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# Washington Agreement Between Azerbaijan and Armenia: A Brief Remark

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## Promises and Challenges of the Agreement

On 8 August 2025, with the initiative of U.S. President Donald Trump, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan signed the *Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and Inter-State Relations between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan*. While not a final peace treaty, this agreement is considered an important milestone in ending the decades-long hostility between the two neighboring South Caucasus nations.

The 17-clause agreement, published by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of both Armenia<sup>[1]</sup> and Azerbaijan<sup>[2]</sup>, covers various aspects of bilateral relations, including mutual recognition of sovereignty and territorial integrity. Most importantly the parties promise to refrain in their mutual relations, from the use of force or the threat of use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of each other. Among the most urgent and promising sections of the agreement is the part where two sides agree to combat intolerance, racial hatred and discrimination within their respective jurisdictions.

One of the most contested issues in post-war Azerbaijani–Armenian relations has been the establishment of a transit corridor that would connect mainland Azerbaijan with its Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, passing through Armenian territory. Dubbed as a Zangezur corridor this strategic route is considered to become “a pathway from Central Asia down through the Caucasus to Turkey and beyond to the world, effectively revitalizing the old Silk Road<sup>[3]</sup>”. Heated discussions around this route have extended beyond Armenia and Azerbaijan, drawing in other concerned parties as well. Russia has expressed a desire to control this strategically important transport route, while Iran has been vocal in its opposition, citing concerns about regional balance and sovereignty.

Azerbaijan has insisted that Armenia should exercise no authority over the corridor. Before the Washington meeting in one of his recent speeches, President Ilham Aliyev stated that Azerbaijani citizens should not see Armenian border authorities while traveling along this passage<sup>[4]</sup>. Armenia, while agreeing in principle to provide such a connection, has refused to renounce its sovereign authority over its own territory.

Amid these tensions, along with the signed agreement a joint declaration was issued by the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the United States during negotiations. The declaration emphasizes that the Republic of Armenia will work with the United States of America and mutually determined third parties to establish a framework for this route. The passage was formally named in the declaration as the “Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity” (TRIPP)<sup>[5]</sup>, underscoring its intended role as a mechanism for regional stability and economic cooperation.

However, despite its significance, the publicly available texts do not address several long-standing and sensitive issues in Armenian–Azerbaijani relations. One of the most prominent of these is the fate of the centuries-old Armenian community—over 100,000 people—of the former *Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region* of the Azerbaijan SSR, later the breakaway, unrecognized *Nagorno-Karabakh Republic*. This population left the region after Azerbaijan re-established full control over the territory following its military offensives from 2020 to 2023. The omission of this question in the published agreement texts is notable, as President Trump—who initiated this pact—had explicitly raised this particular issue during his electoral campaign.

It should be reminded that, in recent years, after the 2020 war, the Azerbaijani authorities has also actively raised the issue of the right of return for Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia, who were compelled to leave in the late 1980s when hostilities erupted in the wake of the weakening and eventual collapse of the Soviet Union. In 2022, under the guidance of Azerbaijani authorities, the “Community of Western Azerbaijanis” was established<sup>[6]</sup>—led by a member of the national legislature—to promote this issue<sup>[7]</sup>. “Western Azerbaijan” is the term backed by the Azerbaijani government to designate certain parts of the Republic of Armenia. Officially, the establishment of this community was presented as a means of advancing claims to a right of return for Azerbaijanis originating from Armenia. In practice, however, it functions as an instrument for exerting political pressure on Armenia. So, immediately after the signing of the agreement, Azerbaijani social media users circulated claims that the organization—whose name appears inconsistent with the abovementioned provisions of the agreement—had

been self-dismantled. This narrative, however, was subsequently and indirectly contradicted by the authorities, when the organization's message of congratulations on the occasion of the agreement's signing was published on the official website of the President of the Republic<sup>[8]</sup>.

## **Religion in the Peace Process**

In one of our previous articles for *Observatoire*<sup>[9]</sup> we examined how the Azerbaijani side instrumentalized Islam to gather the sympathies of international Muslim community during the 2020 war. The peace summit in Washington demonstrated that religion remains a symbolic marker of the conflict, and in this particular case it was Christianity that came into play.

It was said above that, during his presidential campaign, President Trump had raised the issue of the plight of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh. And he did it within his broader political discourse, consistent with his declared conservative agenda. In doing so, he deliberately highlighted the Christian identity of the Armenians as part of a politically charged electoral narrative. On 23 October 2024, through his social media platform *Truth Social*, Trump criticized his election opponent, former Vice President Kamala Harris, for 'doing nothing as 120,000 Armenian Christians were horrifically persecuted and forcibly displaced in Artsakh<sup>[10][11]</sup>. This theme resurfaced during the signing procedures, when an Armenian journalist reminded President Trump of his earlier statements by asking whether he had "a message to the persecuted Christian Armenians<sup>[12]</sup>" as he stood at the White House entrance to greet the arriving leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan. The religious identity of the Armenians was also invoked at several other points during the peace agreement proceedings. Trump himself reinforced this framing when the Armenian Prime-Minister raised with him the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh leaders imprisoned by Azerbaijan in 2023. He explicitly characterized them as '23 Christian prisoners' and pledged to request their release from the Azerbaijani president<sup>[13]</sup>". In another symbolic gesture during the joint press conference with the US and Azerbaijani presidents, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan welcomed the agreement by quoting the Bible—an act that echoed themes consistently present in President Trump's rhetoric while simultaneously highlighting the deeper cultural memory of Armenians as ancient Christian nation<sup>[14]</sup>. Such gestures underscore how religion, while not formally inscribed in the agreement, still informed the symbolic vocabulary of the proceedings.

Christianism in this context of Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict operates on multiple levels: as we have seen as an electoral tool in U.S. domestic

politics, as an existential marker of national identity for Armenia and at the same time as a contested historical narrative in Azerbaijan's cultural policy. Thus, in general, religions in the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict are not merely symbolic rhetoric, but a flexible instrument of power—used alternately to mobilize support, legitimize claims, or undermine adversaries. Religious dimensions continue to shape perceptions of justice, heritage, and belonging, suggesting that any durable settlement will ultimately require more than political and territorial arrangements—it must also grapple with the deep symbolic and identity-rooted aspects of the conflict.

The religion has also manifested itself in disputes over historic religious monuments. For many years, the Armenian side has expressed concerns regarding the “silent erasure” of Armenian religious heritage in Azerbaijan<sup>[15]</sup>, while Azerbaijani authorities, including the president, have responded with accusing Armenians of destroying mosques in territories formerly under Armenian control<sup>[16]</sup>. A particularly sensitive issue concerns ancient Christian churches located in the Republic of Azerbaijan, which the Azerbaijani authorities refuse to recognize as part of the Armenian heritage, instead classifying them as monuments of the ancient Caucasian Albanian polity<sup>[17]</sup>. For instance, this policy was illustrated immediately after Azerbaijan recaptured the territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020, when one such church—Khudavang (Dadivank)—was transferred from Armenian priests to the Udi community<sup>[18]</sup>. The Udis are an ancient Azerbaijani ethnic and religious minority, officially recognized by Azerbaijan as the successor to the Caucasian Albanian Church, although they are indigenous to another region of Azerbaijan, where they continue to reside.

The controversy surrounding the Christian heritage of these churches dates back to the Soviet period, when the region's history was reinterpreted in accordance with Soviet ideological frameworks. Churches that had long been under Armenian ecclesiastical authority were reclassified within Azerbaijani historiography as monuments of the ancient Caucasian Albanian polity, an early medieval Christian state in the Caucasus. According to this interpretation, the churches were originally Caucasian Albanian but became “Armenized” after the Arab conquest, when the Caucasian Albanian polity ceased to exist as a political entity.

## **Conclusion**

It may be argued that the issues discussed above—though representing some among the many complex challenges in the relations between the two sides—indicate that, while the agreement and memorandum

constitute an important step forward, provisions such as the mutual commitment to combat intolerance and hatred will necessarily require substantial genuine efforts on the part of both parties.

## Notes

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- ↑1 See [online] <https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2025/08/11/Initialed%20Arm-Az%20Peace%20Agreement%20text/13394>.
- ↑2 See [online] [https://mfa.gov.az/files/Birge%20Beyanname-ABS/Initialed%20Peace%20Agreement%20\(EN\).pdf](https://mfa.gov.az/files/Birge%20Beyanname-ABS/Initialed%20Peace%20Agreement%20(EN).pdf).
- ↑3 Melik Kaylan, “The Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Deal And The New Trump Corridor”, *Frobes*, August 10, 2025. [Online] <https://www.forbes.com/sites/melikkaylan/2025/08/10/the-armenia-azerbaijan-peace-deal-and-the-new-trump-corridor/>
- ↑4 “Azərbaycan vətəndaşı Naxçıvana gedərkən erməni sərhədçinin üzünü görməli deyil”, *Editor*, July 19, 2025. [Online] <https://editor.az/azerbaycan-vetendasi-naxcivana-gederken-ermeni-serhedcinin-uzunu-gormeli-deyil>
- ↑5 “Joint Declaration by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and the President of the United States of America on the outcomes of their meeting in Washington D.C., United States of America”, August 9, 2025. [Online] <https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2025/08/09/Nikol-Pashinyan-visit-US-declaration/>.
- ↑6 See the website of the Community of Western Azerbaijan. [Online] <https://westaz.org/az/%C4%BOCMA/umumi-melumat>.
- ↑7 “Ilham Aliyev viewed conditions created at administrative building of Western Azerbaijan Community”, website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, December 24, 2022. [Online] <https://president.az/en/articles/view/58330>.
- ↑8 “Members of the community of Western Azerbaijan”, website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, August 12, 2025. [Online] <https://president.az/az/articles/view/69644>.
- ↑9 Altay Goyushov, "Understanding tensions in Nagorno-Karabakh through a religious prism: a look back at the war of 2020", *Bulletin de l'Observatoire international du religieux*, 47, 2024, [en ligne] <https://obsreligion.cnrs.fr/bulletin/understanding-tensions-in-nagorno-karabakh-through-a-religious-prism-a-look-back-at-the-war-of-2020/>.
- ↑10 Armenians use the term Artsakh to name Nagorno-Karabakh, It is the name of the ancient province which encompassed territories of Nagorno-Karabakh as well.

- ↑11 Donald Trump's truth social account, October 24, 2024.  
[Online] <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/113359046804685083>.
- ↑12 "Do you have a message to the persecuted Christian Armenians? Journalist: Trump", *Tert*, August 8, 2025.  
[Online] <https://tert.am/en/news/2025/08/08/trump/4239673>.
- ↑13 Zartonk media's instagram account, August 10, 2025.  
[Online] <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DNMLeFCyQ9U/>.
- ↑14 "Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's statement at the trilateral meeting with Donald Trump and Ilham Aliyev", Press release, website of The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, August 9, 2025. [Online] <https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2025/08/09/Nikol-Pashinyan-US-trilateral-meeting/>.
- ↑15 Caucasus Heritage Watch, "Silent Erasure - A Satellite Investigation of the Destruction of Armenian Cultural Heritage in Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan", October 2, 2024.  
[Online] <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/48703f664f2f467b8f4f42008d8c75da>.
- ↑16 "Interview with Ilham Aliyev on Al-Jazeera television", website of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, February 8, 2017.  
[Online] <https://president.az/az/articles/view/22719>.
- ↑17 Jost Gippert & Jasmine Dum-Tragut (ed.), *Caucasian Albania. An International Handbook*, Berlin, De Gruyter-Brill, 2023.
- ↑18 "Largest monastery in Azerbaijan, Khudavang, subjected to Armenian falsification", *Report*, November 25, 2024. [Online] <https://report.az/en/domestic-politics/largest-monastery-in-azerbaijan-khudavang-subjected-to-armenian-falsification/>.

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