared up again. Let me bring you to a promise that your foreign minister made last year that said it was necessary to take concrete measures to prepare the populations for peace. What we are seeing right now is the opposite of that. How are you trying to limit the suffering of civilians?**

-You know we are not responsible for this outbreak. As I said, we were a subject of a physical attack from Armenian army which is situated on the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. Above from that, the current Armenian regime did everything in order to destroy the negotiation process. Exactly one year ago, Armenian prime Minister at the rally in the occupied area of Azerbaijan made a statement that 'Karabakh is Armenia' and that statement actually destroyed negotiation process. Because the principles which are on the table and which are the basis for settlement demand the return of the occupied territories to Azerbaijan. And when Armenian prime minister says that not a centimeter of land will return to Azerbaijan, when he says that 'Karabakh is Armenia', when they organize illegal settlement of foreign people on the occupied territories which is a brutal violation of Geneva Convention, they destroy negotiation process. After that, in order to make us responsible for that, they attack us three times-on July, August, and September. When we beat them on the battlefield, they call everywhere, they make a plea to everyone, 'stop Azerbaijan'. We want to stop, but we want the occupation to stop. Therefore, the main message should be to Armenia, we are not on Armenian land, we are on our land. Our land for 27 years...

**-One thing that Armenia will say is that Turkey is really providing quite a strong influence, including supplying things like military aid. To what extent would you say Turkey are accelerating and pushing your country and your actions in this conflict?**

-This is absolutely false information. Turkey for us is a strong ally, partner and brotherly country, and of course the statements expressed their position and we are very grateful to Turkish government, to Turkish President, Turkish people for this support. But Turkey in no other way is involved in this conflict. Armenia bringing such fake news to the media wants to diminish the capacity of Azerbaijani army. We are fighting ourselves. Yes, we purchased weapons from Turkey, but not only. Our main supplier of weapons is not Turkey. And probably everybody knows about that. So, the fact that we buy modern Turkish equipment including the fighter drones should not be a problem for anyone. Because Armenia gets weapons free of charge. We pay for them and Armenia gets free of charge. Turkey in no other way is involved in the conflict.

**-We keep talking about weapons and we keep talking about fighting here. Is diplomacy still an option? Will you sit down, have talks with the prime minister of Armenia to find a different way out of this conflict?**

-I can tell you, that during my term as the president, I had maybe tens of talks with two former Armenian presidents and the current prime minister. During those previous debates we made a substantial progress on negotiation table. We elaborated the principles which today are the basis

for the settlement of conflict. And we were constructive. Negotiations are taking place since 1992. Can you imagine? For almost 30 years. And we were living with hopes, mediators were telling us that you should wait a little bit, there will be more constructive approach from Armenian side. But when this prime minister came to power, as a result of the coup d'état two years ago, he destroyed completely negotiation process. And I had meetings with him many times. But these meetings were absolutely senseless. And he told me that they are not going to give the territories back, they told me that Nagorno-Karabakh must be, how to say, adjusted to Armenia. So this is absolutely unacceptable demand on me, and also unacceptable for mediators. Armenian government should change their position, should refrain from maximalist position, should stop telling that Karabakh is Armenia because this is not true and this is destroying negotiations process and of course, we are going back. By the way, tomorrow, our foreign minister will be in Geneva, meeting with the ambassadors of the Minsk Group. And as far as I know, Armenian foreign minister was supposed to go there in the beginning of the month, but he ignored that. He is not there. Our foreign minister is there. It shows who wants negotiations and who wants just accusations against Azerbaijan.

**-President Aliyev, thank you for joining us on this special program on Euronews. Thank you very much for your time.**

-Thank you.



**President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has been interviewed by CNN-Türk television.**

**-Mr. President Ilham Aliyev, welcome to CNN-Türk. Thank you for giving this interview on such historic days for Azerbaijan. Without further ado, let me immediately move on to the questions. First of all, what is the latest situation in the operations? Are they going as planned? What territory has been liberated from occupation?**

-Everything is going according to plan. The Azerbaijani army is restoring the territorial integrity of the country these days. The operation continues successfully. One city and many villages have already been liberated from the occupation. This once again proves that the Azerbaijani people will never put up with the occupation. We have repeatedly said this: Karabakh is our historical and ancestral land! Unfortunately, the negotiations held for a long time did not lead to any results. Therefore, of course, Azerbaijan had to restore its territorial integrity on its own and is doing exactly that.

As you know, on 27 September the Armenian armed forces launched a new offensive against us. Many of our cities and villages are being shelled. Today the death toll among our civilians is about 30 people. The Armenian armed forces are shelling our cities and villages, about a thousand houses have been destroyed or seriously damaged. But everything is going according to plan, and I hope that the tasks before us will be fulfilled.

**-Mr. President, I would like to return to the processes in the zone of operations again. As we know, the Armenian army began shelling Azerbaijani cities outside the conflict zone with ballistic missiles. In particular, it is targeting settlements in the second largest city of Azerbaijan, Ganja, a power plant in Mingachevir with ballistic missiles. What do you think was the goal?**

-In my opinion, this is a sign of helplessness of the Armenian army and the crimes of the military-political leadership of Armenia because violence against civilians, the shelling of settlements and the destruction of peaceful cities with ballistic missiles is considered a war crime. This indicates that Armenia cannot resist us on the battlefield. Losing the battle and in an effort to stop us, and in order to harm the civilian population as much as possible, it resorts to such heinous acts. As you noted, Ganja and Mingachevir are cities that are far from the war zone. At the same time, our cities located near the front zone are bombarded every day. The nearest district is Tartar. From one to two thousand shells are dropped on the city of Tartar every day. The main purpose of this is violence against civilians. This once again demonstrates the fascist essence of Armenia, the fascist essence of its regime. But this does not frighten the Azerbaijani people and has no impact whatsoever. Our citizens living in these regions, in these cities and villages stand firmly. They say: long live the Motherland, may our lands be liberated from occupation as soon as possible. They will remain in these places to the end and will provide our army with moral support.

**-If Armenia continues shelling civilian settlements, will there be any change in your current position?**

-No, there should be no change in our position. We are not fighting against the Armenian people. I have already spoken about this many times. We are waging a fair fight. We want to restore our territorial integrity, we are doing this and we have achieved success in this matter and in this direction. Azerbaijan has never fought against the civilian population and against civilians. The other day I said that we have no problems with the Armenian people. Thousands of Armenians live in Azerbaijan, and they are our citizens. The Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh today are also our citizens. All our goals are military. We have every right to destroy military targets because they have caused great damage to our army and cities. Therefore, our duty is to destroy them and ensure the safety of our population.

**-Armenia's bombardment of civilian settlements with ballistic missiles is essentially a war crime, an act contrary to the Geneva Convention. In this context, do you plan to put forward any initiatives regarding war crimes before the UN? Do you collect evidence of these crimes on the ground?**

-We certainly do. All of their war crimes are already being recorded. Unfortunately, the international community did not react to the war crimes that were committed against Azerbaijan and our people earlier. The Khojaly massacre is an act of genocide that took place in front of the whole world. However, the then military-political leadership of Armenia was not held accountable for this. The destruction of our cities and villages, the appearance of more than a million internally displaced persons – the international community did not take any action in this regard. Therefore, this issue has not been resolved for many years because no distinction is made between the occupier and the victim of the occupation. And the shelling of our cities and villages by the Armenian armed forces with ballistic missiles today is a war crime. The leadership of Armenia, of course, must and will bear responsibility for this.

**-So far you have received several calls for a ceasefire. You have personally answered them. But looking at the 30-year history of the conflict, do you think that these calls will produce results?**

-I believe that these calls should not be just calls for a ceasefire. We have repeatedly said that sanctions should have been applied to the occupying state of Armenia. If sanctions had been applied in due time, then, perhaps, this issue would have been resolved long ago. Very serious pressure should have been put on Armenia – not in word but in deed. Unfortunately, this did not happen. Therefore, this process dragged on for 30 years. Negotiations that have been fruitless for 30 years are already losing their point. In addition, recently, the military-political leadership of Armenia, both with aggressive actions and aggressive statements, disrupted the process of negotiations. In other words, it dealt a crushing blow to the talks. To say that “Karabakh is Armenia” essentially means an end to the negotiations because the essence of the negotiations is that the occupied lands should be gradually and on a step-by-step basis returned to Azerbaijan. This is enshrined in the fundamental principles. To say that “Karabakh is Armenia” actually means an end to this process. There were other similar statements. After that, in July, Armenia attacked Azerbaijan in the direction of the state border, killing many soldiers and one civilian. Therefore, the restoration of the ceasefire must be ensured on certain conditions. First of all, we should be given a schedule for the withdrawal of the Armenian armed forces from the occupied lands. We

have already communicated our position on this issue to the Minsk Group. I hope that our calls and proposals will not remain unanswered.

**-I think that speaking about the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, France should be mentioned separately. What can you say in connection with France's position on this issue?**

-I have already spoken about this several times. We have always perceived the Minsk Group as a group, and this is still the case today. We believed that the co-chair countries of this group should remain neutral, not support any of the parties, because otherwise their mediation mission would be called into question. Until recent events, they managed to maintain neutrality to a certain extent. We know that the Armenian lobby is strong in these countries. It can and does influence the governments of these countries. We see today that the Armenians living in various countries are conducting an organized black propaganda campaign against Azerbaijan. Unfortunately, some countries have recently demonstrated a lop-sided position. There were cases of support for one of the parties. This is unacceptable. We have expressed our position on this matter. If mediators want to remain mediators and continue to deal with this issue, then they should be more responsible and not take sides. They should try to take actions intended to resolve this issue so that the conflict is resolved as soon as possible, so that the ceasefire can then be restored and a lasting peace can be established.

**-Why did you say that French President Emmanuel Macron should apologize?**

-You also know that there have been accusations against us. Official statements said that Azerbaijan and Turkey had allegedly transferred members of terrorist groups to the region even though there is no evidence of that. Ten days have passed since those statements. So far, we have not been presented with any evidence. This is injustice to us. These statements were made on the basis of false information. This was said either on the basis of unverified and unconfirmed information or on purpose. It is hard to say. In any case, each country must defend itself. Naturally, we are responding to injustice against us. We cannot but react to this. There was another statement – “Azerbaijan wants to conquer Nagorno-Karabakh”. This statement is also completely contrary to international laws because Nagorno-Karabakh is our land. How can a country conquer its own land? Such statements completely contradict the mandate of the Minsk Group. We just want the internally displaced persons who have been expelled from their native lands for about 30 years to return to their homes so that the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan is ensured. The territorial integrity of Azerbaijan is as important as the territorial integrity of other countries.

**-Speaking of black propaganda, since the start of the counter-offensive, a black propaganda campaign against Azerbaijan has been carried out on social media. What can you say about this? What facts do you have in this regard?**

-You know, black propaganda against us has been going on for many years. There are several reasons for this. One of them is that Azerbaijan is pursuing an independent policy on a global scale. The interests of the Azerbaijani people are at the center of our policy. We have not been, do not want to be and will not become an instrument in the hands of other countries. The development of today's Azerbaijan, the development achieved in all directions testifies that Azerbaijan is on the

right path. Look at the successes we have achieved in international relations. Azerbaijan is recognized as a responsible and reliable country on a global scale now. We currently chair the second-largest international organization after the United Nations – the Non-Aligned Movement. We were able to achieve this with the support of 120 countries. Today Azerbaijan is a political, geographic and energy bridge between Europe and Asia. In other words, we have achieved all these successes also thanks to an independent policy. Some countries did not like this, some countries tried to look down on Azerbaijan but our resolute position did not allow them to do this. Therefore, one of the reasons for the pressure exerted on us is precisely the fact that we are pursuing an independent policy, we are going our own way, we are not acting on anyone's order and we are not bowing to anyone. There are other reasons as well. This is a long story, it may well be the topic of a separate interview. As soon as these events occurred, those who regularly conducted black propaganda against us, non-governmental organizations, circles, media representatives of some countries immediately took action to tarnish the image of Azerbaijan, slander us, invent utter lies about us in order to form a false opinion and a wrong idea about this conflict.

Of course, by fighting against these accusations on our own, we have achieved some success. But our possibilities are also limited. Our voice often falls on deaf ears. We are not provided with an international platform. International media structures are more on the side of Armenia and spread false information about the conflict. Therefore, taking this opportunity, I want to thank the representatives of the media of brotherly Turkey for the fact that these days they are communicating the truth about this war to the whole world, transmitting information live – the destroyed cities, dropped missiles, the city of Ganja, the city of Mingachevir, the city of Tartar. In other words, this information, transmitted mostly by Turkish media, serves to form a fair opinion about the conflict.

**-Mr. President, a few days before the start of the operation, you made an appeal to the leaders attending the UN General Assembly in New York, the United States. You appealed to the whole world. In your speech, you said that some terrorist groups were being sent to Armenia, and you drew attention to this issue. You emphasized, in particular, the need to pay attention to this issue. Three days after this statement, Armenia launched an offensive against Azerbaijan. What intelligence does Azerbaijan have on this issue today?**

-In that speech, I also said that Armenia is preparing for a new war, we have information about this and Armenia must be stopped. As for the existence of camps of terrorist organizations in Armenia, we had these data before.

**-What are these terrorist groups?**

-First of all, there were camps of PKK terrorist groups in the Azerbaijani lands occupied by Armenia. We have new intelligence information – some of it has already been published in the media. There are already documents and audio information about their negotiations and contacts. This question did not raise any doubts in us because Armenia is a terrorist country. During the first Karabakh war, dozens of terrorist acts were committed against us – in the metro, buses, ships. I believe that the world should recognize the Armenian terror as a disgusting fact known in the world. The man who committed the terrorist act in the French airport in the 1980s was subsequently

handed over to Armenia, then released and declared a hero. Therefore, terrorists from various countries flock to Armenia these days. According to our information, Armenians and representatives of other nationalities from the Middle East flock to Armenia to participate in the unjust war against Azerbaijan.

**-I would like to return to the topic of the OSCE Minsk Group. Russia is one of its co-chairs. What are your expectations from Russia in the region?**

-Russia as a co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group also carries out a mediation mission, of course. We have no problem with this. At the same time, Russia is the only country among the three co-chair countries that is our neighbor. Naturally, we have long-term historical relations with Russia. At present, Russia is developing ties with both Armenia and Azerbaijan. This is a very important fact. Therefore, there are no problems either in the bilateral format or within the Minsk Group. During these events, Russia's position has been responsible.

**-Mr. President, what is Iran's position on this issue?**

-Iranian officials have supported Azerbaijan's just cause. A few days ago, Iranian officials said that the occupation must be stopped, the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan must be restored and our IDPs must return to their native lands. This is a fair position.

**-Have you had any contact with US President Donald Trump in this process? Do you consider the presence of the United States in it important?**

-America is also a co-chair of the Minsk Group. Together with two other co-chairs, they participate in these affairs. I had no contact with the President of America. However, high-ranking US officials have naturally expressed their opinion on this issue and in connection with these events. At the same time, the distinguished Donald Trump also made a statement on this matter. I believe that his statement was complete and logical. Our bilateral ties with America are developing successfully. In many areas, we act as partners. Naturally, America as a superpower expresses its position on this issue. We are satisfied with their position as well.

**-In July, Armenia attacked the city of Tovuz. Now, in the course of this operation, it strikes at civilian sites and settlements again. You have already said that Armenia is doing this in order to drag Azerbaijan into a provocation. Apart from being drawn into a provocation, does the shelling of these settlements, in particular the city of Tovuz, the Mingachevir power plant and other similar targets, pose a threat to energy security in the region? Can this be viewed as a transformation of energy infrastructure into a target? In particular, I mean the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, the TANAP project. What is your take on that?**

-This, of course, is also one of Armenia's goals. They did not even conceal this, and the statements of the Armenian leadership before these events indicated that they intended to strike at our strategic energy infrastructure – pipelines, as well as the Sangachal oil and gas terminal, one of the largest oil and gas terminals in the world. In fact, one of the reasons for the Tovuz events was precisely this – to occupy new Azerbaijani lands, then strengthen their positions at the negotiating table and, at the same time, either approach our strategic energy communications or take them under control and then dictate their will to us. This is always part of the plans of the Armenian state. They don't

conceal that. The strike on the Mingachevir power plant is also an integral part of this plan because it is the largest plant not only in Azerbaijan but also throughout the entire South Caucasus. Even though we have built many stations in recent years, the Mingachevir station today is our largest station providing electricity to a significant part of the country. If it failed, then certain problems could have arisen in relation to energy issues, of course. Today Azerbaijan exports crude oil, natural gas and electricity. We export our surplus electricity. These actions were aimed at our economic potential and once again showed the whole world the criminal essence of Armenia and the Armenian regime.

**-Mr. Aliyev, how big is the Azerbaijani population of Nagorno-Karabakh?**

-Today there is not a single Azerbaijani in Nagorno-Karabakh. They have all been expelled from there. The entire Azerbaijani population was expelled both from the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and from seven districts adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh – in Soviet times, Nagorno-Karabakh was an autonomous region. In Soviet times, in the late 1980s, Azerbaijanis constituted 25 percent of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijanis accounted for 98 percent of the population of the city of Shusha. Shusha is our ancient historical city. At the first stage, all Azerbaijanis were expelled from Shusha, then from Khankandi, other cities and villages, and after that from seven districts adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh. Today, there is no Azerbaijani population in Nagorno-Karabakh and the adjacent occupied districts. We will now go back there. We already started going back four years ago. But after the end of this confrontation, we will, of course, return to these regions.

**-You said that Azerbaijanis were expelled from the occupied Karabakh lands. But at present, a large Armenian population also lives in other Azerbaijani lands. What can you say in this regard?**

-This is natural because there are representatives of many nationalities living in Azerbaijan. They live like one family. Azerbaijan is known as a multicultural country worldwide. This is acknowledged by the United Nations, as well as other international organizations operating in the humanitarian field. Azerbaijan is the land of tolerance, ethnic and religious tolerance. Thousands of Armenians live in our country today and they are our citizens. They also live normally, like all other nationalities. Of course, I am sure that after the end of this war and conflict, the Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh today will live with us. Azerbaijan is a multinational country. This has been the case throughout history. I think this is our great advantage.

Representatives of other nationalities do not live in Armenia. Armenia is one of a handful of countries in the world where 99 percent of the population is Armenian. All other nationalities were expelled from there. First of all, the Azerbaijanis were expelled, then the rest. Armenia is a mono-ethnic state, and this once again proves that it is a racist country. Representatives of no other nationality can live there. They are either unable to withstand the torment and leave or they are expelled by force.

**-Dear President, I have a few more questions left, let me ask them. If we come back to the topic related to the theater of operations, has there been a difference after the inclusion of**

**unmanned aerial vehicles and armed unmanned aerial vehicles in the arsenal of the Azerbaijani army?**

-There is a big difference. Armed unmanned aerial vehicles made in Turkey are a type of weapon created on the basis of the latest and modern technologies, only a few countries in the world have such capabilities. This is a manifestation of the technological, economic and intellectual potential of Turkey. Of course, the possession of such opportunities facilitates our work and saves the lives of our citizens, soldiers, because without them we would have to strike at tanks, cannons and other Armenian equipment from the ground. And this could lead to great human losses. These vehicles give us a great advantage in keeping human losses low. At the same time, they are technologically advanced.

**-By the way, speaking of air defense systems, the Armenian side has, in particular, such modern air defense systems as S-300 which it had acquired from Russia. The Azerbaijani army also has defense systems, but not these weapons. Do you think this creates a double standard?**

-No, we have anti-aircraft guns for S-300 which we bought from Russia. We have purchased a large amount of weapons from Russia. There are no restrictions in that area. Therefore, I cannot speak of double standards. The only difference is that we buy them and they are very expensive systems. Armenia often receives them free of charge – either as a gift or as a loan. But this loan remains on paper and is never repaid. Naturally, if this expensive armament had not been provided to Armenia free of charge, then Armenia’s possession of it could not even be a subject of discussion and the conflict would have been settled long ago. The free armament has instilled confidence in them that they would be able to hold these lands under occupation forever. The difference is this. We have the opportunity to acquire weapons from Russia. We buy weapons from other countries as well. There are no restrictions on this issue. There are some countries that have imposed an embargo on the sale of weapons to us but this does not create any particular problems for us because the arms market is now more diversified and its geography is expanding. I recently said that the Turkish defense industry is developing so rapidly today that, I hope our equipment with Turkish weapons will rise to an even higher level in the future.

**-I would like to touch upon the issue that has drawn our attention here. Wherever we were, in Baku or cities in the conflict zone, in Tartar, we saw the flags of Turkey everywhere next to the flags of Azerbaijan. What would you like to say about this?**

-In fact, it has always been this way, because Turkey is not only an ally and the closest country for us. Turkey is a fraternal country for us, just like Azerbaijan is for Turkey. The flag of Turkey is a native flag for us, as native as the flag of Azerbaijan. But, of course, this conflict, the clear position of Turkey during these battles, the statements of Mr. President, my brother Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the support provided to Azerbaijan, the words that “Azerbaijan is not alone” in people’s letters coming from Turkey have, of course, further increased the love of Turkey. You are also witnessing that the flags of Turkey and Azerbaijan are waving together in all our regions. At the same time, the flags of Turkey and Azerbaijan are waving together in Turkey today. The video footage shown to me is also very touching and we are glad that our Turkish brothers there decorate cars and

buildings with the flags of Turkey and Azerbaijan. In other words, it is a symbol of true brotherhood and solidarity. There is no other country that would support Azerbaijan like Turkey. There is no country in the world that would support Turkey the way Azerbaijan does. This is our great asset.

**-My last question, dear President. If the prime minister of Armenia Pashinyan were in front of you instead of me now, what would you tell him?**

-Basically I have nothing to say to him. We have met many times. Two years ago, in our first contacts after he came to power, I think we had a very good conversation. I had hopes that he, as the new prime minister, would introduce amendments and changes to Armenia's aggressive policy and understand that as long as this conflict remains unresolved, peace will not come to this region. As a person who came to power as a result of a coup and made big promises, he will not be able to fulfill them because if the relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia are not normalized. And then there is no need to talk about the economic development of Armenia. I was hoping that he understood this and the first messages from Armenia were very positive. We showed restraint, taking into account their request, and strengthened the ceasefire. It is possible to say that the ceasefire was rigorously observed in the last two years. The Minsk Group co-chairs also noted this in their statements. But what happened next? We realized that he deceived us. I think that this is a very wrong path in politics. You can't lie. Our words do not differ from our deeds. But the words given to us turned out to be a lie. His words that "Karabakh is Armenia, full stop" actually put an end to the negotiations. After that, there were other provocative statements, including such that Azerbaijan should negotiate with Nagorno-Karabakh, i.e. the so-called "Nagorno-Karabakh republic". This was a blow to the format of the negotiations. Not only we but also the Minsk Group opposed this. Then in July, they carried out a military provocation in Tovuz, in August they sent a sabotage group and last month they already carried out a large-scale offensive. Therefore, I have said everything to him. Addressing the Armenian people, I want to say that they should hold their government accountable, demand that it stop the fire, end the occupation, not send their children to war, do not send them to Azerbaijan because the so-called "army of the Nagorno-Karabakh republic" consists of citizens of Armenia by 90 percent. In other words, there is no such thing as the "army of Nagorno-Karabakh". Why should a person born in Armenia fight against us on Azerbaijani soil? Therefore, I want to tell the Armenian people that the Armenians live in peace today and will continue to live in Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijani state is doing everything possible for their normal life. I want to tell the Armenian leadership: the sooner you leave the occupied lands, the better it will be for you.

**-Dear President, on these historic days when the fighting continues, you have expressed very important thoughts. Once again, on behalf of the CNN Türk TV channel, I express my deep gratitude to you.**

-I also thank you and CNN Türk TV channel, which broadcasts wonderful reports every day. Interesting live discussions with renowned people are organized in your studios. I express my gratitude to your channel for the unequivocal support of Azerbaijan. Let me also thank all representatives of the Turkish media for being with us on these difficult days.



**-Thank you very much, thank you again!**

-Thank you!

**On 6 October, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by the Russian “Perviy Kanal” television.**

**-My name is Yevgeniy, I am a correspondent of "Perviy Kanal". Thank you very much!**

President Ilham Aliyev: Very nice to meet you. Thank you!

**-Ilham Heydar oglu, you have repeatedly stated that the goal of the current offensive operation is the return of Karabakh. "Karabakh is our land and we will return there" – these are your words. Quite an unequivocal position. But the position of the opposite side is no less unambiguous – "We will not give up an inch of land". This, as it turns out, is a road to nowhere. In your opinion, what should happen for Azerbaijan and Armenia to sit down at the negotiating table?**

-First of all, four resolutions of the UN Security Council, which were adopted in 1993, at a time when the Armenian occupying forces were seizing the territories of Azerbaijan, must be implemented. These resolutions send a very clear signal to the aggressor. They state that an immediate, unconditional and full return of the occupied territories must be ensured. Twenty-seven years have passed since then. The Armenian side does not comply with these resolutions, ignores them and tries in every possible way to freeze the conflict as much and as far as possible. All calls from the international community, including the OSCE Minsk Group co-chair countries, that the status quo is unacceptable and must be changed, remain in the air. Therefore, our position is based on the norms and principles of international law and on historical justice. Meanwhile, the Armenian position is based on historical lies and violation of the norms and principles of international law. As soon as the resolutions of the UN Security Council are implemented by Armenia, as soon as Armenia agrees to the withdrawal of its troops from the occupied territories, I am sure that both sides can come to an agreement that will establish peace in the Caucasus in a short time.

**-Fighting has been going on for more than a week now and, judging by the video footage circulated by both sides, it is clear that the fighting is quite intense and involves heavy losses. Can you cite these figures from the Azerbaijani side?**

-On our side, as a result of shelling from Armenia and from Nagorno-Karabakh, 27 civilians have been killed and more than 170 civilians have received wounds of varying degree of severity. More than 800 houses have been destroyed. The current escalation of the confrontation began on 27 September, when shelling of Azerbaijani settlements, as well as our combat positions, began from the occupied territories, as a result of which civilians and servicemen were killed in the very first minutes of this attack. We were forced to take adequate action and quickly launched a counteroffensive. As a result of this counteroffensive, we suppressed a large number of firing points and combat positions of the opposing side and liberated a part of the occupied territories in the northern and southern directions. Therefore, many settlements of Azerbaijan, citizens living there, can already live normally there because they are beyond the reach of Armenian artillery. In recent days, however, the shelling of the territory of Azerbaijan is carried out by long-range artillery from the territory of Armenia, using such deadly systems as "Point U" and "Elbrus", which represents a flagrant violation of the Geneva Convention, a crime, a war crime. The shelling of the

town of Tartar, which is located in the immediate vicinity of the conflict zone, continues this morning too. The population of Ganja, the second largest city of Azerbaijan, was also shelled. One missile hit the territory of our largest power plant in Mingachevir. More than 10 of our cities and hundreds of villages are subjected to massive artillery bombardment. This is an old tactic of the Armenian side. Every time they suffer defeats on the battlefield, they resort to such ignoble actions, trying to harm the civilian population and thus attempting to stop the counteroffensive of the Azerbaijani army. But they are not succeeding and will not succeed.

**-Is it possible to talk about military losses?**

-Military losses. To date, the information related to this is confidential. The Azerbaijani public will be informed about this after the end of the active phase of hostilities.

**-You are calling on Turkey to participate in the settlement of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. What exactly, in your opinion, should this participation consist in? Should there be a military or political effort?**

-I said this yesterday, proceeding from the fact that Armenia's aggressive actions continue, proceeding from the fact that Armenia is trying in every possible way to involve as many countries as possible in this conflict. I spoke in an interview about the inadmissibility of such a policy. The conflict should not go beyond the borders of Armenia and Azerbaijan. In fact, the conflict does not even enter the territory of Armenia. Despite the shelling from the Armenian territory, we do not strike any strikes on the territory of Armenia, we do not go into the territory of Armenia although there are all the possibilities to do that. The Armenian side is trying to drag the CSTO into this confrontation, but to no avail. It is trying to involve European countries. In essence, it is trying to internationalize this conflict, and we, accordingly, present our position on the inadmissibility of such an approach. Regarding my statement about Turkey's involvement. I meant, of course, only a political settlement, a post-conflict settlement. At the moment, Turkey is not in any way involved in the conflict, despite all rumors and insinuations in this regard. This is not supported by any facts – for example about the Turkish F-16 fighter shooting down an Armenian SU-25. This news circulated both in Russian and European media. There is no evidence. It turned out that the Armenian pilot, apparently due to a lack of professional training, crashed into the mountain. Such fake news are often thrown into circulation. I don't know for what purpose. I can only guess. But they have no foundation whatsoever. So, when the phase of the military confrontation ends, we will, of course, return to the negotiating table. By the way, from the very beginning of the hostilities, Azerbaijan said that we are not leaving the process of negotiations, we are counting on a political settlement, but there must be a settlement. We cannot sit and wait for another 30 years for pressure to be put on Armenia. Of course, Turkey, as a great country, as our neighbor and neighbor in the South Caucasus, has every right to take part in the mediation mission that will be carried out after the end of hostilities. Given that the current mediation mission has not led to any results for 28 years but led to inaction, to what we are seeing now, we must, of course, proceed from a pragmatic approach – who can really have a positive impact on events in the region, reduce escalation, establish a lasting peace and develop cooperation. Of course, first of all, I think, these are Turkey and Russia.

**-You mentioned European countries. You responded quite harshly to the President of France and called on him to apologize for the words about the mercenaries who are fighting on the side of the Azerbaijani army. Can you confirm once again today that the mercenaries do not participate in the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh on the side of Azerbaijan?**

-I have been talking about this all these days. I am surprised with such media speculation, and in my telephone conversations with the President of France I defended our position with sufficient reasoning. First, I asked for evidence, and if there is no evidence, then he should apologize to the Azerbaijani people. Secondly, I said we do not need mercenaries. Today Azerbaijan has a powerful army. According to all international ratings, it is among top 50 most powerful armies in the world. We have 100,000 fighters under arms, not counting the reservists and not counting other paramilitary formations ready for battle. Today the Azerbaijani army is liberating our territories. Videos from the scene of hostilities show our artillery and drones in action, they should, Azerbaijani soldiers and officers planting flags in the lands already liberated from occupation. Therefore, these accusations are unfounded, we resolutely reject them and cannot allow such rumors and unverified data to somehow manipulate public opinion. Let them provide evidence. We are in the tenth day of hostilities, but no evidence has been presented to us.

**-If we assume that the hostilities are over and Azerbaijan has achieved its goals, what is the future for Karabakh given the number of Armenians living there? What will happen to them?**

-I have also repeatedly spoken on this topic before and during the escalation. As recently as yesterday, in an interview with a Turkish TV channel, I said that we consider the Armenians living in the territory of Karabakh our citizens. And we believe that after the settlement of the conflict, after the end of the occupation, the Armenian and Azerbaijani population of Nagorno-Karabakh should live together, as has been the case for many years. When the conflict began in the late 1980s, 75 percent of the population in Nagorno-Karabakh was Armenian and 25 percent Azerbaijani. The city of Shusha, where they held the so-called "inauguration" of the leader of the criminal regime and insulted the Azerbaijani people, consisted of the Azerbaijani population by 98 percent. The city of Shusha was founded by the Azerbaijani Panahali Khan. This is an ancient Azerbaijani city from which all Azerbaijanis were expelled. So after the end of the conflict, after a peaceful settlement, which, by the way, is reflected in the fundamental principles, the so-called Madrid principles, the Azerbaijani population should return to the occupied territories. It is explicitly stated that all displaced persons have the right to return to their places of residence. Thus, after a peace agreement is reached, and I hope that this will happen, the Azerbaijanis will return to Nagorno-Karabakh and will live where they used to live. My position has always been that we must return to the atmosphere that existed before the start of the conflict in the late 1980s. I think it is possible. It will not be easy after what the Armenian executioners did in Khojaly, having exterminated the civilian population, destroyed our historical and religious sites and erased the historical heritage of Azerbaijanis from these territories. It will not be easy. But I believe that we should strive for this. And my appeal to the people of Armenia and to those who live in Nagorno-Karabakh now was repeatedly expressed during the hostilities. I called on the Armenian people to reason their government. I called on Armenian mothers not to send their children to the occupied territories. It is probably no secret for anyone that the so-called army of Nagorno-Karabakh does not exist. What

is called the army of Nagorno-Karabakh consists by 90 percent of the citizens of Armenia. I made these calls. I have not heard such calls from the Armenian side these days – apart from hatred, apart from aggression, apart from threats and apart from completely inappropriate actions. Our position is that we are in favor of a peaceful settlement of the conflict. I am confident that if there is political will on the part of Armenia, we will be able to achieve this.

**-Ilham Heydar oglu, sooner or later, all wars end in peace. How do you imagine this moment?**

-You know, it is difficult to talk about this because our people have experienced so much grief, so much suffering has been inflicted on them by Armenian occupiers that it is very difficult to imagine this moment now as a holistic picture. We have not had peace for over 30 years. What we had over the past more than two decades has been a truce. But everyone understood that it was unstable, it was not durable. Therefore, the co-chairs of the Minsk Group represented by the presidents of Russia, the United States and France made statements several years ago, there was more than one statement of this kind, that the status quo is unacceptable and that it must be changed. They perfectly understood and understand that this truce is very fragile and unstable. Today's escalation confirms this once again. Therefore, if we talk about peace, first of all, I see it as a political settlement that would be comprehensive, that would be long-term, that would be eternal with serious guarantees from leading countries of the world, countries that would be acceptable to both Azerbaijan and Armenia. I do not exclude that the composition of these countries may be different from the composition of the Minsk Group and its co-chairs today. Because the Minsk Group was set up in 1992, in completely different geopolitical realities, just after the collapse of the USSR and, to be honest, I don't quite understand the basis on which this group was established. Because there must be some principle on which this or that association or temporary format is created. Therefore, I think that, returning to what we talked about earlier, the active participation of regional powers, guarantees of international organizations and, of course, the return of Azerbaijanis to the lands that rightfully belong to them.

**-A clarifying question. What configuration can that be, in your opinion?**

-It is probably premature to talk about it. I think I am slightly jumping the gun already. I just want our neighbors and partners to know my position. I think that regional cooperation has already proved its worth in many areas. If we pay attention to recent years, we can see that Azerbaijan, together with its neighbors, has worked very hard to create a strong regional cooperation format – political, economic, transport, energy and any other. Suffice it to look at the achievements we have made after many years by signing the Convention on the Settlement of the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea. Almost from the very beginning of their independence, some of the five Caspian littoral countries could not agree but then, showing good will, we came to agreement and saw the advantages. Today, cooperation between such a great power as Russia and such a great power as Turkey, a NATO member, is much more sincere, durable and effective than cooperation of NATO member Turkey with, say, another NATO country that constantly accuses Turkey of something. These are new geopolitical realities. This was not the case in 1992. The world has changed. It is changing right before our eyes. And we must proceed from this, not from any dogmas, not from any assumptions or established opinions that this or that country has a potential for a solution. Today, when the conflict has entered an active phase and when the Armenian prime minister, as I

can see, is annoying world leaders with his phone calls, it is clear who has the potential for settlement. These are the countries that have the potential for a settlement, the countries Azerbaijan respects for dignity, justice and sincerity. They should be the guarantors of long-term peace.

**-Thank you very much for the detailed answers and for the interview.**

-Thank you!

**President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by TRT Haber (News) TV channel.**

**- Mr. President and Commander-in-Chief Ilham Aliyev, welcome to TRT Haber. Thank you for your time. How much of the occupied land has been retaken so far? What is the current stage of the fighting, and is it going according to plan?**

- Yes, everything is going according to plan. So far, all the tasks set have been fulfilled. Azerbaijan's Army is advancing successfully. Many settlements, one city and several villages have been liberated from occupation. Currently, fierce battles are ongoing in different directions.

As you already know, the city of Jabrayil and several villages of Jabrayil district were liberated yesterday. I hope that Azerbaijan's Army will continue to fulfill its mission successfully, and Azerbaijan's territorial integrity will be restored. It is our primary goal. This goal will secure historical justice. In the meantime, it should also be viewed as respect for international law because Nagorno-Karabakh and other occupied territories are Azerbaijan's historic lands. From the point of view of international law, these lands belong to the Azerbaijani state.

**- In response to the ceasefire calls, you said you did not make phone calls to any country's leader, but simply evaluated the situation with those who reached out. You stressed that the prime minister of Armenia Pashinyan, as usual, called and begged many heads of state. Based on your experience, do you think that other countries' ceasefire calls will work this time?**

- The ceasefire must be provided under certain conditions. The calls we have received so far are intended to ensure a truce, stop the war, and continue discussions. It is not elaborated on what kind of discussions there may be and based on what they may continue. We have been involved in these discussions for almost 30 years, and we have been doing that with certain hopes. If we had not had hopes, of course, we would not have participated in these discussions. Discussions have always been based on existing principles. Among these principles is the issue of restoring the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. Issues of a phase-by-phase liberation of the occupied territories, their return to us, and maintaining peace were discussion subjects. But Armenia has launched a new attack on us, violating the principles we have established from the very beginning.

Of course, we launched a counter-offensive and are liberating our lands thanks to Azerbaijani soldiers. Therefore, the issue of restoring the ceasefire alone cannot be a discussion topic. We have demands, and I have already officially stated them. We must have solemn guarantees. International mediators must confirm these guarantees to us. At the same time, we must be given a timetable for Armenia's withdrawal from the occupied territories, the dates on which it will leave each district. Of course, then the war will stop. We want this issue to be resolved peacefully, but it must be resolved. Some mediators want a ceasefire. The ceasefire has been in force since 1994. Why has this issue not been resolved over these years? Why were the United Nations' resolutions not implemented, and why no sanctions were imposed on the aggressor state? All of these questions remain valid. There are no answers to these questions. Today, as the glorious Army of Azerbaijan conducts its successful operations and liberates our ancestral lands, these calls are being made: do not move forward, take a break. War has its own rules, its laws. Every day has its own significance.

If we take a break, the other side will gather strength and deploy additional forces. Their remarks already show that they are also involving Armenians living outside Armenia in this war. Thus, they want to take this war beyond the region and turn it into a global war. Therefore, our position on the ceasefire is quite explicit. We are ready for that, but there are certain conditions that I have also announced.

**- You have. You have mentioned guarantees. What kind of a guarantee do you mean?**

- First guarantee – the prime minister of Armenia said, while on our lands, a year ago that "Karabakh is Armenia". He must apologize to the Azerbaijani people. Secondly, he must say that Karabakh is not Armenia. Third, he must respect the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. Fourth, he must declare the dates on which Armenian armed forces will leave each district. The Minsk Group co-chairs must approve these conditions. In that case, of course, the ceasefire will be restored, this issue will be resolved through discussion and the Azerbaijani people will return to their native lands. But we need to know when this will happen because we have been waiting for 30 years. The promises given to us and the words spoken for 30 years have not been implemented. The Azerbaijani people can no longer tolerate this. The government of Azerbaijan cannot stand this any longer. We need to be given specific dates of when they will vacate each district.

**- A lot has been said in the 30 years, as you have mentioned. How will you trust the word that will be given now?**

It is precisely why I say that we must be given specific dates in addition to words. If on that date – I do not know whether or not it will be provided – the Armenian armed forces do not withdraw from a given, then we will not honor the ceasefire.

**- Can this confrontation lead to a bigger war, a major regional crisis? Are you worried?**

- Armenia already wants that. That is the calculation behind their sordid deeds. We believe that this should not be allowed. This is a war between Azerbaijan and Armenia that we did not start. We have not caused this war - we are merely defending ourselves and want our lands back. We do not set our sights on Armenian lands. As a result of the clashes started by Armenians on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border in July, the Azerbaijani Army did not cross into Armenian territory, although we could have done that. We struck them hard and they retreated. There were no obstacles in front of us. We did not do that because, as I said, we do not have any military targets on the territory of the Republic of Armenia. Today, Armenia is attacking Azerbaijan from the territory of Armenia. Yesterday, Ganja was hit from the Armenia's territory, and so was Mingachevirt. We have a large power station there. One of the shells hit the station, although their ammunition is in such shape that some of them did not explode. Some were destroyed by our air defense systems. They are provoking us to attack Armenia, to strike at Armenia proper. Then they will tell the whole world that Azerbaijan is attacking us, save Armenia - come to Armenia's rescue.

**- If these attacks continue from within the borders of Armenia, will you maintain your current posture or...?**

- It is too early in the day to say that. We will continue to monitor conflict's course. In any event, the source of every strike on us is a legitimate target. We will have to hit those targets. Today,



Azerbaijan's Army strikes military targets only. This has been obvious to everyone thanks to the released videos. Everyone can see that. We are fighting only against Armenia's occupying army. We have never fought against the civilian population. We have not and will not do that.

**-I saw in Gashalti Garagoyunlu that five Azerbaijani citizens, including two children, were killed. The campaign's ultimate goal that started with the Azerbaijani Army's retaliation to the Armenian attacks of September 27 is already apparent: resolute liberation of Nagorno-Karabakh from Armenian occupation. From day one, you said that the fighting would be stopped only after an unconditional withdrawal of Armenia from Azerbaijan's occupied territories. You maintain the same position, correct?**

- Yes, my position has not changed. We must resolve this issue based on historical justice. Historical justice says that Karabakh is the land of ancient Azerbaijan, and all historical documents, all our historical sites confirm it. At the same time, we have always been very constructive at the negotiating table, and the proposals on the table make the resolution of this issue possible. There should be a step-by-step solution. At the first stage, Armenians must leave five districts, at the next stage, they must leave two more districts, then Azerbaijanis expelled from Nagorno-Karabakh must return to Nagorno-Karabakh, including Shusha, life is restored between two communities, the Armenia-Azerbaijan border is opened, trade begins, then people come into contact with each other and thus, peace comes to the region. So this is our position, and this is the attitude of international mediators and co-chairs. Armenia does not accept this. The Armenian defense minister even said a few months ago that they must start a new war for new territories.

**- There are three co-chairs of the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) – the United States, Russia and France. They are calling for a ceasefire. Has your answer changed? If your condition is not met, is there a possibility of a ceasefire before the Armenians withdraw from the occupied territories?**

- There is no change in our position. I said this to you again today. We are even ready to start working on a ceasefire if we are given the dates for the Armenian armed forces' withdrawal from our lands. But we must also remember that restoring the truce is not an easy task because a ceasefire is not restored unilaterally. There are very intense battles at the moment. Both sides should instruct their soldiers and officers on the ground. One side may follow it, but the other may not. So it is a complicated process. But if we are given the dates for the withdrawal, of course, we will provide this instruction. Then, if the Minsk Group's co-chairs and other relevant countries join in, the ceasefire can be restored and thus, the fighting can be stopped.

**- What do you mean by relevant countries?**

- Turkey. Turkey is a powerful country, a country with great potential globally; it is our neighbor, Armenia's neighbor, and the neighbor to the South Caucasus. Therefore, Turkey must be active in this process. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our Turkish brothers on my behalf, on behalf of the Azerbaijani people, especially my dear brother, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Turkey's support from the first hours is of particular importance. It is not just support for their brothers, and we are, all the people of Azerbaijan, are grateful for that. Turkey's determination is crucial so that these battles do not escalate. Turkey has said that it stood by Azerbaijan, and it was

with Azerbaijan until the end. That Azerbaijan is on the path of truth; justice is on its side. That was a warning to many other actors. Therefore, Turkey must be involved in the subsequent peace process. Of course, the peace process will begin, war cannot last forever, and the sooner it ends, the better. It is our opinion - a lasting peace can be established in the region.

**- Mr. President, when you say the co-chairs of the Minsk Group, you are leaving out France.**

- France is leaving itself out, not me. We treated the co-chairs equally during the entire process, and I have repeatedly said in my statements that Azerbaijan has different relations with each country. Of course, the level of these relations is also different. Meanwhile, we do not separate these countries on this issue, and I must say that these countries were united throughout the whole process until recently. They were impartial. They did not take sides. However, we knew that deep down, there probably was some bias. It is natural. But they never revealed it in their official engagements and interactions with us.

**- You urged French President Macron to apologize.**

- Yes, of course, because he accused us. He insinuated erroneous things. It is unacceptable for our country.

**- What were the accusations?**

- He said that Azerbaijan, together with Turkey, brought in terrorists to the region. He said this in a statement. He also noted that "Azerbaijan wants to conquer Nagorno-Karabakh and we will not allow that". Nagorno-Karabakh is our land. How can one conquer its own lands? Does not the co-chair country know that the Armenians have illegally settled in these lands and destroyed all our historical sites, mosques, and graves and razed our houses to the ground? Look at the images of Aghdam and Fuzuli. They keep pigs and cows in our half-destroyed mosques. This is an insult to all Muslims. Don't they see it? Therefore, the words "Azerbaijan wants to conquer Nagorno-Karabakh and we will not allow that" are unacceptable. This is why France is already excluding itself from this equal trio. We cannot remain silent.

**- The United Nations Security Council has historic decisions on this issue.**

- Of course, they voted for them. The French voted in 1993, so they should respect their vote.

**- With your permission, I have a few more questions. On the roads leading to the front line, in the cities and villages we visited and in the capital Baku last night, we saw the Turkish flag flying next to the Azerbaijani; all over residential buildings, offices, cars – everywhere. There is a similar picture in Turkey, as you may have seen in the news. After the victory in Jabrayil, there were demonstrations in support of brotherly Azerbaijan in Turkey's streets.**

- That's right. We are proud of that, and this is natural. Our brotherhood is eternal, and our brotherhood has stood the test of time. You know that the relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan are an example for the whole world. I have repeatedly spoken about this. I have often said at joint press conferences with my dear brother, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, that there are no other countries in the world as close to each other as Turkey and Azerbaijan, and these are not empty words. These are heartfelt sentiments. Our unity is based on our history, our common ethnic

roots, language, religion and brotherhood. The historic service of my dear brother Tayyib bey and myself is that we have created a modern Turkish-Azerbaijani union on a very solid foundation. Turkish flags have been present everywhere already in Azerbaijan, and Azerbaijani flags are everywhere in Turkey. We are not separate from each other. We are together. These events have once again shown that Turkey was the first to support us unequivocally and decisively. The President of Turkey's very bold and resolute statements were a warning to many countries – stay away, do not interfere, Azerbaijan is not alone, Turkey is next to it, and Azerbaijan is always with Turkey! We support each other in all matters, across all platforms, and our unity must last forever.

**- In the meantime, I would like to mention Pakistan. I see their flags everywhere too. Where do you think Russia stands? Russia has a special significance.**

- I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all other friendly and brotherly countries. After Turkey, the second country that supported us was Pakistan, followed by Afghanistan, and then several other countries. I thank each of them, the presidents of those countries. In this challenging period, their solidarity and support are essential for us and give us moral strength.

Russia is our neighbor. Our relations with Russia are developing successfully. Today, the ties between Russia and Azerbaijan are at a very high level in many areas. Both countries view this relationship as a strategic partnership, which is confirmed by the joint agreements. Russia acts as a large and a very responsible country. Positive messages are coming from Russia, and support for any party is not an issue. However, Armenia had high hopes for that. Armenia's goal in taking the conflict out of the region is to engage Russia. Why is Armenia currently attacking Azerbaijan from the territory of Armenia? Exactly to make us strike back so that they could appeal to the General Secretariat of the Collective Security Treaty Organization. They are a member together with Russia and other countries and say that Azerbaijan is attacking, come and help us. Why did they commit that provocation on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border this July? Tovuz is located far from the Karabakh region. What goals did they have there – one goal was to make us launch an attack, cross the state border – as I said, we had such an opportunity – and then ask the organization to come and fight with us against Azerbaijan. In other words, they want to involve Russia in this. It is yet another provocation, and I am sure it will fail.

**- When attacking Tovuz in July, could Armenia pursue any other goals - undermining energy security, perhaps? The TANAP and Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipelines are coming to mind.**

- Yes, of course, this could have been the case. There were several objectives because they had announced before that in the event of battles around Nagorno-Karabakh, they were ready to strike our critical infrastructure projects –the Sangachal oil and gas terminal and pipelines. Therefore, another goal of the attack on Tovuz district was to see how far they could go. Their primary objective was to cross the state border, occupy Azerbaijani lands, approach the TANAP pipeline or take control of it. But when this did not work, they retreated and asked for help from all mediators. I said that we had no targets in Armenian territory. Therefore, after four days, the attack stopped.

There may have been another reason. I have already spoken about this. Currently, Armenia is undergoing a deep crisis – both political and economic. Due to the crisis, political relations within Armenia have been disrupted. Pashinyan's authorities are imprisoning prominent opposition leaders. For example, they have deprived main opposition party's chairman of parliamentary immunity and arrested him. Criminal proceedings have been launched against the two previous presidents. There is no freedom of speech or freedom of assembly. They have taken over Constitutional Court by force and brought their people. Therefore, there are mounting concerns in Armenia. Pashinyan has orchestrated this attack to distract public opinion, involve Russia, destroy our strategic infrastructure, stabilize the country's situation, and occupy a part of Azerbaijani lands to then strengthen their hand in the talks.

**- Mr. President, let me ask you two more questions. In the regions where such conflicts, clashes and crises occur, there is always a smear campaign. What did you observe in this regard after Armenia launched its attacks? I would like to know your assessment.**

- You know, the smear campaign against Azerbaijan does not stop for a minute or a second. There are several reasons for this. First, the Armenian lobby constantly acts against us. Attempts to slander Azerbaijan, tarnish our reputation and sully our image never cease. There are Armenian lobbies in many countries of the world. This is no secret to anyone. They systematically and regularly attack us. They make up utter lies and slander. During this conflict, the Armenian lobby naturally mobilized all its forces and made efforts for a new smear campaign against us. But we are not worried about this. I told them to provide evidence, proof and facts. I also told the President of France – he called me twice – to provide facts. Eight days have passed since September 27.

**- What is Macron saying?**

- Nothing, he claims that they allegedly have intelligence. I asked him to share it with us. Where is this intelligence? It is not there and cannot be.

**- What does your intelligence say in connection with Armenia? Your intelligence materials dwell on external forces in Armenia – Lebanon, Syria...**

- We do have such information, and they are justified. We are now verifying that information. As a very responsible state, we do not mention that in our official statements. Of course, such information is available in the media, to politicians and political scientists. But we have to corroborate them. From the very beginning, we had intelligence that terrorists had been brought to Nagorno-Karabakh. They are being stationed and trained here.

**- What terrorist groups?**

- Terrorist groups such as PKK. There was plenty of information about this. A few years ago, we raised this issue on international platforms. They have been trained there and we cannot rule out that this remains the case. I will speak about it after I have 100-percent verified facts available to me. Today, the likelihood is very high. But unlike Armenia and some other countries, we do not provide information that has not been verified.

I can give you another example. We were accused that the Turkish F-16 fighter jet allegedly shot down the Armenian Su-25. I said: provide evidence. We have information that these are fabrications of the smear campaign. Today they became convinced that this was not true. But has anyone apologized to us? No! They began to slander us, tried to tarnish our reputation, and finally realized that it was a lie. Yet you have to apologize.

**- Correct me if I am wrong, but the acquisition of armed unmanned aerial vehicles by Azerbaijan's Army has made an enormous impact on the course of these events.**

- Indeed. It has had a considerable impact. Mashallah, these armed aircraft are the most advanced globally, and the fact that the Azerbaijani Army deploys them has dramatically boosted our power.

These vehicles have created ample opportunities for us and, at the same time, enabled us to avoid significant human losses. Because if we had not had these capabilities, it would have been much more difficult to destroy the fortifications Armenia had built across Nagorno-Karabakh and the occupied lands in 30 years - their tanks, cannons and multiple rocket launcher systems. More people could have died. So this perfect and technologically intelligent product testifies to the Turkish people's potential. We are a delighted country because we have such an ally and brother as Turkey. Of course, Turkey's moral support and the Turkish defense industry products at our disposal strengthen us, and the whole world can see that. The Turkish Army is the second strongest army in NATO today, and no-one can confront it. Everyone can see and understand this. We are also building an army based on the Turkish model but on a smaller scale. Inshallah, we will build it together. No-one in the region can confront us either. Our cause and that of Turkey is just. We are protecting ourselves and our citizens; we want to preserve our territorial integrity. We do not claim the lands of other countries. But what belongs to us must remain with us. For 30 years now, Armenians have been exploiting our ancient land, not allowing our people to return to these lands. International mediators have remained indifferent and paid no heed. That being the case, Azerbaijan will do it on its own.

**- I have shared information about the injury of your Armenian citizen during the attack on Ganja. We had the opportunity to conduct round-the-clock observations at the frontline, and the commanders reported that you were calling them.**

- Yes, this once again proves that Armenia is a terrorist country. Their actions fundamentally contravene the Geneva Convention. The shelling of civilians and cities is unacceptable. The city of Ganja is not a war zone. There are no guns or tanks in Ganja. Why are you firing at it? Out of hatred! Hatred of Azerbaijan and Turkey is in their blood. Unfortunately, the young generation in Armenia is raised in a spirit of such hatred. But this cannot make us deviate from our path. You know, the city of Tartar is practically destroyed. Our citizens in Tartar stand bravely and courageously. They are saying that we will rather die than leave our lands. How many shells have fallen on the city? There was a day when 2,000 shells fell on Tartar alone. And this is a small town.

As for my communications with the commanders, they are restoring historical justice. They are risking their lives. They are heroes; they save, liberate and return our lands. The liberation of Madagiz from the occupation is of great strategic importance. The settlement is not very large, but its strategic importance is tremendous. It is tough to capture it, as any military person can tell you.

It is incredibly difficult. But they captured it, Azerbaijan's flag was raised in Madagiz and on the same day, its historical name was returned to the village – Sugovushan. It is our historical name.

The capture of the city of Jabrayil requires extraordinary heroism, because, let me say again, for the past 30 years, during the ceasefire, several lines of fortifications were built there, and quite formidable ones. Also, the local terrain is a natural fortification in itself. Nagorno-Karabakh is located in the mountains. In other words, we are moving from bottom to top. Everyone understands how difficult it is. Therefore, Azerbaijani soldiers, Azerbaijani officers and generals show true heroism, courage, perseverance, and ensuring our territorial integrity at the cost of their lives. Inshallah, we will go forward to the end.

**- After Karabakh and the occupied lands are returned to Azerbaijan, what will you say to the Armenians living there?**

- I have already said it. A few days ago, I visited our wounded soldiers in a military hospital. I expressed my gratitude to them, and, during the meeting, I called on the Armenian people. I realized that it was not easy to say this in front of our servicemen because the Armenians wounded them. But I said that we have nothing against the Armenian people. The Armenian people must hold their government accountable. These battles were the result of the nefarious and dirty policies of their government. Our position remains unchanged. After our lands' liberation and the end of the occupation, the Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh and the Azerbaijanis, who will return there, will live together - as two communities in a single country. Today there are thousands of Armenians living in Azerbaijan. You also noted that the citizen wounded due to the Armenian attack on Ganja was an Armenian by nationality. Armenians live here. Nobody touches them as they are our citizens, and we have no problems with the Armenian people. They are just a hostage of their government.

Unfortunately, when Pashinyan came to power, he promised a lot. We also hoped that the old criminal regime was consigned to history. But instead, a new regime came and plunged its people into further suffering. This regime is killing our civilians and soldiers today. I am absolutely sure that the Armenian and Azerbaijani peoples will reconcile. Today, Armenians and Azerbaijanis live together in many countries. In Georgia, there are about 300,000 Azerbaijanis and 200,000 Armenians. Sometimes they live in the same village. There are no problems between them. In Turkey, Russia – there are about 700,000 Azerbaijanis with Russian citizenship, and they live together. There are no problems. Why shouldn't they live here? We used to live together. I remember my late father and I visiting Nagorno-Karabakh, Shusha in 1982. The mausoleum of our great poet Vagif was being inaugurated. During the ceremony at the mausoleum, Armenian and Azerbaijani poets recited poems in Azerbaijani and Armenian languages. It was a celebration of friendship. I witnessed that picture. Armenians used to live in Baku. We did not have any problems. We want to live together again - to live again as good neighbors with Armenia. The Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh are our citizens. We recognize them as such. I hope that after the end of this aggressive policy, our peoples will reconcile.

**- Did your late father bequeath any wisdom regarding Nagorno-Karabakh? If yes, what?**

- My father's path is the guiding light for me. It is my duty as his son and as President to continue his policy. When I was elected President for the first time, at the inauguration ceremony, I said that I would follow the path of Heydar Aliyev; I would not deviate from this path, which is the only one for Azerbaijan. I am committed to this path in all areas, in foreign policy, in the economic and social spheres, including the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. He was also pressured. In his time, they also exerted pressure on him, demanded that independence be granted to Nagorno-Karabakh. They said that Nagorno-Karabakh had seceded from you, broke away from you. He endured and withstood this pressure. He did not sign a single document that would contradict the interests of the Azerbaijani people because he was our people's leader. There was never any hesitation in my position on the Karabakh issue either. Today I am saying what I said 17 years ago: Nagorno-Karabakh is our land; the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan must be ensured! I will never allow a second Armenian state to be created on historically Azerbaijani lands. We are using all the means to restore our territorial integrity. We are getting close to that.

**- On behalf of one nation in two states, I express my deep gratitude to the President of Azerbaijan, Mr. Ilham Aliyev. You received us under such circumstances, during the war. We thank you as the Commander-in-Chief.**

- I also thank you, and I am glad that you referenced the famous saying by my father at the end of our conversation - these are the words of Heydar Aliyev, and one nation in two states is the guiding light for Turkey and Azerbaijan today. Turkey and Azerbaijan are one nation in two states.

**- Thank you very much.**

- Thank you.

**President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev has been interviewed by Al Arabiya TV channel.**

**Host: So, what was a cold war in the past has become fierce burning all over Azerbaijan and Armenia, a struggle which comes back from the past and moves the sounds of the shelling. Nagorno-Karabakh is in the headlines again and the word expands outside it emits interventions from international parties and warning of the holistic war which could turn to a regional war. The means of the solution international preventions will be the topics of our discussion with the president of Azerbaijan, President Aliyev. So joining us from Baku, President Ilham Aliyev. Welcome, sir.**

President Ilham Aliyev: Thank you.

**Host: President, we will start from these developments and the crisis between Azerbaijan and Armenia. So, what is the threshold of this escalation?**

President Ilham Aliyev: On the 27th of September Armenia launched a military attack on our military positions and civilians, our civilians suffered from that. We have victims among civilians. Information this morning was that 22 civilians were killed and 73 were wounded. Unfortunately, today we have dozens of wounded and again killed people, our ordinary villagers. We had to respond, and our response was adequate. We launched a counter-attack and as a result of this counter-attack we managed to suppress the firing positions of Armenia, which are situated on the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. We managed to liberate some of the territories, several villages and today we liberated the city of Jabrayil which has been under Armenian occupation for 27 years. Our successful military operation continues. And we are fully determined to liberate our land, and to restore our territorial integrity.

**Host: President Aliyev, apparently things are getting out of hand, or out of control between you and Armenia. This expansion in the operations, military operations, is there a limit for it?**

President Ilham Aliyev: Well, I don't think that things are going out of control. It is under control of Azerbaijani army. We are now in the offensive operation, our goal is to liberate our territories. I made a proposal to mediators and also, I made an appeal to Armenian people, to make responsible their government for occupation and to stop occupation. If Armenia agrees on that, if they will start liberating occupied territories which they keep illegally under control for almost 30 years, the war will stop. We don't need war. We were in the process of negotiations since 1992. And during this almost 30 years, there have been zero progress on negotiation table. Armenia did not want to implement resolutions of United Nations Security Council demanding full, immediate and unconditional withdrawal from our territories. On the contrary, their military political leadership was trying to occupy new lands. They were trying to launch, and they actually did in July, they launched a new military attack on Azerbaijan. So, we have to defend ourselves, defend our people and restore internationally recognized territory of Azerbaijan, which is recognized by all countries of world.



**Host: President Aliyev, if Armenia does not respond to this initiative which you have presented, this escalation will continue and there are no fear of the lives of the civilians and the cost will be very high.**

President Ilham Aliyev: Armenia is brutally violating the Geneva convention, not only by using heavy artillery to bomb our cities and villages, but also providing illegal resettlement of foreigners to the occupied territories. We want our territories to be liberated. We counted very much on the mediators. We have a mandate to facilitate finding a solution between the two countries. But instead of showing constructive approach on the negotiation table, Armenia launched a military attack on us in July. And we gave them adequate response. They sent the sabotage group which was planning to commit terror acts and the head of the sabotage group was detained and he gives evidence. And in September they launched artillery bombardment on our villages and cities, and more than 500 hundred houses of ordinary Azerbaijanis, who live close to the area of the conflict have been completely demolished or damaged. Therefore, Armenia must stop these aggressive actions they must commit to withdrawal of their troops from our territory. They must give us a time-table, or withdrawal from occupied territories. Their prime minister who said that ‘Karabakh is Armenia’ should now say that ‘Karabakh is not Armenia’ and after that, of course, we will be ready to put an end to hostility and to restore the ceasefire regime.

**Host: But President Aliyev, through Al Arabiya the Armenian president talked about negotiations. He said that the solution is through negotiations. What do you respond?**

President Ilham Aliyev: I agree. I also think that the solution is through negotiations but negotiations must have the substance. Armenia saying that ‘Karabakh is Armenia’, their prime minister said that, actually they destroy the principles on which the solution should be found. Because OSCE Minsk Group, whose co-chairs are Russia, United States and France, have elaborated for years during the negotiations the principles of settlement. And the first step in order to achieve the sustainable peace in our region, is the liberation of occupied territories. And when Armenian prime minister who came to power as a result of the coup d’etat two years ago, as a result of the so-called revolution which was sponsored by George Soros when he said that ‘Karabakh is Armenia’, he destroys the negotiation substance. There is nothing to talk about. Therefore, prime minister who is in charge in Armenia, must think very seriously about his destructive behavior, about his actions which led to military clash. We have been in the process of negotiations for 28 years and I had an experience in negotiations with the two former presidents of Armenia, and we were working in a more or less acceptable manner in order to find solution. We were making small steps but we were making steps. We were elaborating jointly with mediators the principles which should be the basis for settlement. And two years ago a person from the street who had no experience in political life, who in his all life was not even the head of a small company, who has no idea about geopolitics, who has no idea about international relations, who comes and he starts to destroy his own country and now Armenia is in crisis. He puts to prison the head of the major political party. He launches criminal investigation against two former presidents with whom I in different periods worked on negotiation. He establishes completely despotic regime, and destroys negotiation table. And what should we do? He makes insulting statements against Azerbaijan. He makes provocative steps and actually the mediators themselves

were very embarrassed with this strange, to put it mildly, behavior. He destroys negotiation process. Therefore, I say, to go back to negotiations, first, Armenian prime minister should say that 'Karabakh is not Armenia'. Because 'Karabakh is Armenia' is lie. Karabakh is Azerbaijan. He should say that he is committed to the principles which have been elaborated for 20 years, which provide return of occupied territories of Azerbaijan to us, to those who is the owner of those lands. He should give us now, after he launched this dirty military attack. He should give us a time-table of withdrawal from our cities. And we are ready to stop fire. Otherwise, we will do it by force, we will restore our territorial integrity by force and we will show him his place.

**President Aliyev, I cannot interrupt, because of the translation but there are three points which I'd like to comment on your answer. Number 1 – you were saying that Armenia is going through a crisis but we see that the Armenian people supporting their leadership and they salute how their leadership is trying to preserve them or protect them. The second point, is the only condition for Armenia to withdraw or retreat from saying that Karabakh is Armenian or are there any conditions or preconditions to go back at the negotiation table. And the third, who are the countries which the mediators spoke of who felt embarrassed?**

President Ilham Aliyev: The countries I already said the OSCE Minsk Group, the chairman of the Minsk Group of OSCE, Russia, United States and France and during the last years of my interaction with the representatives of this group, we had opportunity to exchange views. And neither myself nor them actually know what can be done in order to move negotiation forward. Because you know, negotiation principles and negotiation format has been established. It was not established unilaterally by Azerbaijan. It was proposed by the mediators and accepted by two countries, by Azerbaijan and Armenia. The format of negotiations is Azerbaijan and Armenia. This is a conflict between two countries. Prime Minister of Armenia said that is not a format which is acceptable. Azerbaijan has to negotiate with the so-called "Nagorno-Karabakh republic", which no country in the world recognizes, including Armenia itself. So, that was a deliberate act in order to disrupt negotiations because he knew that neither we, no mediators will accept it. And mediators Russia, United States, and France rejected this. Then, he said that 'Karabakh is Armenia' which none of his predecessors did before. None of them, because it means end of negotiations. Because the substance of negotiations is to return the territories to Azerbaijan by peaceful means, through negotiations. And then to provide the normal co-existence between Azerbaijani and Armenian community in Nagorno-Karabakh, because before the war, before Armenia occupied our territories, 25 percent of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh were Azerbaijanis. But today, not only Nagorno-Karabakh is occupied but seven districts surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh where Armenian population did not exist, but where there have been more than 700,000 Azerbaijanis. All of them were expelled. All their houses are destroyed. All our historical monuments, including our mosques are destroyed by Armenian barbarians and now when we were coming closer to making a progress there is a change in government in Armenia. The new people, the new team has absolutely nothing to do with politics, comes to power, makes this destructive statements and actions, launches military aggression on us. What we were supposed to do? We have to defend ourselves. That's what we do and we will do it until our territorial integrity is restored.

**Host: President Ilham Aliyev Russia and France also sent accusations to you in addition to for example Syrian mercenaries through Turkey. How do you respond to that?**

President Ilham Aliyev: We reject it completely. I had received two phone calls from French president during this last ten days, or last week and I told him that give us evidence. There is not a single evidence of the so-called Syrian fighters on our territory. I asked him when he called me on 27 September, and since that time I don't have any evidence. If they have this evidence why they didn't provided to us. Then, when he called me couple of days ago, he raised this issue again. He said that they have intelligence information. I said share it with us. It's not appropriate to accuse a country without providing any evidence and proof. Today I don't have any single evidence from France about this unacceptable accusation. There is no foreign fighters on Azerbaijani soil and I told French president that our army is almost 100 thousand people. What we do now on the battle field is showed in internet, everybody can see how our modern drones destroy Armenian tanks and anti-air systems. Our army is liberating one village after another. Our flag is being raised on the territories which had been under occupation for so many years. So these accusations are absolutely groundless. Another thing which I can tell you that Armenians make another fake news as if Turkish F-16 shot down Armenian SU-25. And that was fake news. That fake news was introduced into the media, European politicians started to exploit this fake information, and now, when it is proven that it didn't happen, no one even apologized. I demand apology from those who accuse us. I demand them to be responsible, to control what they say. We are not a country which will tolerate accusation. We are not a country which will tolerate insult. If we start saying what we think, I think there will be a lot of turbulence in those countries. They should leave Azerbaijan alone. They should leave the region alone. We here on our land, our land is occupied. If France wants self-determination for Nagorno-Karabakh let them give city of Marseille which is almost half inhabited by Armenians and let them announce Nagorno-Karabakh republic. And let them give them independence. Let's give independence to Corsica. Let give independence to Basques. Why they demand independence for Nagorno-Karabakh from us. What right do they have to demand it from us? They should stop these accusations, they should stop attacking Azerbaijan and damaging our image. And if we will start to talk about mercenaries and terrorists, I think those who accuse us, will find themselves in very embarrassing position. They better look to the mirror first, before accusing us.

**Host: In any case, some consider that if this crisis expands then your lands could turn into a battlefield for struggles where you have no benefit from, like a proxy war on your land. Don't you hear that? It could become a struggle of the region**

President Ilham Aliyev: No. There is no proxy war. Azerbaijan is an independent country. Our independence is recognized by the all international community. Azerbaijan has a very strong position on international arena. I can only give you two examples of our achievements. Several years ago with the support of 155 countries Azerbaijan was elected to United Nations Security Council. That's because of our independent policy and because of our country being very responsible member of international community. This year we had a Summit of Non-Alignment Movement in Baku with the participation of 120 countries. And Azerbaijan assumed chairmanship in Non-Aligned Movement. Unanimous decision of 120 countries were to award Azerbaijan with

this honorable duty. Can proxy country get this support? Proxy countries are miserable. No one respects them. No one pays attention to them. Today Azerbaijani word is important for the world. Today without Azerbaijan no project in the region, political, economic, energy, transportation can be achieved. And those who tell us proxy, they are proxy themselves. Let them look at the mirror. They are used to look to the countries from top to the down. We are not in that position. We defend our dignity, we defend our independence. No country in the world has a right to interfere into our affairs as they should understand it. It is in the interests of Azerbaijan to restore its territorial integrity, millions people of Azerbaijanis are waiting for their time to go back to their native land, and we the government will provide it. We will return our people to their homeland, we will restore our cities, restore our villages. We will raise the flag of Azerbaijan on all the occupied territories.

**Host: President Aliyev, Europe says that there is no solution for this crisis between you and Armenia, no military solution. How do you respond to that, for this European position?**

President Ilham Aliyev: I hear a lot about there is no military solution to the conflict. First, I do not agree with that. Second, okay, if there is no military solution, give us non-military solution. Give us diplomatic solution, comply with the United Nations Security Council resolutions. They were adopted by the highest international body of the world. And those resolutions demand, withdrawal of Armenian troops without any conditions from occupied territories. And we have been in negotiations since 1992, and during these 28 years had there been any diplomatic solution? Did mediators or other international organizations provide us with the political solution? No. They made this conflict frozen but it is not frozen. So, how long we are going to wait? Another 30 years? How long Armenians will continue to sit on our land and not allow our people to go back to their homes. If international community cannot provide implementation of international resolutions, Azerbaijan will do it itself. That's what is happening. And once again, I tell all those who want to facilitate, and also, Armenian leadership until it's too late, stop occupation now. Make a statement, that you accept principles of the settlement. You accept territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, you give us a time-table for withdrawal from all occupied territories, and prime minister of Armenia, who on Azerbaijani territories said that 'Karabakh is Armenia' should apologize in front of Azerbaijani people and he should say 'Karabakh is not Armenia' and then, we will stop.

**Host: President Aliyev, one last word, after all which you have mentioned to Armenia, is there anything else would you like to say through our news channel to the Armenian people and all those officials in Armenia.**

President Ilham Aliyev: You know, a couple of days ago, I visited the wounded Azerbaijani soldiers who suffered from Armenian attack. Speaking to them, I made an appeal to Armenian people. And I understood that for them what I was saying was not something very common. That's not probably the only thing which they wanted to hear. Because they were almost killed by Armenians. Sitting in front of them and expressing my gratitude to them, to their parents that they grew such heroes for us, I said, my appeal is also to Armenian people. Make responsible your government for what it has done. Don't send your children to Azerbaijan, don't send your children to occupied territories. Today, 90 percent of the so-called Nagorno-Karabakh army, consists of Armenian citizens. Stop this occupation. Leave Azerbaijani territory. Live on your own land and we will then have peace. We will try again to restore normal relations which Azerbaijani and

Armenian people had before. We will try. It will be not easy. But we will try to be neighbors, to live side by side. That is my, how to say, word to Armenian people. To Armenian government, I have nothing to say. I just already said what they have to do. If they want ceasefire, I already said apologize in front of us, give us a time-table of withdrawal. Not just words that we will stop it and we will negotiate. It will not work. Time-table day one, day two, day three, when they liberate which territory, and prime minister of Armenia who insulted the feelings of Azerbaijanis dancing on our sacred land of Shusha with his gang and saying that 'Karabakh is Armenia' should apologize and say that 'Karabakh is not Armenia'. That's my word.

**Host: President of Azerbaijan, thank you very much for joining us from Baku. Thank you very much, President.**

President Ilham Aliyev: Thank you.

**On October 2, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev was interviewed by Al Jazeera TV channel.**

**Correspondent: President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, thank you for talking to Al Jazeera.**

President Ilham Aliyev: Very glad to see you.

**Correspondent: It has been two decades since the present conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan has begun and you have been through lots of ups and downs but no peace has been succeeded so far. Why has this conflict been dragging for so long?**

President Ilham Aliyev: The main reason is that Armenia doesn't want peace. They want to keep our lands under occupation forever. They don't want to change the status quo and this is a reason why it lasted so long. Because otherwise, if Armenia demonstrated a good will and acted in compliance with the resolutions of main international organizations the conflict would have been resolved many years ago. Because back in 1993, when Armenia occupied part of our territories, the UN Security Council adopted four resolutions demanding immediate, full and unconditional withdrawal of their troops from our territories. But these resolutions remain on paper. Minsk Group which was created in order to facilitate, to find the solution, already is in activity for 28 years, and also without any results. Therefore, the main reason is they said the position of Armenia, the second reason is that lack of insistence from the side of the mediators and lack of pressure on Armenia to start demanding resolutions of the United Nations Security Council. On many occasions, I raised this issue and was saying that international sanctions must be imposed on Armenia to force them to comply with resolutions and to start liberation of our territories but my appeals were not answered properly, and now what is happening is a result of Armenia's destructive policy.

**Correspondent: So, you say Azerbaijan doesn't have the international support that it deserves based on the international legal concerns?**

President Ilham Aliyev: From point of view of international law norms and decisions and resolutions of international organizations, we have very broad support. As I already mentioned the UN Security Council resolutions which is resolutions of the highest international body adopted resolutions asking Armenia or demanding Armenia to withdraw their troops. The General Assembly of United Nations did the same, other international organizations, like Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Non-Aligned Movement, European Parliament and others did the same but it is not enough, so we have a legal framework for the resolution. But there is not enough practical pressure on aggressor and here we see the contradiction between international law, and what is happening in reality. So, such an open ignorance of the norms and principles of international law by Armenia, should be a good indicator that international law doesn't work, or it works selectively. In some cases, as you know, Security Council resolutions are being implemented within days, if not hours, but in our case it is on paper for so many years. So, lack of practical pressure on aggressor is also one of the reasons the conflict lasts so long.

**Correspondent: You have accused Armenia of starting the war, this conflict actually. Many can argue that Armenia having the territory it has and victory of the velvet revolution in 2018, wouldn't risk starting an armed conflict. What would you say?**

President Ilham Aliyev: Well, I don't know, what are the reasons for such kind of analysis but what we see here, we see what is happening on the ground. If we look at what Armenia did after the so-called "revolution", during the last two years, and what they declare, we will see that they were almost provoking us, and they were aiming at starting a new war and the reason is to disrupt negotiations completely. They made several military provocations against Azerbaijan. On 12 July, they attacked our villages and our military positions far away from the region of the conflict, in the area of Tovuz, in the western part of Azerbaijan on Armenian-Azerbaijani border. And it was absolutely difficult to understand why they did it. They attacked us with the heavy artillery. The first victims among military servicemen were Azerbaijanis, four our military servicemen were killed immediately, and one 76 year old villager. So, we had to respond. After we responded and they suffered bitter defeat, they withdrew and started to plea for a ceasefire and then I said that we do not have any military objectives on the territory of Armenia. Therefore, as soon as we pushed them back and they already realized that it didn't work, the clashes stopped. It lasted only four days. Then, on August 23, the sabotage group which was sent by Armenian army to penetrate our territory, and to commit acts of terror was dispersed as the head of the sabotage group was detained. And he is now under investigation, he gives evidence that he was sent in order to commit terror acts against our civilians and military servicemen. It was not us who did it, it was them. And then what happened on 27 September is a logical continuation of this policy. Apart from that, if you look at what they have declared, what they have stated, it's also absolutely clear that they were provoking us. Armenian prime minister a year ago made a statement that Karabakh is Armenia and this statement makes negotiations absolutely senseless. Because one of the main item on the negotiation table is the return of the occupied territories to Azerbaijan. And if he says Karabakh is Armenia and in his understanding Karabakh is not only former Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous district but also all the occupied territories, that means that they don't want to return these territories back, that means end of negotiations.

**Correspondent: So why would Armenia risk a provocation?**

President Ilham Aliyev: First, I think they wanted to destroy completely negotiation process. Then they wanted to put a blame on us, as they do it, and say that look, with Azerbaijan it is not possible to have negotiations. And I think one of the reasons could be the internal difficulties. Because we know what is happening now in Armenia, they suffer very serious political crisis. The leader of main opposition party was arrested two days before they launched an attack. Two former presidents are under criminal investigation, and actually dictatorial regime have been established in Armenia. All the promises which their prime minister was giving after revolution just are on paper, nothing was implemented. They have one of the worst in the world per capita situation with pandemic, so to distract attention and he managed to. And now what he is trying to do, to consolidate society in front of the so-called 'Azerbaijani aggression' and to strengthen his personal rule. So, everything is very logical from their point of view, but they did a very big mistake, and

moreover, before the aggression, several days before, I was speaking at UN General Assembly, saying that they are preparing for war and they must be stopped. And that's what happened.

**Correspondent: You said before that the Armenian military must unconditionally withdraw from the territories that they have occupied. What do you aim for in the region as Azerbaijan?**

President Ilham Aliyev: We?

**Correspondent: Yes.**

President Ilham Aliyev: We still keep our position unchanged. What I am demanding is absolutely in line with international law, because the whole world recognizes territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, and no country in the world recognizes the so-called "Nagorno-Karabakh Republic". What I am saying is completely almost the wording of the UN Security Council Resolutions. And they need to leave our territory and then the war will stop and then the conflict will come to an end. And then, maybe some time later people of Azerbaijan and Armenia can again live together, in piece. So, that's our position, and it is unchanged, and it is based on historical truth, it is based on international law and also it is based on today's political and geo-political realities in our region. I think Armenian government overestimated their so-called importance on global arena, overestimated the possible international support to them and made very serious mistakes provoking us, attacking us and now they are suffering a very serious defeat.

**Correspondent: Would you accept going to the negotiation table with Armenia's prime minister Nikol Pashinyan?**

President Ilham Aliyev: Actually negotiations stopped, because after his statement that 'Karabakh is Armenia', I said there is no rule for negotiations but our Minsk Group co-chairs were making requests to me that Azerbaijan show maybe more how to say understanding, with respect to the fact that Armenian government is new, and maybe they do not completely control their emotions and their words. And I said okay, let's try. We want to find a peaceful solution therefore, we waited for so many years and probably negotiations would have been continued if not for this distractive approach. And after that statement I had a meeting with Armenian Prime Minister but they were absolutely meaningless. They were formal. He was telling me that they are not going to give territories back. And then, what to talk about? If they don't want to do that, if they go against elaborated principles by the Minsk-Group, which they elaborated for years and means that he destroys negotiations. Negotiations cannot be held unilaterally. We need to have a partner but in Armenia so far we don't have a partner for negotiations.

**Correspondent: So, can we say that Azerbaijan's preconditioning for coming to a negotiating table is that Armenia withdraws from the occupied territories?**

President Ilham Aliyev: Actually, it was Armenian Prime Minister who put precondition to us. And that, by the way is another provocation. I think several months ago he put seven preconditions to Azerbaijan. Actually, he wanted to dictate his agenda to us and to the Minsk-Group. And one of those preconditions was that Azerbaijan should negotiate with the so-called "Nagorno-Karabakh authorities". And not only we but also Minsk-Group rejected it. Because it changes completely the format of negotiations, which was elaborated for more than twenty years. And negotiations are



taking place between Armenia and Azerbaijan. So, he puts precondition to us and we rejected it. And the reason why he did it, was again he wanted negotiations to stop and keep the status quo unchanged. As far as we are concerned, we are always ready for negotiations. We never rejected it, we had difficult times in negotiation process in previous years. Not everything was going smoothly. But, with the previous Armenian leaders we had a process. And we were elaborating the step by step approach. Otherwise, we wouldn't have been in this process for so many years. It was not useless time. I think we have made a very big progress. I am in this process since 2003, and I worked with two previous Armenian presidents and we made progress. It was not easy, we had of course a big variety of use but we were making step by step progress and we elaborated what we have now. And after Pashinyan came to power, he not only destroys everything before him, and he wants to pretend that Armenia before him did not exist and he is now the creator of new Armenia and he destroyed all the elaborated principles. Therefore, full responsibility is on him and his government. By the way, reasonable people in Armenia understand it. They were already making statements alarming Armenian population that this person leads their country to catastrophe. It is not a way how to behave on negotiations, it is not a way how to provoke Azerbaijan. Another provocation was the so-called inauguration of the so-called leader of "Nagorno-Karabakh" in the ancient Azerbaijani city of Shusha. No other so-called "Nagorno-Karabakh leader" did that. Why he did it. In order to insult the feelings of Azerbaijanis. Then, they decided to move the so-called parliament of "Nagorno-Karabakh" from Khankandi to Shusha. Why? Another insult on Azerbaijanis. They openly resettle Armenians from Lebanon to the occupied territories, demonstrate it on TV which is a brutal violation of Geneva Convention, in order to demonstrate their hatred to us. Everything what he did was to destroy negotiation process. Therefore, now when they are pleading for negotiations, when Pashinyan calls world leaders many times and is complaining about Azerbaijan, I think those leaders should tell him it was you who destroyed negotiations. It was you who provoked Azerbaijan. It was you who insulted the feelings of Azerbaijanis. Therefore, you must be responsible for that. And Armenian people and I made an appeal a couple of days ago to Armenian people. They should make him responsible for that. We don't have a problem with Armenian people, they are our citizens, we have thousands Armenians living in Azerbaijan, and those who live in Nagorno-Karabakh area, we also consider them our citizens. And we invite them to live together with us as many other nationalities and ethnicities who live in Azerbaijan. Therefore, Armenia should refrain completely from these provocative statements. They should make new statements that Karabakh is not Armenia, and then we will see.

**Correspondent: So, within this deadlock, political deadlock, would a Russian mediation work for Azerbaijan?**

President Ilham Aliyev: Russia is one of the countries which is a mediator along with United States and France, and during my involvement in this process for 17 years all 3 countries were equally involved in the process. And there was and there is quite a high level of coordination in the process. Of course, Russia has a special position, because it is a neighbor to Azerbaijan, neighbor to the region. It does not have a state border with Armenia, but nevertheless, Russia is a country which Azerbaijan and Armenia have good relations and historical relations. Therefore, of course, their role, their, I would say, capability to mediate are much higher due to objective reasons from those who are situated far away from the region and maybe not completely know what was happening

here during the last decades. Therefore, we think that three countries should continue to work together if all of them keep neutrality. This is important. And we are concerned that just recent days we see some statements which are counter-productive and which are demonstrating a kind of change in the position in neutrality. Every country can have its position, it is normal. But if you are a mediator in such a sensitive issue, you should act in this capacity. If you want to act in your national capacity, of course, but then you should step down from the Minsk Group co-chairmanship and say whatever you want, accuse whomever you want, deliver stories about what happened which has no proof and of course, nobody would object. But if you are a mediator you have to be neutral. You have to be a mediator, otherwise mediation will not be acceptable by us.

**Correspondent: So, there are calls from the international community for a ceasefire. But given the latest statements by both Azerbaijani and Armenian side are you choosing to ignore international calls for a ceasefire?**

President Ilham Aliyev: No, we are not ignoring. But ceasefire cannot be achieved unilaterally. I am just trying to deliver the message to those leaders who called me during these days saying that it was not Azerbaijan who started it. We had to defend ourselves. If we did not respond this time the way we did, today we would have had hundreds of victims among civilians. We still have a lot. This morning I received information we have 19 victims among civilians, two of them are children. We have 54 wounded people among civilians. And we have more than 300 houses damaged or completely demolished by Armenian artillery. And they attack our villages, they attack our people, they were to kill as many Azerbaijanis as they can. They started yesterday to use long distance missiles from the territory of Armenia. Thus, they make this weapons which they use a legitimate target for Azerbaijan. And we have to destroy those targets and then they will accuse us that we attack Armenian territory. They want it. They want to invite third parties to the conflict that these parties defend themselves and provide for them another 30 years of illegal occupation. Ceasefire okay, but on what conditions? Conditions must be that they withdraw from the territories. I said just two days ago, let them start withdrawal, let us have the timetable for withdrawal, let them undertake serious obligations proved by mediators and also obey the ceasefire regime and of course we will also do the same. Why should we need this military clash? We need our territories back by peaceful means and we demonstrated for 28 years our willingness to have peaceful settlement. During this 28 years there have been times of clashes and the biggest is now. There was another one four years ago. So, that is our point and I think it is absolutely reasonable taking into account what I said about political and military provocations from Armenia.

**Correspondent: So, when we look at the latest conflict, Azerbaijan military gained some advance and took back some of the villages around the Fuzuli district does it mean that Azerbaijan is not going to withdraw from those areas that they have regained control?**

President Ilham Aliyev: No, of course not. Because these areas belong to us. These areas are the areas of our ancient land, these areas are where our people lived for centuries and they were occupied and destroyed by Armenians. There are pictures in internet of what happened to Fuzuli what happened to Aghdam, what happened to other cities and villages of Azerbaijan in the southern-eastern part of the occupied territories. There are also destructions in the districts of Lachin and Kalbajar where they had some illegal settlements. But not as heavy as in this area.

Therefore, it is our land, we regained it. We regained it by force, we regained it giving our victims. we will never step back from them. We will leave there, our people who were forcefully deported from those territories today they live with one dream, with one goal, for almost 30 years to go back. I can tell you there was a very illustrative example when in April 2016 we liberated part of the territories and gained as a result of the Armenian aggressions we launched a counter-attack. And one of the villages which was destroyed by Armenians and Azerbaijanis could not return there because Armenians' positions were on the mountains. We built for refugees the new village and even those who never saw that land, those who were born after, all of them returned to Jojug Marjanly. I said Jojug Marjanly is a symbol of our dignity, a symbol of our will, Jojug Marjanly is a symbol of our return, and I said our return starts now. So, I am sure that all those who have been deported from those territories will go back. There is nowhere to go back. Because everything is destroyed, everything. Not a single building, everything was destroyed and of course, we will help, we will rebuild the cities. We will rebuild the villages. We will return their initial names because Armenians committed a cultural genocide against us. They destroyed all the mosques on the occupied territories. They keep pigs and cows in the mosques, thus insulting the feelings of all the Muslims. They changed the names of our cities, changed the names of our villages. All the names will go back. We will go back to our lands. This is our legitimate right, this is a historical task for us and I am sure we will succeed.

**Correspondent: The Caucasus region is a very complex one. Not only in terms of geography, but also when it comes to culture, ethnicity and social structures. Do you believe in peoples' rights to self-determination?**

President Ilham Aliyev: You know, this is the point which Armenian propaganda often uses thus, trying to mislead the international public opinion, which of course broadly ordinary people, they are not specialists in the international law. But there are very clear identification of the basic principles of international law, which have the reflection in the Helsinki Final Act. Principle of territorial integrity is prevailing, self-determination is one of the important principles of international law. But if we go back to UN Charter, if we go back to Helsinki Final Act, we will see that the self-determination should not damage the territorial integrity of the countries. And other important point, the territorial integrity of the country cannot be changed by force, and cannot be changed without an agreement of the people of the country. Therefore, in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict of course, self-determination is not working the way how Armenians want to do it. And another argument, Armenian people already self-determined themselves. They have independent Armenian state. Today Armenians live everywhere. They live in France, they live in America, they live in Russia, they live in Middle East, let them ask for self-determination in those countries. What would be the reaction of authorities of those countries if Armenians would ask the land which does not belong to them and ask this land only because they now became majority? Their tactics which they use for many-many years to come, to ask for support, to ask for land, and then to start changing the historical identity of the territory, making fake news about their so-called ancient history, and demand those lands for them. Those countries which want to give self-determination to Nagorno-Karabakh, let them give part of their land to Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh, take them and give self-determination there. I would see what will be their reaction.

**Correspondent: The way I think we have right now you have the Russians, Iranians, Turks, the French and the Americans signaling concerns over the conflict. Could this conflict ever become a regional one?**

President Ilham Aliyev: I don't think so. I think there is no ground for that and we are strongly against this conflict to transform into a regional. That's what Armenia wants to do. Therefore, they invent fake news about some external support to Azerbaijan. But at the same time, they are asking for external support for themselves. That's why I have the feelings that the main target now when they suffer a very serious defeat on the battle field, they want to make this conflict regional but I am sure that the countries which you mentioned will never allow it to happen. Because security in our region is in the interests of all the regional countries and among those countries which you mention - Turkey, Russia, Iran are regional countries. Other countries have nothing to do here in the region. And they are not regional countries. They have the mandate, to facilitate the negotiations because that happened in 1992. We are not responsible, me personally for this composition of the Minsk-Group. If we decided today about the composition of any Contact Group which could facilitate peace, of course composition would have been completely different. I don't want now to specify, but some countries would not have place in this group because of their biased behavior. So, we need to do everything, especially the regional countries, to stay away from the conflict, not to interfere in any sense in the conflict and give the signal to Armenia: Stop occupation! Stop occupation and then you will see the benefits. Then you will integrate with the regional economic, investments, energy, transportation projects, which Armenian leadership for many years deprived Armenians from because of this aggression. So we need to do everything that this conflict stops as soon as possible, the resolution is found as soon as possible. We are not in the position to listen to statements as 'stop it and we will work, we will negotiate, we will help'. We heard it many times, we don't have time to wait another 30 years. The conflict must be resolved now. Those who want to help Armenia, their so-called close partners, let them help by telling them 'leave the territories, demonstrate your will, stop firing', tell that 'today or tomorrow only one week I will leave Aghdam, next time, next week I will leave Fuzuli, next week I will leave Kalbajar' etc. and we will stop. So, this is a very fair position, this is a position aimed at peace not at war.

**Correspondent: What about Armenia's claims that Ankara is militarily involved in this conflict with their planes etc.?**

President Ilham Aliyev: This is a false information, it has no proofs. I already made statements about that. Turkey is our brotherly country from the very first day of Armenian attack, from the very 1st hour, Turkey expressed its full support to Azerbaijan. My brother, president Erdogan many times made very important statements. And yesterday speaking at the opening session of the parliament he made another very important statements that Turkey is next to Azerbaijan, and Azerbaijan is not alone. We feel the support. We are very grateful to our Turkish brothers and president, and other officials. But Turkey in no other way is involved in the conflict. One of the Armenian fake news which now is not any longer in the media, was that Turkish F-16 shot down Armenia's SU-25. This is fake news. Where are the proofs? No proofs. Every plane, which lands and takes off is in the computer. Everybody can see what is happening. And I wonder why Minsk Group co-chair countries France, United States, Russia do not comment on that. They do not

comment on this fake news, some of them comment on other fake news that Azerbaijan with Turkey invited terrorists here.

**Correspondent: This is what I would like to ask Mr. President Armenia also accuses Turkey for transferring Syrian opposition fighters to Azerbaijan.**

President Ilham Aliyev: This is fake news. Absolutely. The same fake news as they said that Turkish F-16 shot down the SU-25. The SU-25 had an accident. I was informed, it hit the mountain because of unexperienced pilot.

**Correspondent: But they say that they have evidence**

President Ilham Aliyev: Let them show it. Where is evidence? Not only Armenia, unfortunately President of France I heard yesterday made a statement about that and he called me on the 27th in the evening and I said it is wrong, it is false. And he made the statements without any evidence. Let him give us evidence. Let him give us proofs. Only words. We can also say many words. But we don't. We behave in a responsible way. There is not a single evidence of any foreign presence in Azerbaijan. What we do, we do ourselves. We have capable army. We have enough people in our army, we have enough people in our reserves. I announced a partial mobilization, which will allow us to involve tens of thousands of reservists. If necessary, so we don't need it. Armenia needs it, because Armenian population is declining. And it is only two million people. Therefore, they themselves now recruit people from Middle East and we have evidences, and not only of Armenian origin. By the way, it doesn't make any difference whether it is of Armenian origin coming from Middle East or non-Armenian origin. If anybody comes from outside to fight as a mercenary that should be internationally addressed. So, it is this accusations that absolutely groundless, and we reject them, and we demand the evidences to be put on the table.

**Correspondent: Will you also be presenting your evidence on the foreign mercenaries that Armenia brings?**

President Ilham Aliyev: We have already some intelligence information and plus, just yesterday I was shown that there are videos in the internet as the people from Middle East are sitting together with Armenian soldiers and they have their uniform, they have Armenian national flag, and they sit together and discuss, you know it is without voice. But it is enough I think. And they must be responsible for that.

**Correspondent: So, could diplomacy ever work or is the war only solution for you?**

President Ilham Aliyev: I said already diplomacy can work if Armenia will comply with the international law, will start immediate withdrawal from part of the territories on the time table. And of course, we need to restore territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. By the way, when we were discussing the issues on negotiation table before this government in Armenia came to power, one of the first items was that the conflict must be resolved on the basis of territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. It must be restored. That is what we demand and I think we have a right to demand it.

**Correspondent: President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, thank you very much for talking to Al Jazeera.**

President Ilham Aliyev: Thank you.

**On September 29, the "Rossiya-1" TV channel aired the "60 minutes" program dedicated to the latest events on the Azerbaijan-Armenia line of contact.**

President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and prime minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan took questions from the program's hosts.

The hosts first asked questions of President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev.

**Host: Mr. President, thank you for agreeing to this interview. What is happening at the front line right now? Information about the use of aviation is already coming in.**

President Ilham Aliyev: The situation at the front line is tense. Due to the Armenian military provocation, which began on the morning of September 27, Azerbaijani settlements and our combat positions were subjected to massive artillery fire. As a result of this aggression, 11 Azerbaijani civilians, including two children, were killed. There are also casualties among the military. We were forced to respond adequately to the aggressor and, thus, protect our people and our land. Fierce battles have been going on for three days now. In their wake, Azerbaijan's Army has liberated several settlements from occupation and seized strategic heights in different directions. Today the situation is such that active clashes are underway.

**Host: Ilham Heydarovich, please clarify Turkey's role. Through its President and head of the Foreign Ministry, Ankara has officially announced that it would help you on the battlefield.**

President Ilham Aliyev: I believe that Turkey is playing a stabilizing role in the region. Turkey is our brotherly country and our ally. From the very first hour, once the international community learned that Armenia attacked Azerbaijan, Turkey spoke out unequivocally at the level of the head of state and other leaders in support of Azerbaijan, in support of international law. Armenia has grossly violated international law by occupying the territory of Azerbaijan for about 30 years. So that is Turkey's role - nothing else. Turkey provides us with moral support, and we are grateful to the Turkish leadership, the President and the Turkish people for their solidarity and support. Turkey does not participate in this conflict in any other capacity. All the rumors that Turkey is involved as a party to the conflict, circulated by the Armenian side, are provocative. As they say now, this is fake news. There is no evidence of Turkey's involvement in the conflict and nor is that necessary. Azerbaijan's Army is well-prepared to protect its people and territory.

**Host: Ilham Heydarovich, you do not confirm; moreover, you deny the information that the Turkish Air Force shot down an Armenian Air Force plane just an hour ago. It was about the F-16 and Su-25.**

President Ilham Aliyev: We do not have this information. Just recently, I was informed that such news appeared in the information domain. It is not corroborated by anything. The F-16 aircraft of the Turkish Air Force do not participate in operations in any way. Given modern technologies' availability, it is very difficult to conceal anything today because there are objective forms of observation. There is satellite observation, and therefore it is effortless to verify that this is another provocation. We understand the Armenian side's goal – by creating such false news, they first want

to belittle the combat capability of Azerbaijan's Army, which is now fulfilling the task of restoring its territorial integrity with dignity. And also to create the impression that the conflict is growing, that third countries are getting involved. They are trying to attract as many countries as possible to justify their provocation. Therefore, I state to you with full responsibility: Turkey is not a party to the conflict, does not participate in it in any way, and there is no need for that.

**Host: Ilham Heydarovich, is your country ready to proceed towards the Kazan formula, within the framework of which Armenia must liberate several districts or any other formula? What can be done in principle now? How can the situation be reversed, if the conflict in Karabakh has been burning or at least smoldering for as many as 30 years? What to do?**

President Ilham Aliyev: You know, Azerbaijan has always shown constructiveness on the negotiation track. And the Minsk Group co-chairs, who are responsible for the mediation mission, can confirm this. In particular, in the past two years, we have repeatedly stated, both myself and other officials, that we are committed to the resolution principles developed over the years and which the Minsk Group and its co-chairs consider the basis for the negotiating process. Moreover, we have repeatedly stated in the past two years, and before that, we are committed to the negotiation format. Negotiations are underway between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

There are only two sides to the conflict. Sometimes, when talking about the conflict, there is a mention of all sides. It is an erroneous definition - not all sides. There are only two sides – Armenia and Azerbaijan. Still, look at what has been happening in recent years after the Soros coup carried out by the current government in Armenia? The Armenian prime minister publicly declares that Karabakh is Armenia, full stop. In this case, what negotiations can we talk about? After all, the essence of the principles developed by the OSCE Minsk Group is that the territories around the former Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous region should be transferred to Azerbaijan. And then he says that Karabakh is Armenia and that we have to negotiate with the so-called puppet regime of Nagorno-Karabakh. Thereby, trying to undermine the format of negotiations that have already existed for 20 years, Armenia deliberately disrupts the negotiations and puts forward unacceptable demands. When the Minsk Group recently began to speak more actively about who remains an obstacle to the resolution, they resorted to provocations like September 27. Before that, on July 12, our positions at the state border were attacked. On August 23, an Armenian subversion group was captured; its leader was captured on the line of contact. Everything is being done to derail the negotiations, then accuse Azerbaijan, and then involve third parties, thereby undermining the talks. The reason is that the Armenian side wants to maintain the status quo. The co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group represented by the Presidents of Russia, France and the United States have repeatedly made statements that the status quo is unacceptable. And this means that the territories under occupation must be returned to Azerbaijan. We are committed to negotiations, but we see completely opposite actions from the Armenian side.

**Host: Please tell us, Mr. President, what happened on Sunday; what provoked such a large-scale and bloody confrontation?**

President Ilham Aliyev: You know, Armenia had been moving towards this Sunday, towards what happened on Sunday for several months. If you track their actions and statements' chronology, you



will clearly see that they deliberately went for this provocation. Not so long ago, speaking at the UN General Assembly, I openly said that Armenia was preparing for war, and it must be stopped. In July, they launched an armed attack on our settlements along the state border. It is far away from the conflict zone. One civilian and several servicemen were killed then. The clashes lasted four days. Since we did not have and still do not have any military targets across Armenia, as soon as the Armenian armed forces were driven back from our territory, the fire was ceased by mutual agreement. Then, as I said, a subversion group infiltrated our territory and was neutralized. Then the Armenian side publicly and defiantly announced the resettlement of Armenians from Lebanon to the occupied territories and to our ancient Azerbaijani city of Shusha, which amounts to a war crime. It is a violation of the Geneva Convention. It is done demonstratively. Before that, they held the so-called swearing-in ceremony for the so-called leader of the criminal Nagorno-Karabakh regime in Shusha, an ancient pearl of Azerbaijani culture.

All these are deliberate provocations against us, attempts to drag us into conflict and provoke retaliatory actions. We showed restraint, constructiveness and common sense, but when they failed, they made this attempt. Moreover, another reason is the internal political crisis in Armenia. After all, there is a Soros regime in Armenia today. The coup that failed in Belarus was successful in Yerevan two years ago. Today the Armenian leader in the person of Pashinyan is Soros's henchman, a man who made many promises and who cannot fulfill them, and the country is in crisis.

So he needed an external factor, some mess, so to speak, to divert the population's attention, which he succeeded in doing. Moreover, just two days before they attacked us, Armenia's prominent opposition party leader was arrested. The dictatorial and despotic regime of Pashinyan eliminated the entire opposition in his country and is now demonstrating aggression against the Azerbaijani people again.

**Host: Your position is clear. Many thanks! Can you please say briefly: yes or no? Are there fighters from Syria on the frontline right now?**

President Ilham Aliyev: No! It is another piece of fake news. There are no fighters from Syria. There is no evidence, no proof. It has been planted by Armenian propaganda and circulates through different websites and media outlets. There is no need for this. Azerbaijan has a trained army and a vast mobilization reserve. Just yesterday, I announced partial mobilization; we are calling tens of thousands of reservists to arms. With a population of 10 million versus 2 million in Armenia, we do not need human resources. Therefore, we can stand up for ourselves and punish the aggressor to never venture even to look in our direction.

**Host: Thank you very much! Ilham Aliyev was on the line with us from Baku. Peace to you. Goodbye!**

President Ilham Aliyev: Thank you! Goodbye!