

## **Azerbaijan, Turkey to boost trade volume to \$15bn**

By **Aisha Jabbarova**

Azerbaijan and Turkey have signed preferential trade agreement to step up efforts to bring their trade volume to \$15bn.

The agreement was signed during Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's one-day visit to Baku on February 25.

President Ilham Aliyev said that the documents signed with his Turkish counterpart during the visit, including the agreement on preferential trade, will give a great impetus to increase the trade turnover from \$4.5 billion to \$15 billion, as was outlined in 2019.

Aliyev's remarks came after the eighth meeting of the Turkey-Azerbaijan High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council, which he co-chaired with Erdogan.

Aliyev described 2019 as a successful year for the Turkish-Azerbaijani ties.

The president reminded that in 2019, the sides completed in Turkey the TANAP project, which is a main part of the Southern Gas Corridor and transports Caspian gas through Turkey and onward to Europe. The Southern Gas Corridor will be fully commissioned by late 2020 and TAP which part of it, has been completed 92 per cent, Aliyev said.

### **Investments**

Aliyev reminded that so far Azerbaijan has invested 18 billion in the Turkish economy and Turkey \$12.5 billion in the Azerbaijani economy.

"Currently, about 4,000 Turkish companies work in Azerbaijan. They have done work worth \$16 billion in more than 300 projects. According to these parameters, Turkey ranks first," Aliyev said.

### **Kars-Nakhchivan railway**

During Erdogan's visit, the two countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the construction of the Kars-Nakhchivan railway between Turkey and Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic.

Aliyev said that "This issue is of particular importance because Nakhchivan has been living in the condition of the blockade for many years because of Armenia's occupying policy. The delivery of products manufactured in Nakhchivan to foreign markets is a major problem. The construction of the Kars-Igdir-Nakhchivan railway would eliminate this problem, and this will contribute to the development and well-being of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic where the only land border between Azerbaijan and Turkey passes. Thank you for this agreement".

"An exchange of views was also held on further activities and the successful development of Nakhchivan. Three years ago, we prepared a list of goods that can be exported from Nakhchivan to Turkey. We are grateful for that too and I am sure that the number of export operations from Nakhchivan to Turkey will increase in the future," the president went on saying.

### **Defence**

Aliyev said that he also discussed future cooperation in defence with his Turkish counterpart.

"Last year alone, 13 joint military exercises were conducted. There will be even more this year. Azerbaijan will continue acquiring modern weaponry from Turkey, and we also talked about organizing joint production today."

### **Nagorno-Karabakh conflict**

Furthermore, Aliyev thanked Erdogan for his country's just position in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. He said that controversial and unconstructive statements made recently by Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan undermine the peace negotiations.

"The unconstructive position of Armenia is the main obstacle to the settlement of the conflict. The extremely contradictory and conflicting statements of the Armenian leadership cause great damage to the negotiation process. They either say that Nagorno-Karabakh is Armenia or that Nagorno-Karabakh is an independent state. It turns out that they don't know themselves what Nagorno-Karabakh is. If they don't, we can tell them: Nagorno-Karabakh is Azerbaijan! The whole world and we are talking about this. All countries of the world recognize and support the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, and not a single state recognizes an illegal entity called Nagorno-Karabakh. Of course, the conflict should be resolved within the framework of territorial integrity and sovereignty of our country and the inviolability of our borders," Aliyev said.

Furthermore, the president said that “Turkey is a country that provides Azerbaijan with the biggest support on a global scale”, adding that “there is no issue in which Azerbaijan would not support Turkey”.

“In all the processes currently taking place in the region, the Azerbaijani state and the Azerbaijani people unequivocally stand by the Turkish state and people. Our unity is eternal, and we are certainly building our future on this solid foundation. Therefore, today's eighth meeting of the Council for Strategic Cooperation is a matter of special importance because the countries closest to each other in the world have made very serious decisions on further interaction and cooperation,” the Azerbaijani president went on saying.