

France's mention of destruction of churches in Nagorno-Karabakh triggers condemnation from Baku

Nate Ostiller · OC Media · 2026-05-07

A brief mention of Nagorno-Karabakh and the destruction of Armenian churches in the region by French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot has triggered outrage in Azerbaijan. Barrot's comments, which referred to 'consistent reports on the degradation or disappearance of around forty Christian heritage sites since 2021' in the area, were deemed 'anti-Azerbaijan allegations' by Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry spokesperson Aykhan Hajizada on Thursday.

During a session in the French Senate on Wednesday, Barrot was asked by French MP Étienne Blanc about Nagorno-Karabakh, particularly concerning reports that 'that Azerbaijan is destroying an ancestral cultural and religious heritage there', as well as the fate of the 19 Nagorno-Karabakh Armenian prisoners held in Azerbaijan.

'What is France's diplomatic stance?', Blanc asked Barrot.

In response, Barrot said, 'We are very committed to defending the interests of Christians in the East whenever their freedom of worship or their heritage is threatened'.

In addition to the mentions of the 'forty Christian heritage sites' that have been damaged or destroyed, Barrot said he supported the efforts of NGOs aimed at doing census work on the status of Christian sites in the area.

Moving on, Barrot echoed the sentiment recently shared by French President Emmanuel Macron in Yerevan, saying, 'Eight years ago, Armenia was under the influence of Russia. Thanks to [Prime Minister] Nikol Pachinyan's peaceful revolution, corruption has been curbed, new alliances have been forged, and a step toward Europe has been taken'.

Azerbaijan took particular issue with the first part of Barrot's response, as well as the usage of the term 'Nagorno-Karabakh' in lieu of 'Karabakh'.

'At a time when conditions for lasting peace have been created in the region following the just war waged by Azerbaijan on its sovereign territories within the framework of the norms and principles of international law, we strongly condemn such provocative statements by the French side, which question Azerbaijan's sovereignty over its territories and cast doubt on the protection of cultural and religious heritage', Hajizada said.

'It is a clear example of a double standards that the French Minister, who ignores the destruction of hundreds of mosques and other cultural heritage sites in the Azerbaijan's territories during Armenia's occupation, comments on the demolition of certain structures dating back to the occupation period and makes inappropriate references to the proceedings before the International Court of Justice'.

Hajizada further claimed that 'historical and religious monuments located in the sovereign territories of Azerbaijan constitute our national and cultural heritage and are protected regardless of their origin or religious or secular affiliation'.

In April, satellite imagery suggested that Azerbaijan had destroyed an Armenian church in the area.

Three other recent resolutions with similar language by the Dutch and Belgian parliaments, as well as the EU Parliament, have also caused outrage in Azerbaijan. The latter led to Azerbaijan severing ties with the EU Parliament.

For ease of reading, we choose not to use qualifiers such as 'de facto', 'unrecognised', or 'partially recognised' when discussing institutions or political positions within Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and South Ossetia. This does not imply a position on their status.

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