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## **AZERBAIJAN SLAMS FRENCH OFFICIALS' ILLEGAL VISIT TO KARABAKH**

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Baku has condemned an illegal visit of French officials to the city of Khankandi in Azerbaijan's Karabakh region, the Foreign Ministry said on September on 16.

Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Leyla Abdullayeva said that this is not the first illegal visit by France's National Assembly member Francois Pupponi to Khankandi.

"He is known for his strong anti-Azerbaijani position. The French deputy's name is included in the list of foreign nationals banned from entering our country, for violating Azerbaijani legislation," Abdullayeva stated.

Moreover, she emphasized that a ban on entry to Azerbaijan will be also imposed on the mayor of France's Arnouville city and a representative of the Sarcelles district, who accompanied Pupponi during the illegal visit.

"Such irresponsible and provocative behavior of France's representatives is unacceptable and undermines post-conflict peacebuilding efforts in the region," Abdullayeva stressed.

During the last year's 44-day war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, French President Emmanuel Macron and some French circles failed to demonstrate a neutral position, despite the fact that France is a co-chair in the OSCE Minsk Group mediating talks between Baku and Yerevan.

In contradiction to the mandate of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chair, only the interests of Armenia were protected and an inadequate position, which did not meet the requirements of a balanced and fair co-chairmanship, was displayed. This stance was several times criticized by Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and some other senior officials.

A Moscow-brokered ceasefire deal that Baku and Yerevan signed on November 10, 2020, brought an end to six weeks of fighting between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijani army declared a victory against the Armenian troops. The signed agreement obliged Armenia to withdraw its troops from the Azerbaijani lands that it has occupied since the early 1990s.

The peace agreement stipulated the return of Azerbaijan's Armenian-occupied Kalbajar, Aghdam and Lachin regions and withdraw its troops from the Azerbaijani lands that it has occupied since the early 1990s. Before the signing of the deal, the Azerbaijani army had liberated around 300 villages, settlements, city centers, and historic Shusha city.

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