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A D D R E S S

by H.E. Dr. Elmar Mammadyarov

**Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan
at the 12th meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council**

Sofia, December 6, 2004

Mr. Chairman,

My country has subscribed to the statement made on behalf of the GUUAM Group countries by the distinguished Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. Speaking in my national capacity I, too should like to join other colleagues in extending appreciation to Minister Passy for the work done by the Bulgarian OSCE Chairmanship over this year. I am also pleased to welcome the incoming Chairman-in-Office - Foreign Minister of Slovenia Mr. Dimitrij Rupel and wish him every success in this challenging and responsible post.

Anniversaries of the signature of the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris to be marked the next year in our Organization give us yet another opportunity to assess to what extent the OSCE has succeeded in achieving its fundamental goal – to promote security for its participating States.

In this regard I believe that as the result of such an assessment my country would not be the only one to arrive at a general conclusion: we could be hardly complacent when it comes to practical realization of the OSCE's potential or its real effectiveness in coping with complex challenges encountering the European security already for many years.

The Organization has not always been successful and consistent in promoting implementation of its own norms and principles, especially with regard to the settlement of the decade-long conflicts within its area. In this context allow me to note that the situation in the settlement of the conflict between two participating states - Armenia and Azerbaijan, despite 12 years of the OSCE's mediation, remains unsolved, not lastly, due to the lack of principled and consistent approach within the Organization towards its solemnly declared goals.

Mr. Chairman,

Armenia, having occupied the territories in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh region of the Republic of Azerbaijan, from where all the Azerbaijani population had been ethnically cleansed, believes that it can count on a place in Europe with such a burden. The conflict not only isolates Armenia from the countries of the region and from the regional cooperation but also impedes the integration of the entire region of the South Caucasus to Europe.

Trying to consolidate the results of its military aggression, Armenia has consequently launched a policy of transfer of settlers into the occupied Azerbaijani territories, which is another blatant violation of international law, in particular the Geneva Convention of 1949. Such actions of Armenia run contrary to the political settlement of the conflict, as well as undermine credibility of the OSCE mediating

efforts and are obviously aimed at prejudicing their outcome and imposing a *fait accompli* on Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan has repeatedly expressed its deep concern with these actions at all international levels. We were compelled to request the UN General Assembly to consider the situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. By doing this, we do not intend to direct the process of the conflict resolution into other channels. The matter is about the problem, which impedes the peace negotiations and, if continued, could lead to a humanitarian crisis. The problem of transfer of settlers should be solved in order to proceed further within the Minsk process. OSCE can contribute by sending its multinational fact-finding mission to the occupied lands of Azerbaijan as envisaged by the Helsinki Document of 1992. This mission composed of representatives of the OSCE participating States with relevant expertise should enquire into and report on transfer of settlers.

Azerbaijan still remains committed to the peaceful settlement of the armed conflict on the basis of the commonly recognized norms and principles of international law, including those pertaining to territorial integrity and inviolability of the internationally recognized borders, the relevant UN Security Council's resolutions and the appropriate OSCE documents and decisions.

We would like to normalize our relations with Armenia and to restore good neighbourliness between our two countries, but it is impossible to achieve this on the basis of existing so-called "realities" created as the result of the armed aggression, and our neighbour has to get rid of the illusion that time ticks in his favour.

Azerbaijan agrees on necessity of establishment of confidence between the two countries, but unlike Armenia we see this process as a two-way street. Our confidence with regard to Armenia, which is now equal to nothing can emerge only if we see the latter's sincere readiness to withdraw its troops from our occupied territories.

We expect an appropriate and constructive approach of Armenia. Armenia must take immediate, unconditional and effective measures to cease and reverse all illegal actions in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, including the transfer of population. The government of Armenia has to give clear and firm guarantees against the repetition of such illegal policies and practices.

Mr. Chairman,

Four rounds of recent Prague meetings of the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan, convened with the assistance of the Co-chairmen of the Minsk Conference, brought about certain hopes. In the course of these meetings we

managed to discuss main issues, including return of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, restoration of transport and other communications, establishment of normal interstate relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan and gradual solution of the political issues related to the conflict.

From this esteemed podium I stress that Azerbaijan is ready and wishes to conduct substantive negotiations for the resolution of the conflict which must be based on international law and democracy, not on ethnic cleansing and de-facto annexation of territory of a sovereign state.

Mr. Chairman,

We could hardly agree with the statements coming from the top leadership of Armenia about ethnic incompatibility of Azerbaijanis and Armenians. We believe that Azerbaijanis and Armenians-citizens of Azerbaijan can and will live side by side in peace in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of my country. The major challenge we all face in the region is not an ethnic hatred between the two peoples but incompatibility of the ideology of territorial claims towards neighbors which belongs to the past and a wish to be an integral part of Europe which is our clear vision of the future.

Mr. Chairman,

The situation of a stalemate in the settlement urges principled approaches and calls for immediate actions of the international community. We expect a contribution to be made in this regard by the incoming Slovenian Chairmanship. The OSCE still has some capacity to be utilized for the settlement of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan and other similar conflicts in the OSCE area. We still believe that if political will is there, we can put an end to the practice of double standards and selective approaches, and the OSCE will be able to fulfil its mandate efficiently as well as prove its credibility and relevance. With this goal in mind Azerbaijan is prepared to engage constructively into discussing ways how to carry forward further the OSCE reform.

Thank you.