



Hügelgasse 2, A-1130 Vienna Tel: +43 (1) 403 13 22 Fax: +43 (1) 403 13 23 E-mail: vienna@mission.mfa.gov.az

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STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

**Special meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council
16 January, 2014**

*in response to the address delivered by Swiss Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE,
H.E. Mr. Didier Burkhalter*

Thank you,

I would like to warmly welcome President Burkhalter to the Permanent Council and extend our Delegation's gratitude for presenting your priorities in an open and comprehensive manner. Since this is the first meeting of the Permanent Council under the Swiss Chairmanship, I want also to congratulate our friend Ambassador Thomas Gremminger for assuming the gavel of Chairman of the OSCE Permanent Council and wish him a good luck.

Mr. Chairman,

Indeed we are living through a difficult, but necessary period of reflection of a role that the OSCE could play for building a security community free of conflicts and dividing lines. Some of us believe in this Organization as capable to increase the level of security and predictability, others see OSCE as fit for putting more emphasis on issues of democratization and respect for human rights. Our visions of the OSCE role might differ, but none of us would succeed in reinforcing our respective visions until we foster a culture of dialogue, try to articulate our concerns and find ways to cooperate to advance security. In the interest of time I would concentrate my intervention on one major concern for our Delegation, which coincides with your priority that is dialogue and confidence-building in South Caucasus.

For Azerbaijan existence of protracted conflict on its territory is the most serious, if not existential security challenge that we take into consideration in this reflection period, which we named Helsinki+40. We joined the OSCE with a major expectation that principles of Helsinki Final Act will help us finding solution to the conflict with our neighbor. This year we will mark the 20th anniversary of signing a cease-fire agreement that was established as a temporary measure to speedily proceed to a peace agreement. Unfortunately, more than two decades of OSCE mediation yielded no substantive results.

As a country most of all suffering from this conflict, we have many reasons to engage in finger pointing, first of all due to lack of implementation of four United Nations Security

Council resolutions demanding immediate, unconditional and complete withdrawal of occupying forces from all occupied territories of Azerbaijan. We have generations of refugees and internally displaced persons deprived of their fundamental right to return and live in their land of origin, to restore their private property on the land of their ancestors. These territories are heavily militarized, large amount of CFE limited weapons are deployed in those territories in violation of the Treaty. Continued militarization of the conflict zone prevents us from engaging into CSBMs. The logical questions our Delegation wishes to rise with regard to this conflict, without naming, blaming or shaming anyone: “are we able to discuss these issues?” or rather “is there a political will to engage into dialogue on these serious challenges to a security community?” So far we fail to find a solid answer here that would keep us assured that a security community that we embarked to build on would be free of conflicts. Nor the OSCE Minsk Group, which has almost gone to oblivion, helped alleviate our grievances.

Therefore, our Delegation in Vienna wants to seek clarifications to this, in our view extremely difficult situation. We express our readiness to engage into dialogue on these issues. We hope that Helsinki+40 would be a suitable format for the interested Delegations to contribute to the progress in resolution of protracted conflict. We believe in opportunities of a dialogue and following your recommendation wish to encourage everyone concerned to seize them.

Mr. Chairman,

Our Delegation supports your call encouraging contacts between civil societies of Azerbaijan and Armenia and stands ready to consider any reasonable confidence-building measure that could contribute to resolution of the conflict. Especially, we see a real merit in engaging both Armenian and Azerbaijani conflict affected communities of the Nagorno-Karabakh region. These parts of population have lost contacts more than twenty years ago and they experience more difficulty in finding proper opportunities for contacts outside of the region. Therefore, we consider possibilities of arranging meetings of these two communities as a matter of priority, but, of course, we are also supportive to ideas of contacts at a broader level of societies in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

I suspect that distinguished Ambassador of Armenia would probably respond to my statement with his own concerns with regard to the position of the Azerbaijani authorities on the conflict. I encourage him to raise them again within the Helsinki+40 process in order to enable me to respond or suggest a specific set of confidence-building measures, which may alleviate his concerns and save the time here today.

I wish to conclude by thanking you for being with us today and wish you and your able team every success.

Thank you.