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Statement at 822nd meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council 8 July 2010

As delivered by Ambassador Fuad Ismayilov

Mr. Chairman,

The Delegation of Azerbaijan welcomes the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus Ambassador Peter Semneby to the Permanent Council meeting today. We thank him for distribution of his presentation in advance and take note of his observations.

In our general remarks, we would like to underline that cooperation with EU remains at the top of Azerbaijan's foreign policy agenda ever since we re-gained our state sovereignty and independence in early 1990s. Azerbaijan views the European Union as a good model of successful development in economic, social and humanitarian fields.

Azerbaijan was among those who adopted the Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit in Prague on 7 May 2009. We hope that Eastern Partnership will open new avenues for deepening cooperation between EU and Azerbaijan on a multitude of issues of common interest and concern, and look forward for the start of talks on the Association Agreement.

Mr. Semneby has begun his presentation with the issues related to democracy and touched upon my country as well. In this regard, we have to stress that democracy is our choice and we remain adherent to democratic values.

We would like to inform Mr. Semneby that the Azerbaijani side has already invited the OSCE to observe the parliamentary elections to be held in our country later this year.

Also, the Government of Azerbaijan does its utmost in providing free and independent conditions for functioning of media outlets. As evidence, there are a lot of independent sources of information in the country and purely criminal charges should be in no way considered as constraint on freedom of media.

Now, we would like to turn to the issue of conflicts, namely, the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, which remains the major threat of instability and impediment to the economic development and integration of the entire region of the South Caucasus.

But, first of all, we must touch upon the title used regarding the conflict in Mr. Semneby's written presentation. We can not agree with such politically incorrect approach and believe that necessary amendments will be made therein.

The heaviest consequences of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict are well-known. Armenia occupied one-fifth of the territory of Azerbaijan, and conducted ethnic cleansing on these territories, around one million Azerbaijani population has become internally displaced persons or refugees. These are the facts that can not be denied.

Against this background, Azerbaijan has been seeking the ways of peaceful resolution of conflict for almost two decades.

The legal and political constituent for the settlement of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan is based on the norms and principles of international law.

Immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of all armed forces of Armenia from all the occupied territories of Azerbaijan is a prerequisite for the transformation of the armed conflict into the de-escalation phase, which is necessary for creation of appropriate conditions for the comprehensive post-conflict rehabilitation of the conflict-affected territories, restoration and opening of communications for the mutual use by both sides in both directions and return in safety and dignity of the displaced population to their places of origin in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan and adjacent territories.

The ultimate objective of the settlement process is to elaborate and define the model and legal framework of the status of the Nagorno-Karabakh region within Azerbaijan. Having said that, Azerbaijan believes that the process of definition of any status shall take place in normal peaceful conditions with direct, full and equal participation of the entire population of the region, namely, the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities, and in their constructive interaction with the government of Azerbaijan, exclusively in the framework of a lawful and democratic process.

The major way for future process of elaboration of the status of Nagorno-Karabakh region in the framework of territorial integrity of Azerbaijan is lying through the return of the Azerbaijani Community to the Nagorno-Karabakh region in peace, security and dignity and reestablishment of peaceful neighbourhood and cooperation with the Armenians of the region.

Attempts to define the status of the Nagorno-Karabakh region in a situation of continued occupation of the region and surrounding territories, and forced displacement of Azerbaijani population are incompatible with universal and European values and contradict the principles and ideas of peace, democracy, stability and regional cooperation.

In this regard, we would like to recall the Resolution of the European Parliament dated 20 May 2010 on the need for an EU strategy for the South Caucasus that judges unacceptable any conditioning of the respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, calls for abandon of preferences to perpetuate the *status quo* created by force and with no international legitimacy, demands the withdrawal of Armenian forces from all occupied territories of Azerbaijan as well as calls for unconditional recognition of the rights of refugees and IDPs to return to their homes and underlines the need for their prompt realization.

The solid legal basis, which is available for the conflict settlement and includes the resolutions of UN Security Council, the decisions and documents of the OSCE, Council of Europe, European Parliament and other international organizations along with the Meindorf Declaration and the last statement by the Heads of States of the Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group, clearly forms on the high level the approach of the international community and the Co-Chairs countries of the Minsk Group to the conflict settlement and determines on the macro level the basic elements of the settlement.

The stance of Armenia proves that it considers the conflict settlement process only as a mean of securing the annexation of Azerbaijani territories that it has captured through military force and in which it has carried out ethnic cleansing.

Here, in response to the allegations by Armenia against Azerbaijan, I would like to particularly emphasize that it was armed forces of Armenia that violated the cease-fire regime and undertook assaults on the outposts of Azerbaijan. By the way, we have read an interesting detail in the media outlets that at least one of the soldiers wounded during that incident is citizen of Armenia. Moreover, the president of Armenia has recently visited the occupied territories of Azerbaijan and opened a new military unit there. These facts clearly confirm the illegal presence of the armed forces of Armenia on the occupied territories of Azerbaijan.

So, taking into consideration the aforesaid, the EU could provide its important constructive contribution to conflict settlement starting with convincing Armenia to cease its destructive policies, to respect the generally accepted norms and principles of international law and to negotiate in good faith with a view to finding a soonest solution to the conflict.

As far as the EU projects on rebuilding confidence are concerned, let us reiterate that they must serve to reintegration of the Nagorno-Karabakh region into Azerbaijan and restoration of peaceful coexistence of two communities in the region within the internationally recognized borders of Azerbaijan.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.