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## **EU SUPPORTS PRINCIPLES OF TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY**

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27.11.2017

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Vestnik Kavkaza 26 Nov 2017

Brussels, capital of the European Union, hosted the Eastern Partnership summit. This initiative, aimed at improving relations with the countries of the former USSR within the framework of the EU Neighborhood Policy, includes six countries, including Azerbaijan and Armenia. In the final declaration, participants of the summit expressed their support of territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty of their partners and pledged to protect them.

That's how the Brussels declaration responded to the issue of unresolved conflicts, in particular (although no conflict region was specifically mentioned) the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It's especially important for Azerbaijan, since 20% of its territory is under the Armenian occupation for more than 20 years. As a result of this occupation, more than a million Azerbaijanis became refugees and internally displaced persons. The UN Security Council adopted four resolutions demanding immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the Armenian troops from the Azerbaijani territories, but Armenia refused to do it.

"Aggressive separatism can't be accepted in the 21st century. All forms of separatism must be condemned and a common approach should be applied to all manifestations of separatism. Territorial integrity of Azerbaijan is as valuable as territorial integrity of any other country, and it must be restored," Ilham Aliyev said in Brussels.

Apparently, he was heard, since the final document of the summit stated that violation of principles and norms of international law continues in the region. This declaration also urged to intensify efforts to resolve conflicts in accordance with principles and norms of international law.

"We believe that all these conflicts must be resolved through the prism of international norms and laws, through very clear support for territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence. The EU supports existing platforms that help to resolve these conflicts," the document says.

What is the reason behind Europe's support of Azerbaijan's position in the conditions when there are still frictions between Baku and Brussels due to different views on the human rights issue, and due to the fact that Baku maintains relations of strategic partnership with Russia? Obviously, the answer lies in the fact that Azerbaijan, unlike other "Eastern partners", is able to pursue an independent policy and isn't going to join the European Union, although it's not against mutually beneficial cooperation with the bloc.

This story demonstrates that it's much easier to pursue independent foreign policy when you're economically independent. The European Union is the main trading partner of Baku. 50% of

Azerbaijan's trade accounts for the EU member states. the EU invested \$20 billion in its economy since Azerbaijan became independent. The Southern Gas Corridor project is currently developing, it already exceeds \$40 billion. Azerbaijan's gas fields will become a new source of natural gas for Europe and will change the energy map of the European continent.

Another important initiative is the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway project, which connects Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, creating a new transport corridor between Asia and Europe. This will be the shortest transport route that will increase mutual trade turnover and allow many countries to join the project.

Another important result of the Brussels summit is the signing of an agreement on comprehensive and expanded partnership between the European Union and Armenia. Some experts suggested the Armenian leadership needs association with the EU for a more successful bargaining with Russia.

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Kaynak/Source: