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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 13th meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council**

Ljubljana, December 5, 2005

Mr. Chairman,
Dear colleagues,

It is my pleasure to join other speakers in extending appreciation to Minister Dmitrij Rupel for the work done by the Slovenian OSCE Chairmanship through this year. I am also pleased to welcome the incoming Chairman-in-Office - Foreign Minister of Belgium Mr. Karel de Gucht and wish him every success in this challenging and responsible post.

There is no doubt that enhancing the OSCE effectiveness will increase its relevance for participating States and contribute to strengthening our common Euro-Atlantic space of security and cooperation. In this process, resolution of long-standing conflicts in the OSCE area must be placed among the top priorities for the Organization. The OSCE effectiveness shall be measured by successful solving of these outstanding conflicts through firm adherence to its fundamental norms and principles, and implementation of the decisions adopted. There is a need to strengthen the OSCE role in the conflict resolution processes, including through establishing a special mechanism to this end. With this in mind I would also like to reiterate the urgent necessity to achieve the settlement of conflicts existing in the GUAM member states Georgia and Moldova with full respect for their territorial integrity.

Next year is expected to be a decisive one in the process of the settlement of the Kosovo conflict. It is a firm and unequivocal position of the Republic of Azerbaijan that this process should be carried out in full accordance with the UN Security Council resolution 1244 and on the basis of the Helsinki Final Act, and regardless its outcome it must not establish any precedent whatsoever.

In the OSCE Ministerial Council Draft Decision on Tolerance and Non-discrimination we reaffirm our determination to implement the existing commitments in this field, including through fighting prejudices against Muslim communities that we witness more and more. To remedy this negative phenomenon, sound strategies and educational approaches, supported by adequate resources, need to be developed and vigorously implemented.

Mr. Chairman,

The conscious choice of values of democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights has taken an irreversible character in my country. Azerbaijan is young, yet vigorous democracy that has been reacting adequately vis-à-vis those who are either unable or unwilling to adapt to the new environment and new demands. Consolidation of democracy is an arduous and long-term process, for which harmony of efforts by all sides becomes essential. An essential element of this process is a respect of law, which should serve as a “code of conduct” and should be accepted by everyone.

Mr. Chairman,

It is regretful that the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which resulted with the occupation of vast territories of Azerbaijan and the massive expulsion of Azerbaijani population and impedes the economic development and integration of the entire region of South Caucasus to Europe, still remains unresolved after 13 years of the mediation by the OSCE.

Besides some intensified talks and increased efforts of the OSCE Minsk Group and its Co-Chairs, we still have to put a lot of efforts and political courage to move forward. It is obvious that present situation leads us to nowhere and subsequently, patience is getting exhausted. As a result, offensive statements are in full swing. We are deeply concerned of recent statements made by the top leadership of Armenia, directly undermining territorial integrity and sovereignty of Azerbaijan.

The freezing of the conflict and sustaining of the “status quo” and further on keeping the occupied territories of Azerbaijan under military control is a strategic fault aside from the violation of international law. The “status quo” will only increase tensions and in its turn, this will dramatically reduce the opportunities of peace negotiations and eliminate a glimpse of confidence that is so much needed. It will also leave almost no chances for smooth process of rehabilitation, revitalisation, for peaceful coexistence of Armenians and Azerbaijanis, and therefore, no favourable conditions for objective settlement of political issues.

Status of Nagorno-Karabakh can only be decided within lawful, peaceful and democratic process that can not be based on the ethnic cleansing. It may only be determined by taking due and equal account of views of both Azerbaijani and Armenian communities, living side by side together in Nagorno-Karabakh. The liberation of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan is the main prerequisite to make the whole thing possible.

Upon the withdrawal of Armenian troops from the occupied territories all transport corridors are to be opened for both sides. For the sake of effective peace, corridor through Lachin area is to be used mutually by Armenians and Azerbaijanis in both directions.

The Government of Azerbaijan will stand ready to provide its assistance to both communities in Nagorno-Karabakh region for rebuilding the infrastructure of the region through attraction of investments.

Return of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan and return of Azerbaijani population to these territories, environment of peace and stability, development of trust and confidence between Armenians and Azerbaijanis for peaceful co-existence should be one of the main tasks of the peaceful settlement of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. We count on increased efforts of the Co-Chairmen. The incoming Belgian Chairmanship is expected to contribute in this regard, as well as all OSCE participating States.

Thank you.