

Why Is Azerbaijan in No Hurry to Achieve Peace with Armenia?

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On 19 September, shortly after Azerbaijan's 24-hour military operation launched in Karabakh, the leader of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic announced its dissolution, saying the republic would cease to exist. Moreover, the entire ethnic Armenian population left Karabakh. Thus, it was assumed that the main obstacles to achieving a peace deal between Azerbaijan and Armenia – Nagorno-Karabakh's status and the security of local Armenians – had been removed, and the two countries would soon be able to sign a peace treaty. However, in October Aliyev refused to attend EU-led peace talks with Pashinyan in Granada and Brussels. It appears that Azerbaijan is in no hurry to sign a peace treaty with Armenia. In Azerbaijan, analysts have made several assumptions about the reasons for this. In this article, I will discuss those reasons that seem most likely.

First of all, for Azerbaijan, France is primarily seen as a hindrance to the signing of a peace treaty. France's relations with Azerbaijan have now been severed, largely because of its open support for Armenia in the Karabakh conflict, its convening of the UN Security Council session on the Karabakh issue, and its agreement to sell weapons to Armenia. For that reason, Azerbaijan cannot see France as a neutral mediator. Secondly, some members of the European Parliament have called on the EU to adopt [sanctions](#) against Azerbaijan, accusing Baku of committing ethnic cleansing and human rights violations. Azerbaijan hopes to dissuade EU countries from their support of Armenia by not participating in peace talks in Granada and Brussels. Thirdly, the EU also wants to discuss the return of ethnic Armenians to Karabakh. Azerbaijan, however, is

unwilling to discuss the population of Karabakh in a peace agreement to be concluded with Armenia, as Baku considers Karabakh its internal issue. Likely, for these three reasons, Azerbaijan is unwilling to accept EU mediation in peace talks.

Armenia's frayed relations with Russia but good relations with the West can be stated as the fourth reason for Azerbaijan's reluctance to achieve peace. On the one hand, for some time, Nikol Pashinyan has voiced a hard line against Russia. In an [interview](#), he said that depending solely on Moscow in the security sphere was "a strategic mistake," adding that Russia might abandon the region. In another interview, he [stated](#) that Armenia sees no advantage in continuing to host Russian military bases on its territory because of Azerbaijan's full control over Karabakh. Pashinyan has likewise commented on Russia's turn against Armenia because of his criticism of Russia: Both countries have recently summoned each other's ambassadors to their respective foreign ministries for discussions. On the other hand, relations between Armenia and the West have been [expanding](#) as the country's rift with Russia widens. For example, France has already begun selling weapons to Armenia; the EU has decided to further increase the number of its observer mission on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border; addressing MEPs in the European Parliament's hemicycle, Pashinyan publicly [stated](#) that "Armenia is ready to be closer to the European Union, as much as the European Union considers it possible." Russian officials have threatened [to overthrow](#) Pashinyan because Russia views Armenia's Westward-leaning foreign policy as a threat. In his address to MEPs, Pashinyan himself reiterated Russia's threats, [saying](#) that "our allies [i.e., Russia] in the security sector have made public calls for a change of power in Armenia, to overthrow the democratic government." In this context, uncertainty as to whether Pashinyan can stay in power is stated as one of the reasons why Azerbaijan is not rushing to sign a peace treaty. Thus, if Armenian stability is in question, the continuity of any peace agreement is doubtful. The threat to Pashinyan's government

seems particularly real, especially because of the [plans](#) of the president and officials of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic to establish a government in exile in Yerevan. Those plans have received the support of the former president of Armenia, Serzh Sargsyan.

In my opinion, there are two more reasons that hinder the peace process but that have not been disclosed by Azerbaijan yet. The fifth reason is still the issue of territorial integrity. Currently eight Azerbaijani villages (Baganis Ayrım, Upper Askipara, Lower Askipara, Kheyrimli, Gizilhajili, Sofulu, Barkhudarli and Karki) are under Armenian occupation and one Armenian exclave (Bashkend/Artsvashen) is under Azerbaijani occupation. In addition, Armenia claims that Azerbaijan occupied 200 square kilometers of Armenian territory in 2021. Azerbaijan first of all demands Armenia to agree on border delimitation and return the occupied villages. Pashinyan raised the option of returning the occupied villages on both sides – i.e., a land swap – after the 2020 war. However, he later changed his position and proposed to maintain the present state of affairs. Speaking about returning the territories demanded by Azerbaijan, Pashinyan recently [said](#) that Azerbaijan occupied four more Armenian villages: Berkaber (Bibish), Vazashen (Lelekend), Paravakar (Tatli) and Aygehovit (Uzuntala). Interestingly, it was the first time that these villages have been mentioned by an Armenian official. Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry has [denied](#) the allegations made by the Armenian prime minister. Thus, the issue of the return of occupied villages on the eve of peace talks has once again spiked tensions between the parties. Why are the parties unwilling to return the occupied villages? Armenian leadership does not want to return these villages because Armenia's highways connected to both the inland regions of the country and Georgia pass through Gazakh's occupied villages, while Armenian roads to Iran pass through Karki. If Armenia returned these villages, Azerbaijan would assume full control of the highways. And for Baku, the return

of these villages is naturally important both from the point of view of restoring territorial integrity and giving Azerbaijan a very significant leverage over Armenia. Thus, Azerbaijan wants to establish border control points along the highways spanning these villages. By doing so, it can close Armenia's access both to its inland regions and international roads, pressuring Armenia to give a corridor to Azerbaijan via Syunik.

The sixth reason why Azerbaijan is in no hurry to sign a peace is that good relations with Armenia in the short term could bring about a hope for stability and security among Karabakh Armenians and a desire to return. This again raises the question of whether the peacekeepers should remain in Azerbaijan or an international mission should be dispatched to the region to replace them. The return of the Armenians will ramp up Western demands and pressure on Azerbaijan by creating an obligation for Azerbaijan to ensure the rights of this population. And after the military solution to the conflict, Azerbaijan does not intend to accept any of these terms. On the contrary, Azerbaijan wants a peace in which all its desires are satisfied, dictated by the winner of the war.