

# Five years after the Second Karabakh War: The path to victory, restoration and peace







**F**rom the day the Second Karabakh War that began on September 27, 2020 and up until the moment when the Azerbaijani flag was raised on the liberated lands after 44 days of heroic battles, Azerbaijan wrote a new chapter in its modern history. This development brought back to mind the symbol of victories that changed the balance of power in the region and led to the emergence of a new geopolitical map. That brilliant military triumph was not only a historic turning point in terms of the liberation of lands that had been occupied for decades, but also the restoration of national dignity, the awakening of national identity, and the strengthening of Azerbaijan's position as a rising regional power in the South Caucasus.

In the five years following this great victory, Azerbaijan not only secured its borders, but also embarked on large-scale restoration and reconstruction projects. Important steps were taken to build modern infrastructure, restore vandalized villages and cities, and create conditions for the return of hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons to their homes. Thus, the victory turned from a purely military event into a nationwide development project reflecting the state's strategic vision for the future. This project embodied the synthesis of both security and socioeconomic development.

Today, on the fifth anniversary of that war, Azerbaijan stands on the threshold of a new and historically sig-

nificant political stage. On August 8, 2025, a historic peace agreement was signed between Azerbaijan and Armenia, mediated by the United States. This document opens up a new future for the region. The agreement,



based on the principles of mutual recognition of sovereignty and inviolability of borders, opening of communication and transport lines, and renunciation of hostile rhetoric, if implemented with wisdom and loyalty, could mark the beginning of a period of lasting stability and cooperation in the region.

The commemoration of these five years clearly shows that the Victory of Azerbaijan is not just an end, but also a new beginning – a long-term path of development that combines the liberation of the land with the restoration of man, the consolidation of peace, and faith in the future. Therefore, the Second Karabakh War is no longer perceived as just a military memory, but also as a continuous national story – it combines the lessons of the past, the achievements of the present, and the hopes of the future.

The trilateral statement of November 10, 2020 ended the Second Karabakh War and imposed an obligation on Armenia to withdraw all its military forces from the territory of Azerbaijan. However, this obligation was not fulfilled within three years. On the contrary, Armenia and the separatist forces it supports had strengthened their military presence in Karabakh, deployed new equipment, failed to give up their claims to independence, and continued their activities against the Azerbaijani state through self-styled entities.

The terrorist incidents that took place in September 2023 brought the situation to a critical point. The deaths of civilians and military personnel as a result of mine explosions on the Ahmadbayli-Fuzuli-Shusha highway, as well as the incessant shelling of the positions of the Azerbaijani Army, were the last events that exhausted the patience of the Azerbaijani state. Thus, a local anti-terrorist operation was carried out as a necessary step to restore the constitutional order of Azerbaijan, ensure the security of citizens, and protect its sovereign rights based on international law.

The anti-terrorist operation began on September 19, 2023 and lasted only 23 hours and 43 minutes. As a result of high professionalism, technological superiority and strategic planning, the Azerbaijani Army achieved all its goals in a short time, separatism in Karabakh was eliminated once and for all, and the territorial integrity and sovereignty of our country were fully regained.

Only five years have passed since the liberation of Garabagh and East Zangezur from Armenian occupation. Images of once devastated, plundered and mine-ridden lands have been circulated around the world. But these territories have changed beyond recognition today: cities and villages are under construction, roads are being built, lands are being cultivated and yielding crops, enterprises are starting to operate, and





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tens of thousands of Azerbaijanis who lived as internally displaced persons for decades are already settling in their new homes. The pace of these changes is truly astonishing, and the results are even more surprising, especially when compared with the situation 35 years

ago, the first years of independence. At that time, many thought that Azerbaijan would remain in poverty and hopelessness for many years. But the people managed to overcome those difficulties – they eliminated the severe consequences of economic decline and separation



from Soviet space and mitigated the consequences of Armenian military aggression. In a short period of time, Azerbaijan not only restored its industrial potential, but also managed to increase it several times.

The last five years have been a crucial stage in the modern history of Azerbaijan. As a result of the combined government and institutional effort, comprehensive development programs have been implemented in various strategic areas. The reconstruction work began with mine clearance operations – the first step to ensure the safety of the soil. This was followed by the construction of schools and universities to revive the education system, the renewal of energy and communication networks, and the creation of modern infrastructure services. The work carried out in the field of transport, highways, railways and airports has reconnected Garabagh and East Zangezur with the rest of Azerbaijan.

The humanitarian and administrative framework for these large-scale activities was the created by the Great Return program, which enabled thousands of families to safely return to their homeland.

The most important achievements of this five-year period can be summarized in the following areas:





**Demining**

The clearance of the liberated territories of Garabagh and East Zangezur from mines is considered one of the most important humanitarian and national tasks of the

post-war period. Mines pose an immediate and direct threat to the lives of civilians and workers engaged in reconstruction work, as well as hinder the implementation of infrastructure, agricultural and settlement projects. Therefore, the Government of Azerbaijan, through ANAMA, the Azerbaijan National Mine Action Agency, declared this issue one of the top priorities immediately after the Second Karabakh War (2020). This was the first step towards ensuring lasting peace and sustainable development in the region.

During 2020–2025, ANAMA specialists, together with the engineering forces of the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Emergency Situations, carried out the largest mine clearance operation in the country's history. By September 2025, a total of 227,700 hectares of land had been cleared in Fuzuli, Aghdam, Lachin, Shusha, Jabrayil, Zangilan and Tartar districts, as more than 209,000 unexploded ordnance had been detected and neutralized. Among them, approximately 38,600 anti-personnel mines, 22,200 anti-tank mines and more than 148,000 unexploded ordnance were found and retrieved. Currently, teams are clearing more than 1,400 hectares of land per week, using modern electronic detectors, armored vehicles and specially trained mine-sniffing dogs.

From a humanitarian perspective, mines have caused more than 400 casualties over the years, both civilians and military personnel, including those killed and





injured – mine-clearing workers, farmers, and residents returning to their homelands.

According to international reports, Azerbaijan is one of the most mine-contaminated countries in the world

today. According to government estimates, more than one and a half million mines remain planted in the liberated areas, and their complete clearance is a process that could take years and cost billions of dollars.





However, despite all these threats and risks, the acceleration of clearance work and the safety of liberated areas vividly demonstrate Azerbaijan's determination to transform Garabagh from a land of death into a place of life and construction.

### **Educational institutions**

Education is one of the top priorities of the state strategy for the restoration of liberated territories. Currently, more than 20 schools operate in those regions, and this number is expected to exceed 40 in the next academic year .

In 2025 alone, 14 secondary schools were opened in liberated territories, employing 284 teachers and educating more than 2,400 students. In addition, six pre-school educational institutions (kindergartens) were opened during the same year, with 209 children attending them under the supervision of 20 educators. These facts show how quickly social and educational life in Garabagh and the surrounding regions has been restored in the five years after liberation.

One of the most important achievements in the field of education in the liberated territories is the opening of the Garabagh University, established by presidential decree in 2023. The university began operating in

Khankendi in the 2024–2025 academic year and was the first state higher education institution established in the liberated territories.





There are six departments and 27 specialties at the Garabagh University – covering engineering, pedago-



gy, languages, economics, medicine, and humanities. According to the Ministry of Science and Education, 1,120 students were to be admitted for the first year and a total of 1,104 students were admitted — which indicates a 98.5 percent implementation of the plan.

Not only academic buildings but also modern student dormitories, service infrastructure and a university clinic, which opened in February 2025, have been put in place. The architectural style of the campus reflects the synthesis of Azerbaijani cultural identity and modern technological advanced.

The Garabagh University is not only an institution of higher education, but also a symbol of scientific and cultural revival and peace through knowledge. The university has become a center of knowledge and innovation by attracting local and foreign experts. It has also become a pillar of stability and intellectual development in the region.

### **Energy and communications**

Energy and communication projects are key pillars of the reconstruction and sustainable development phase that began after the Second Karabakh War in



2020. Electricity, water and communication infrastructure in the occupied territories were almost completely destroyed for many years. Therefore, their restoration has been identified as a national priority for the return of residents and the provision of social services.

The Government of Azerbaijan believes that sustainable energy and modern communications are not only essential for daily needs, but are also key contributors to the formation of a production-oriented economy and an integrated society.





Significant results have been achieved in the energy sector in the last five years. "AzerEnerji" OJSC has

built new 110 kV electrical substations in Fuzuli, Lachin, Shusha, Aghdam and Jabrayil districts, the small hydroelectric power stations that had been inactive for many years have been reactivated. High-voltage transmission lines of 110 and 330 kV have connected these cities to the national energy grid. In addition, "Azerlshig" OJSC has built modern control centers and digital substations in Fuzuli, Shusha and Hadrut.

In 2021, the government announced the "Garabagh and East Zangezur – Green Energy Zone" initiative, implementing solar and wind energy projects in partnership with international companies such as BP. The goal is to produce hundreds of megawatts of clean energy by 2030.

In the field of communications and digital infrastructure, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies is implementing the Smart City and Smart Village programs. Fiber-optic networks have covered cities such as Fuzuli, Shusha and Aghdam, and high-speed internet, 4G and 5G services have been launched. In addition, integrated centers have been created to digitize public and educational services.

Thus, energy and communication projects have not just become part of the infrastructure, but have evolved into symbols of stability and progress. They have played





a significant role in transforming the liberated territories into models of modern life and innovation, forming the basis of Azerbaijan's new development model.

Network of railways, highways, tunnels and airports

The integration of Azerbaijan's railway network reached a historic milestone on May 10, 2025 with the opening of the Aghdam railway station complex and bus station. The passenger train line from Baku to Aghdam has become operational. This event was officially announced by the "Azerbaijan Railways" CJSC and presented as an integral part of the second stage of the "Barda-Aghdam" line. On the same day, it was announced that preparatory work had begun on the restoration of the "Aghdam-Khankendi" line. This logistics line will be an important transport axis that will strengthen connection into the Khankendi-Shusha-national network.

In parallel with this progress in railway infrastructure, a leap was also observed in the construction of highways. Immediately after the war of liberation, the Victory Road (Fuzuli-Shusha direction) was put into operation as the first strategic route leading to Shusha. In the following years, the State Agency for Automobile Roads operated in two parallel directions:

Improvement of the Victory Road – a total of 92 kilometers of the road were renovated by installing two layers of asphalt-concrete pavement on a 31-kilometer section and one layer on a 61-kilometer section. This significantly increased the safety and passing characteristics of the road.

Construction of the new Fuzuli-Shusha highway – the first 48km section of this road, with a planned length of 84.6 km, is designed as a six-lane road, and the remaining part as a four-lane road. Numerous bridges and tunnels have been built on the road, ensuring the comfort of movement in difficult sections of the terrain. This highway will play the role of the main artery of tourism and economic relations between the cities of Shusha, Khankendi and Fuzuli.

In addition, about 80 km of mountain roads and more than 10 km of tunnels are being built in the Garabagh and East Zangezur regions (e.g. in the Kalbajar-Lachin direction). These projects will significantly shorten the distance between cities and villages and increase the efficiency of logistical chains.

Three international airports have been fully constructed in the liberated territories in the past five years:



Fuzuli International Airport was built in record time, in a matter of nine months, and was put into operation in October 2021.

Zangilan International Airport was inaugurated on October 20, 2022 with the participation of the presidents of Azerbaijan and Turkiye.

Lachin International Airport was put into operation on May 28, 2025.

On July 17, 2024, "AZAL" (Azerbaijan Airlines) announced the start of regular passenger flights twice a week on the Baku-Fuzuli route.

#### The Great Return Program

Roads and bridges are not only an infrastructure project, but also a mainstay of the Great Return policy. This program has been implemented in stages by the State Committee for Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons since 2022.

During the fall of 2023–2025, the Committee documented the arrival of returnees to Lachin, Khojaly, Aghdara, Kalbajar, and other districts, the handover of keys to residential buildings, and the expansion of regular settlement processes.

According to official data, a total of 22 billion manats (approximately 12.9 billion USD) have been allocated for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the liberated territories in the 2020-2025 time period. Of this, 4 billion manats (2.35 billion USD) are intended for 2025.

The government plans to complete the first phase of the Great Return program by the end of 2026. This phase will enable the return of tens of thousands of internally displaced persons to the Garabagh and East Zangezur regions. This will be a crucial step towards restoring lasting stability and a full life.

#### Conclusion

The facts listed above show that in the five years since the Second Karabakh War, Azerbaijan has achieved unprecedented results in the field of reconstruction and development. In a short period of time, a nationwide transformation has taken place in the areas of security, education, energy, transport and social infrastructure in the liberated territories.

In a matter of five years, Azerbaijan has brought completely destroyed cities back to life, turning Garabagh and East Zangezur into symbols of national revival and nationwide solidarity.

However, these achievements are not the end in themselves, but rather the beginning of a new era of development. Azerbaijan is moving forward with determination towards its strategic goals – completing reconstruction, strengthening regional integration and consolidating peace. At the heart of this policy is the revival of people, the rebirth of the land and the transformation of Garabagh into a symbol of Azerbaijan's national revival and identity. 🌱