

Statement
by H.E. Mr. Edward Nalbandian
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia
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ENGLISH only

Mr. Chairman,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Chairman-in-Office, Frank Walter Steinmeier and his team for their leadership in this Organization throughout the year, as well as to extend my gratitude for warm hospitality.

We appreciate the strong commitment of the German Chairmanship to dialogue and cooperation which was demonstrated since the assumption of the OSCE gavel. The renewed spirit of dialogue is more than ever essential in overcoming the current challenges to European security. The OSCE with its historic commitment to the prevention of large-scale conflicts and building confidence should be the main platform for reconciling different approaches and perceptions of security. After all, this is the *raison d'être* of this organization founded on the very essential agreement on inadmissibility of war in Europe.

Thus, the Chairperson-in-Office assumes a leading role in calling for dialogue on the future of the arms control. Armenia has always been a staunch supporter of improved cooperative security arrangements aimed at enhanced transparency and predictability in the OSCE area based on the principles of restraint, inclusivity and risk reduction. We would like to reiterate our readiness to engage in the discussion on the future of arms control based on these principles.

The main objective of arms control regimes is the prevention of use of force. Any significant threat or use of force is a challenge to the indivisible security in the OSCE area since it can undermine the very foundation of our common commitments and core values which inseparably tie us together. The use of force is even more disastrous in the environment of peace processes. Those who consider the use of force as an opportunity to pursue one sided advantages should be boldly reminded that it is a zero sum game which can likely destroy what had been built through long years of negotiations and may seriously undermine further efforts of building bridges between the parties concerned.

Mr. Chairman,

Large scale military offensive of Azerbaijan against Nagorno-Karabakh in April was the most dangerous escalation of the conflict since 1994 when trilateral cease-fire agreement was signed without time limitations between Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia.

The Azerbaijani aggression was accompanied by gross violations of the international humanitarian law in an apparent attempt to terrorize the people of Nagorno-Karabakh. When many OSCE participating States have been condemning in strongest terms the brutalities committed by DAESH, most of them could not even imagine that the same kind of despicable crimes could be committed in the OSCE area, by an OSCE participating State. The images of those atrocities, including the beheadings, were circulated in the Azerbaijani media in a self-congratulatory manner. The perpetrators were publically decorated by the authorities.

These inhumane brutalities reminded the horrors of the past. This year marks the 25th anniversary of the deportation of the population of 24 Armenian villages from Nagorno-Karabakh and its surroundings. The deportation and massacres of Armenians in Sumgait, Baku, Kirovabad preceded

it and followed in Shahumian and Mardakert regions of Nagorno-Karabakh. The atrocities against civilians in April vividly demonstrated that nothing has been changed in Azerbaijani approaches. This once again reconfirms that the aspiration of people of Nagorno-Karabakh for self-determination was right then and it remains right now.

The four days military offensive in April was the culmination of longstanding policy pursued by Baku. Many factors clearly demonstrate that Azerbaijan has long before embarked on the path of hostilities and we have been constantly reminding about them, including at the Ministerial Council level.

First, instead of preparing the population to peace, as the Co-Chairs of the Minsk group have been calling for, Baku has for years fueled anti-Armenian propaganda. The books of the renowned Azerbaijani novelist were burnt on the streets of Baku just for speaking the truth about Armenian massacres and calling for reconciliation. It's not just the books, but the bridges between the people that Azerbaijan has been intentionally and constantly burning. "Where they burn books, they will ultimately burn people". So many times the words of German classic proved to be true. The 2016 report of the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance states: "Political leaders, educational institutions and media have continued using hate speech against Armenians; an entire generation of Azerbaijanis has now grown up listening to this hateful rhetoric.

On the eve of the Hamburg Ministerial the leadership of Azerbaijan repeated its claim alleging that not just Nagorno-Karabakh but the territories of the Republic of Armenia, including its capital are native Azerbaijani lands and one day they will return there. What is this if not a territorial claim against the neighboring OSCE participating State in a sheer defiance to our joint commitments and values that lay in the foundation of this Organization?

Second, the skyrocketing accumulation of heavy weaponry in gross violation of international arms control agreements have been pointing to Azerbaijan's inclination to the military solution. According to the international reports in 2015 Azerbaijan was the largest importer of major weapons in Europe.

Third, the rejection to establish confidence building measures proposed by the Co-Chairs, such as the mechanism for investigating the cease-fire violations and the expansion of the OSCE monitoring capacities shows that Azerbaijan has been striving to limit the international permanent presence in the conflict zone to keep its hands free for military operations. Here, in the OSCE, this should be known better than elsewhere, since proposals on these CSBMs have been consistently blocked by Azerbaijan once they required the OSCE consensus for allocating appropriate funds.

Fourth, in their militarist stance and bellicose rhetoric Azerbaijani leadership has never shied away to claim that war is a viable option. The more one goes deeply in extreme statements and uncompromising positions, the more one becomes hostage of own rhetoric. At the end of the day the words can act. The threat of use of force has been going hand-in-hand with increasingly dangerous escalation on the line of contact with Nagorno-Karabakh and border with Armenia through more frequent ceasefire violations, use of heavy weaponry and incursions.

Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh have always exerted efforts together with the Co-Chairs for the exclusively peaceful settlement to the conflict. Both Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh have always been against the use of force. This is the fundamental difference between the Armenian and Azerbaijani positions.

In response to the condemnation by the Co-Chair countries of the threat or use of force the leadership of Azerbaijan keeps claiming that the international law is void and it is only possible to solve the issues through force. This was once again repeated before Hamburg meeting. On the eve

of the OSCE Ministerial the bellicose rhetoric of Azerbaijan was accompanied by large scale military exercises involving 60 thousand troops, almost entire personnel of the armed forces, more than 150 tanks, 700 rocket and artillery systems and more than 50 units of military aviation, in gross violation of the OSCE Vienna document.

Fifth, the maximalist and uncompromising stance at the negotiation table, rejection of the proposals of the Co-Chair countries even at their final stages, like at Kazan summit in 2011, almost constant profanation of the Co-Chairs' efforts and the attempts to do mediation shopping in other formats have been illustrative of Azerbaijan's intentions to derail the negotiations and buy time to continue its military buildup. It does not come as a surprise that the Co-Chairs in their public statements called on Baku to reverse this stance.

Mr. Chairman,

It is our conviction that April aggression was so far the culmination of Azerbaijan's destructive policy but not the end. Baku has been carefully hiding its military casualties of April aggression in an attempt to justify huge price of its adventurism but certainly it cannot hide the fact that together with human losses the peace process became its casualty.

The Co-Chair countries organized two summits with the participation of the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan in May in Vienna and in June in St. Petersburg to address the consequences of April aggression and create conditions conducive for the advancement of the peace process.

It is imperative to implement what was particularly emphasized and agreed upon in the framework of these Summits on exclusively peaceful settlement of the conflict, full adherence to the 1994-1995 trilateral ceasefire agreements, which do not have time limitations, creation of mechanism for the investigation of ceasefire violations, expansion of the team of the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office.

Armenia has agreed to proceed on this basis. These agreements have yet to be honored by Azerbaijan. From the very beginning Baku refused to implement the agreement on the investigative mechanism. As for the expansion of the capacities of the PR CiO's office, Baku tries not only to curtail the implementation of the proposal but even impede mission's current activities in the conflict zone in violation of its OSCE mandate and further complicate the work of the monitors by attempting to keep them as far from the conflict zone as possible and diminishing their ability of rapid reaction. Strengthening of capacities of the Office of PR CiO does not mean mere arithmetical increase of its staff, but rather deployment along the Line of Contact and increase of frequency and efficiency of its monitoring activities on the ground. When it comes to the security of the people residing in the conflict area there is no place for petty bargaining.

Azerbaijan failed to question the validity of the cease-fire agreements of 1994 and 1995, since the Co-Chair countries clearly and boldly reaffirmed that the terms of these agreements do not expire and they should be strictly adhered to. The use of force against the right of people of Nagorno-Karabakh to self-determination created this conflict. Continued threat to use force with its materialization in April seriously undermined the peace process and heavily contributed to the sustention of status quo. Thus, going beyond status quo first of all requires renouncing the threat or use of force.

When Azerbaijan stubbornly refuses to implement the agreements reached in Vienna, St. Petersburg or elsewhere before, it undermines not just those agreements; it damages the peace process as a whole, since it contributes to eliminating the slightest hopes that anything agreed with Baku could ever be implemented. In the current circumstances of lack of trust and confidence the Co-Chair countries have to even more assertively pursue Azerbaijan to comply with its commitments. The implementation of the agreements in a good faith and without preconditions may open the door for

starting to rebuild the trust – an essential prerequisite for a durable settlement - based on three principles of international law – non use of force or threat of use of force, equal rights and self-determination of people, territorial integrity, which together with the elements for conflict resolution were consistently proposed by the Co-Chair countries as an integrated and indivisible whole.

Mr. Chairman,

Armenia is hosting the only OSCE full-fledged Office in South Caucasus which demonstrates our strong adherence to the implementation of the OSCE commitments in all three dimensions. The continued attempts to hinder the implementation of the mandate of the Yerevan Office by Azerbaijan who already closed its field mission in Baku once again reveals true attitude of that country not only towards Armenia but the OSCE and its commitments. We are convinced that Azerbaijan should not be in a position to “export” its repressive perception of human rights in the region. Baku should be boldly reminded that it cannot count on the complicity of others to this end.

Mr. Chairman,

Before I conclude, I would like to add few remarks related to the human dimension of our activities. Last December by the nation-wide referendum Armenia adopted amendments to the Constitution aimed at improved governance system with increased transparency and accountability. It was followed by the adoption of a new Electoral Code to meet the necessary legal changes in line with requirements of the amended Constitution. It is noteworthy that both the Constitutional reform and the new Electoral Code have been drafted in close cooperation with the Venice Commission and the OSCE/ODIHR and both received positive feedbacks from our international partner organizations. To further strengthen the public trust in the election process the Government accepted the proposal coming from the opposition and the discussions on the draft Code were held with the equal involvement of parliamentary political factions as well as civil society representatives.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, I would like to assure Austria, the incoming Chair that it can count on Armenia’s support. I would also like to welcome Italy’s joining the troika.