



FRANCE'S ANTI-AZERBAIJANI POLICY IN THE NAGORNO-KARABAKH  
CONFLICT

FRANSA'NIN DAĞLIK KARABAĞ SORUNUNDA AZERBAIJAN KARŞITI  
POLİTİKASI

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Öz

Bu makale, Fransa'nın Ermenistan-Azerbaycan, Dağlık Karabağ çatışmasındaki politikasına odaklanmaktadır. Fransa'nın, hem Batı güç merkezlerinden biri olarak hem de AGİT Minsk Grubu'nun bir eşbaşkanı olarak, Azerbaycan'ın toprak bütünlüğüne tamamen zıt bir tutum sergilemesi incelenmektedir. Bu bağlamda, makale Fransa'nın eylemlerinin arkasındaki nedenleri, özellikle Fransadaki Ermeni diasporasının etkisini analiz etmektedir. Bu etki, Fransız eşbaşkanları ve temsilcilerinin Ermenilerin pozisyonunu destekleyen ve uluslararası müzakerelerde onların lehine kararların alınmasını savunan bir tutum sergilemelerine yol açmıştır. Ayrıca, makale, önceki Fransa Cumhurbaşkanlarından farklı olarak, Cumhurbaşkanı Emmanuel Macron'un döneminde Fransa'nın Ermenistan'a sürekli yardımları ve desteği konusunda kapsamlı bir açıklama yapmaktadır.

*Anahtar kelimeler:* Azerbaycan, Karabağ, Heydar Aliyev, Ermenistan, Fransa, Budapeşte.

ABSTRACT

The article is dedicated to France's policy during the Armenia-Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, where it takes a position completely opposite to Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, both as one of the centers of Western power and as one of the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group. In this context, the article analyzes the reasons behind France's actions, such as the influence of the Armenian diaspora, which led to the French co-chairs and representatives taking a stance supporting the Armenians' position and advocating for resolutions in their favor during international negotiations aimed at peacefully resolving the conflict. Furthermore, unlike previous French presidents, the article provides a comprehensive explanation of the French government's continuous aid and support to Armenia under President Emmanuel Macron.

*Key words:* Azerbaijan, Karabakh, Heydar Aliyev, Armenia, France, Budapest.

**Introduction**

Since the late 1980s, Armenians took advantage of the existing situation to once again bring up the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. Moreover, Armenia expelled hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis living in Western Azerbaijan from their native lands. In the early 1990s, their growing aggression against Azerbaijan further escalated the events in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Seeking by all means to annex Nagorno-Karabakh, which is historically Azerbaijani land, Armenia received support from several leading countries. One of these major Western states was France, which was among the first to recognize Azerbaijan's independence, established significant economic relations with the Republic of Azerbaijan, and actively participated in energy projects. Between 1991 and 1993, Armenia occupied Azerbaijan's Nagorno-Karabakh region along with seven adjacent districts.

During that period, Azerbaijan demanded the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian armed forces from its territories through the United Nations, leading to the adoption of relevant UN Security Council resolutions (Resolutions 822, 853, 874, and 884). The Karabakh issue was raised in meetings held in

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Prague and Helsinki, where France actively participated in the negotiations. The importance of resolving the conflict peacefully, in accordance with UN resolutions and principles of international law, was emphasized.

On March 24, 1992, the OSCE Minsk Group was established to facilitate a diplomatic and peaceful resolution to the conflict. At that time, the UN Security Council also recognized the importance of OSCE's role in the conflict. Since 1997, France, Russia, and the United States have served as co-chairs of the Minsk Group. However, instead of acting as a mediator to foster peace and build bridges in bilateral relations, France took a unilateral stance by supporting Armenia. For many years, France sought to mediate in the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, both as a co-chair of the Minsk Group and as a leading Western power. However, its approach was entirely anti-Azerbaijani.

By supporting Armenia, France took a position contrary to international law, openly disregarding the relevant UN resolutions and globally accepted security conventions. Several key factors contributed to France's biased stance in the conflict. It is well known that France has an Armenian diaspora exceeding 500,000 people, including members who hold seats in the French Parliament. This allows them to influence state affairs and exert pressure for the adoption of resolutions and statements that serve their interests. Another significant factor was the use of the Armenian electorate, which held considerable voting power and privileges, by the French President during election periods. Additionally, as a country that considers itself a leading global power, France remained committed to its imperialist past and sought to maintain influence in the South Caucasus, attempting to expand its leverage over the region's countries [1, s. 108-109].

### **International Negotiations and France's Policy**

On May 12, 1994, the National Leader Heydar Aliyev signed the Bishkek Protocol, declaring a ceasefire. The signing of this protocol was a significant event in Azerbaijan's history. From the beginning of the war, Azerbaijan remained committed to resolving the conflict through internationally accepted legal mechanisms. Therefore, in all negotiations and mediation-based meetings, Azerbaijan consistently highlighted its rightful position, emphasizing that Armenia was an occupying state and demanding its immediate and unconditional withdrawal from Azerbaijani territories. At the 1994 OSCE Budapest Summit, Azerbaijan once again reaffirmed its commitment to peace and stressed the necessity of implementing UN resolutions. Although a decision was made at the summit to establish OSCE peacekeeping forces for deployment in Nagorno-Karabakh, conflicting positions from countries like France and Russia prevented its implementation.

At the 1996 OSCE Lisbon Summit, under the firm stance of the National Leader Heydar Aliyev, significant achievements were made regarding the peaceful resolution of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. By the end of the summit, three fundamental principles were established for resolving the conflict:

1. Recognition of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and Armenia;
2. Ensuring the security of the population living in Nagorno-Karabakh;
3. Granting Nagorno-Karabakh a high-status self-governance within Azerbaijan.

However, under the influence of countries like France, Armenia refused to accept these principles. Subsequently, the Minsk Group co-chairs introduced different principles for the peaceful resolution of the conflict. Among them, Armenia only agreed to the "Common State" principle, as it served its interests. However, the National Leader Heydar Aliyev rightfully rejected this proposal, asserting that Azerbaijan would not allow the creation of a second state within its territory.

On April 3, 2001, a meeting was held in Key West, Florida, where the presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia, along with representatives from the Minsk Group member states, participated. Although the political discussions and outcomes were not disclosed to the public, the meeting played a crucial role in organizing direct negotiations between the parties in subsequent years [1, s. 110]. The co-chairs of the Minsk Group proposed the "Step-by-Step Package" principle in 2005 with the aim of resolving the conflict on a political level, and the "Madrid Principles" in 2009. However, since no agreement was reached between the parties and a common ground was not found, these principles did not create the conditions for resolving the conflict.

On March 14, 2008, despite all the obstacles and deliberately created hindrances, Azerbaijani diplomacy achieved another success on the political level. Azerbaijan succeeded in having a resolution titled "The Situation in Azerbaijan's Occupied Territories" (Resolution 62/243) adopted at the 62nd session of the UN General Assembly. The resolution reaffirmed the occupation of Azerbaijan's territories by Armenia in the international arena. The resolution was adopted with 39 countries in favor, 7 against, and 100 countries remaining neutral. This was one of the successes of President Ilham Aliyev's policy. It is not accidental that France, which has always shown a special sympathy for Armenians, opposed this resolution. France tried to

present Nagorno-Karabakh as a party to the conflict and emphasized the importance of the participation of the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians in the negotiation process. Labeling Nagorno-Karabakh as a party to the conflict would mean ignoring Armenia's designation as an occupying state in the international arena. Furthermore, France has always tried to soften decisions regarding Armenia in the UN Charter and has referred to Nagorno-Karabakh as a “disputed territory”.

In the negotiations between the co-chairs of the Minsk Group — France, Russia, and the USA — to resolve the conflict, the main obstacle to peace was not the positions of the conflicting parties, but rather the conflicting stances of the co-chairs, their divergent declarations, and principles, which hindered the path to peace. On December 1, 2010, during the Astana summit, France, Russia, and the USA spoke with a united position, stating that it was time to resolve the conflict and that they would jointly prepare principles for resolving the conflict. At the same time, the co-chair countries emphasized the importance of adhering to the UN Charter in the resolution of the conflict. However, the adopted documents remained only on paper and did not influence the region. Moreover, in 2014, through the mediation of the Presidents of Russia and France, meetings between the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan were held in Sochi, Wales, and Paris. Despite all efforts, Armenia once again resorted to provocations in Nagorno-Karabakh, hindering the intensification of peace negotiations [8].

### **Pro-Armenian Stance of the Macron Administration**

While previous French presidents showed sympathy and support for Armenians, under Emmanuel Macron, this support became much more pronounced. Supporting Armenia became one of the core principles of France's foreign policy. Even in early 2017, during his presidential campaign, Macron's visit to the so-called “Armenian Genocide” memorial in Paris and his promise to establish a commemoration day for the genocide won the active support of the Armenian diaspora and the “Coordination Council of Armenian Organizations” in France. After being elected president, Macron further emphasized his support for Armenians, even stating that “France is always indebted to Armenia in terms of financial assistance”.

A clear demonstration of this pro-Armenian stance in Macron's foreign policy was his participation in the “Francophonie” summit in Yerevan on October 11-12, 2018, his visit to the so-called Armenian Genocide memorial, and his refusal to visit Azerbaijan, in contrast to previous French presidents who visited both conflict parties in an effort to maintain a balanced policy. This reflected Macron's open support for Armenia.

France, which had committed acts of genocide against populations in its colonies, took steps to recognize the so-called Armenian Genocide by passing laws in 2001, 2006, and 2012. However, France never provided a legal assessment of its own actions in its colonies. In particular, in Algeria, Rwanda, and New Caledonia, France responded to uprisings against its rule by committing genocide and using military force against civilians. In Algeria, 1.5 million people were killed, and in Rwanda, 500,000 people were murdered, constituting real genocides [2, s. 158].

### **The 2016 “April Battles” and the 2018 “Günnüt” Operation: France's Role and Macron's Actions**

During the 2016 “April Battles” and the 2018 “Günnüt” operation, France, as a co-chair of the Minsk Group, called for a ceasefire and expressed concern about the situation in the region. In response to Armenian provocations, the Azerbaijani Armed Forces displayed heroism and defeated the enemy in both military operations. During these meetings, Supreme Commander-in-Chief Ilham Aliyev emphasized the importance of a peaceful resolution to the conflict, but also did not rule out the possibility of war. The conflicting interests of various states and the contradictory statements of the co-chair countries, which only prolonged the conflict, prevented efforts to resolve the frozen problem and ultimately closed the path to peace in the following stages.

On September 30, 2020, during his visit to Latvia, Macron addressed the press and touched upon the Armenia-Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, accusing Azerbaijan of starting the war. He also condemned Turkey's support for Azerbaijan. However, it is well-known that Azerbaijan did not start the war; rather, it was Armenia. On September 27, 2020, in response to Armenia's provocation, the Azerbaijani Armed Forces launched counteroffensive operations along the entire front. This provocation was not the first, as in July and August of the same year, Armenians had used heavy weapons and artillery against the peaceful civilian population. Following this, Macron's unconstructive remarks during his press conference in Latvia once again highlighted France's anti-Azerbaijani stance to the international community [6].

During the 44-day war, Macron repeatedly called President Aliyev, urging the cessation of military operations. Furthermore, in his public statements around the world, he portrayed Azerbaijan as the aggressor

and Armenia as the victim of aggression. Macron even went as far as accusing Azerbaijan of hiring mercenaries to fight in Nagorno-Karabakh. In response, on December 1, 2020, President Ilham Aliyev addressed the Azerbaijani people regarding the return of the Lachin region and firmly expressed his stance against Armenia's supporters. He stated that the "illusion of maintaining a permanent conflict" was the product not only of Armenia but also of those who supported it. President Aliyev said, "If France loves Armenians so much, it should give them Marseille and create a second state there"[1, s. 111].

The decisions made by the French Senate on November 25, 2020, and November 15, 2022, to recognize the so-called "Nagorno-Karabakh Republic" which is not even recognized by Armenia itself, should be viewed as an attempt to reignite the conflict in the region. The trilateral statement signed on November 10, 2020, by Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Russia officially confirmed the end of the conflict from both a legal and factual standpoint. In his interview with the Azerbaijani people, President Ilham Aliyev confirmed that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict had been resolved with the signing of the agreement.

France's stance on Nagorno-Karabakh highlighted the presence of double standards in its foreign policy. The French Senate's decision to recognize the so-called entity was influenced by various factors. By acting outside the framework of the November 10 declaration, France weakened its position in the South Caucasus, leading to regional powers surpassing its influence. By reigniting the conflict, France sought to reassert itself as a leading power in the region. In fact, the Azerbaijani people justifiably demanded that France be removed from the Minsk Group, viewing its actions as a continuation of its anti-Azerbaijani policy.

France's "hegemony" plans, reflected in Macron's rhetoric, effectively ended with the November 10 declaration, which marked the conclusion of the conflict resolution process in the South Caucasus. Additionally, the strained relations with Turkey and Turkey's active involvement in the process further angered France. The presence of approximately 500,000 Armenians in France, many of whom hold government positions and interfere with the administration's decisions, created a situation where decisions were often made in line with their interests [9].

The French President's provocative remarks against Azerbaijan were once again evident in his interview on October 12, 2022, with the "France-2" television channel. In this interview, Macron expressed his "special" relationship with Armenia, claiming that they were always striving for peace and security. He then made statements against Azerbaijan that lacked any legal foundation. Naturally, Azerbaijan responded swiftly to Macron's inflammatory remarks. During the summit of the CIS Heads of State Council in the capital of Kazakhstan, Astana, President Ilham Aliyev strongly condemned Macron's words, considering them insulting and full of slander [7].

France's continued adherence to Armenian interests and its disregard for international law was once again evident in September 2023, during the disarmament of illegal Armenian separatists. In September 2022 and 2023, remnants of illegal Armenian militants in Karabakh once again attempted provocations. As a result of these provocations, after 23 hours of military operations on September 19, 2023, the remaining separatist forces were fully disarmed. Following this operation, French President Macron declared that Armenia's territorial integrity was being given careful attention, accusing Baku of "threatening" Armenia's borders. Macron emphasized, "France is currently giving very careful attention to Armenia's territorial integrity, as that is the issue". He also accused Russia of showing "solidarity" with Baku, siding with them. [6].

Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev responded clearly and decisively during his visit to Karabakh, giving a robust reply to France, which has been adversarial towards the country. The Azerbaijani leader emphasized that international law consistently supports Azerbaijan, both on the battlefield and in the political realm. He highlighted that Armenia's supporters would have to accept this reality and come to terms with the new regional dynamics. Additionally, President Aliyev underscored the significance of establishing a border checkpoint on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border in the Lachin region on April 23, 2023. He emphasized that this would mark the complete restoration of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity.

Furthermore, instead of addressing the causes of recent riots and strikes in New Caledonia, or reflecting on its failures in Africa, France chose to blame Azerbaijan. France criticized Azerbaijan for its active participation in the United Nations Movement (Azerbaijan held the chairmanship of this movement from 2019-2024) and anti-colonial processes. In reality, France should have focused on critically analyzing its foreign policy and making decisions based on international law and the interests of its population, rather than placing blame on Azerbaijan [3, s. 18-20].

### **Conclusion:**

Although France was one of the first countries to recognize Azerbaijan's independence and establish significant economic ties with the country, as a co-chair of the Minsk Group, France failed to pursue a "balanced" policy in the Armenia-Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and often made statements

supporting the interests of Armenia. It is no coincidence that both National Leader Heydar Aliyev and President Ilham Aliyev made their first official foreign visits to France. Despite the efforts of Azerbaijani diplomacy at the OSCE summits in Budapest, Lisbon, and Istanbul, which aimed to resolve the conflict, Azerbaijan managed to achieve several successes, even though Western countries attempted to prolong the conflict. Attempts by the co-chairs of the Minsk Group to resolve the conflict through the “Package”, “Phased”, and “Unified State” principles ended in failure. France, which has a non-constructive attitude towards Azerbaijan and is strongly influenced by the Armenian diaspora, has a special sympathy for Armenians driven by several key factors. For example, in 2008, during the UN General Assembly session, when a decision favorable to Azerbaijan's interests was made, France, along with other co-chair countries, opposed it.

The sympathy for Armenians reached its peak during President Emmanuel Macron's term, and there are significant reasons for this. In 2018, Macron visited Armenia, made statements supporting Armenians, and did not visit Azerbaijan, which was yet another manifestation of his pro-Armenian policy. After the events of September 27, 2020, when Armenia was defeated and Azerbaijan regained its territories, President Macron quickly intervened, emphasizing the need for a ceasefire. He made sharp statements against Azerbaijan and declared that France was standing by Armenia. His anger was rooted in the new realities created by the signing of the November 10, 2020, ceasefire agreement. Overall, France's Islamophobic and anti-Azerbaijani policies, as well as its unacceptable interference in Azerbaijan's internal affairs, clearly demonstrate that the further France stays from the region, the better it will be.

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