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A D D R E S S

**by H.E. Mr. Elmar Mammadyarov,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan,
at the 16th meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council**

Helsinki, 4 December 2008

Mr. Chairman,
Dear colleagues,

I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to H.E. Mr. Alexander Stubb and entire Finnish team for excellent organization of this Ministerial Council meeting and for the successful Chairmanship carried throughout the year.

I am glad to welcome our distinguished colleague from Greece, Minister Dora Bakoyannis, as the incoming Chairperson-in-Office and wish her every success in future endeavors.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are meeting in a very symbolic place, which gave birth to the cornerstone document of this Organization – Helsinki Final Act.

This document provided very stimulating point of departure for a dynamic process that helped overcoming the dividing lines in the European continent and consolidating the achievements in the democratic transformation of our countries.

We all shall reaffirm our strong commitment to respect the principles contained in the Helsinki Final Act and to define the OSCE added value in the European security architecture. We all start recognizing that the principle of territorial integrity and sovereignty of states in the context of the latest developments on the European surface begin to play most essential role, first of all from the security point of view.

Azerbaijan believes that the OSCE has a unique role in the European security architecture. Early warning, conflict prevention and resolution, crises management and post-conflict rehabilitation shall remain the core tasks of the OSCE.

Building on the immense experience of negotiating consensual approaches the OSCE has accumulated, we have to seriously address the current problems existing in the arms control regimes.

The OSCE, through its various structures and field missions, has acquired rich expertise in assisting the participating States to consolidate their democratic societies and supporting their overall development. Yet the OSCE potential in a number of areas still need to be realized.

However, the emerging trend to confine the OSCE to dealing mainly with the human rights issues and exclusively in the eastern part of the Euro-Atlantic area is

a matter of our concern. Azerbaijan has consistently promoted a balanced approach to the OSCE activities related to all three dimensions.

We stress the necessity for the OSCE executive structures to focus on the priorities identified by the respective participating States and to avoid situations of going beyond their mandate or engaging in the activities duplicating the efforts of other international organizations.

Mr. Chairman,

The Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remain a major source of instability and a fragile cease-fire cannot be a substitute for a lasting and durable peace.

On the 2nd of November following the meeting of the Presidents of Azerbaijan, Armenia and the Russian Federation a Joint Declaration was signed. We consider this Declaration as an important document that creates a good basis for the settlement of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The Presidents declared that they would continue to seek for a political resolution of the conflict on the basis of the principles and norms of international law and the decisions and documents adopted within this framework. This basis implies the United Nations and OSCE documents, primarily the UN Charter, Helsinki Final Act, four UN Security Council resolutions and other resolutions and decisions adopted by the UN and OSCE. All of these documents prove that the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan is the basis for the settlement of the conflict.

The Moscow Declaration reaffirmed the stage-by-stage approach with international guaranties for the settlement process, which all parties and mediators have accepted as the real possible option. The resolution of the conflict would create favourable conditions for economic development and comprehensive cooperation in the entire region. Moreover, the Declaration underlines the importance of creating conditions for implementation of CBMs.

Azerbaijan firmly believes in the benefit of eliminating results of the ethnic cleansing and ensuring peaceful and secure life of the Azerbaijani and Armenian communities in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, restoring inter-communal cooperation and on this basis providing their equal and direct participation in democratic process of definition of status of the region within Azerbaijan. I hope that Armenia will realize the advantages of this approach, which meet her own interests as well.

Thank you.