

New issues in the Europe – Azerbaijan relations

ARVAK center's comment, 24.01.2024

In a response to statements by EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell about concerns on Azerbaijan's territorial claims to Armenia, Baku harshly criticized the European organization. On January 22, 2024, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan stated that it “*strongly rejects the unfounded accusations*”.

“The blatant distortion of facts by the EU High Representative is a disregard for the legitimate interests of Azerbaijan, and the threatening rhetoric is a clear example of double standards that further strain relations between Azerbaijan and the EU... In addition to a complete distortion of the views of the President of Azerbaijan regarding historical facts relating to the territories of Azerbaijan and Armenia, the High Representative provokes militarization and an aggressive policy towards Azerbaijan, – was stated in the Foreign Ministry statement. Baku also considered Borrell’s remarks regarding the expulsion of French diplomats from the country to be interference in the internal affairs of Azerbaijan and promised to “resolutely prevent any claims against their national interests and attempts to legitimize threatening statements”.

It should be assumed that the last mentioned phrase refers to sanctions, which Borrell clearly hinted at, emphasizing in his speech that any violation of the territorial integrity of the Republic of Armenia is unacceptable and will have serious consequences for the EU–Azerbaijan relations.

Borrell’s statement came against the backdrop of the decision of the PACE Presidential Committee to initiate a procedure for limiting the participation of AzR in this organization, up to expulsion from it for a number of reasons, including the refusal to invite the PACE delegation to the forthcoming February presidential elections and the denial of access to the rapporteurs of the organization in Lachin (Berdzor) in the past.

Apparently, the impulsive response of the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry to Borrell’s recommendations is due to the fact that Baku is aware of the prospect of devaluation of relations with European organizations and countries that play a key role in their policies.

Obviously, Baku overestimated its capabilities in the political and diplomatic clash with Paris, which is transferring the conflict from the bilateral dimension into a much broader context of Europe–Azerbaijan relations, in which Paris has a more extensive toolkit of pressure on the Aliyev regime. And, surely, this pressure will gradually increase and not only due to Baku’s obstruction of Paris’s attempts to gain a foothold in Armenia, but because of I. Aliyev’s efforts to refrain from the Western negotiation platforms to resolve relations with Armenia and, in general, due to the growing confidence of the EU, that Azerbaijan is shifting its foreign policy course towards Moscow.

Highly likely that given the current unfavorable situation, Baku will try again to transfer the essence of the issue from the political to the economic field and play its “*energy trump card*” in relations with the European organizations, relying on the support of the Head of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, who has lobbied for the loyalty of the European structures to I. Aliyev’s autocratic regime because of “*unprecedented significance of Azerbaijani energy resources for Europe.*”