

ENGLISH only

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Edward Nalbandian, Minister of Foreign Affairs of
the Republic of Armenia at the 24th Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council**

Vienna, 7 December 2017

Mr. Chairman,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Chairmanship-in-Office for leading the organization throughout the year, good organisation of the Ministerial Council and the warm hospitality.

Armenia has always been a strong advocate for advancing the indivisible security in the OSCE area and has continuously contributed to the discussions aimed at reinvigoration of the framework of arms control and CSBMs.

Building trust and confidence does not rest only with the first dimension. We strongly believe that the economic and environmental basket of our Organization has an untapped potential. In this regard the OSCE could be a natural platform for promoting an inclusive dialogue between participating States, including on regional integration processes.

About two weeks ago Armenia signed a Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement with the European Union. It vividly demonstrated that the membership to one integration framework, in the case of Armenia to the Eurasian Economic Union, does not preclude cooperation with the others. We hope that pragmatic and result oriented dialogue will be the driving force of the economic cooperation in the whole OSCE area.

We would also like to emphasize Armenia's contribution to the human dimension of our activities and highlight in this regard our effective cooperation with the OSCE institutions. The April Parliamentary elections in Armenia demonstrated that the progress achieved in upholding fundamental freedoms is irreversible and sustainable and we acknowledge the contribution of the OSCE institutions in this regard.

We are glad that the theme of protection of the ethnic and religious groups from identity based violence and atrocities especially in our neighboring region – in the Middle East, is getting more and more attention within the OSCE. Armenia has been among the first to raise this issue and support the strengthening of the OSCE commitments in this regard. The further development of effective measures to counter hate crime and discrimination against Christians and members of other religions was the main focus of the recent high-level conference in Yerevan, co-organized by the OSCE Chairmanship and ODIHR with the support of the Armenian Foreign Ministry.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Ministerial Councils provide an opportunity to talk about the achievements and vision for the future. However, it is equally important not to omit to address the setbacks of the Organization in an open and candid manner.

The consequences of the closure of the OSCE Office in Yerevan pertain to very essence of the OSCE, which is designed to settle the issues through dialogue and cooperation and never through

imposing the position of one participating State at the expense of all others and the entire Organization. It created a very negative precedent. The refusal of Azerbaijan to join the consensus on the extension of the mandate of the Office damaged not merely the integrity of the field missions of the OSCE, but its capacity of inclusive cooperation. Azerbaijan failed to respect the OSCE commitments and eliminated the OSCE Office in its own country before it attacked and closed the last OSCE full-fledged mission in the region. It is particularly deplorable that the Office was closed against the will and consistent efforts for its preservation exerted by the host country and all participating States with one exception - Azerbaijan. We would like to recall that both German and Austrian Chairmanships rejected the accusations of Azerbaijan against Yerevan Office. It does not come as a surprise that Azerbaijan found itself in isolation in challenging the OSCE Office in Yerevan.

We are determined to continue our close cooperation within the OSCE framework. The “Armenia cooperation programme” opens good opportunities in this regard.

Mr. Chairman,

Ten years ago the Basic Principles for the Peaceful Settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict were presented to the sides by the Minsk Group Co-Chair countries in the margins of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Madrid.

Two years later the Athens Ministerial Council of the OSCE adopted a statement on behalf of all participating States that strongly supported the Basic Principles and noted the commitment of the parties to reach an agreement on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution based upon the principles of Non-Use of Force or Threat of Force, Territorial Integrity, and the Equal Rights and Self-Determination of Peoples. The presidents of the Co-Chair countries in their five joint statements issued since 2009 reiterated their support to these principles and main elements for the conflict resolution which were presented by them as an integrated whole. Since then the Co-Chairs have reaffirmed this approach on many occasions, including during almost all OSCE Ministerial Councils and most recently in their joint statement made in Hamburg. On numerous occasions Armenia has continuously reiterated its readiness to continue negotiations based on these principles and elements with the aim of the exclusively peaceful settlement of the conflict.

There are several reasons why till now it has not been possible to advance the peace process despite numerous meetings on the presidential and ministerial levels, many rounds of negotiations, the tireless mediation by the Co-Chair countries, and the strong endorsement of the OSCE and all others who have supported the efforts and approaches of the Co-Chairs.

First, Azerbaijan made a step back and has refused the abovementioned three principles of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution as a basis for the conflict settlement.

Second, Azerbaijan adopted a selective approach towards the elements proposed by the Co-Chairs, who have continuously warned against such practice, since they conceive their proposals as an indivisible whole, and made it clear that any attempt to select some principles and elements over others would make it impossible to achieve a solution.

Third, Baku does not comply with the reached agreements and backtracks from them, as it happened during many rounds of negotiations, most notably during the Summits in St. Petersburg (June 2010), Astrakhan (October 2010), Sochi (March 2011), Kazan (June 2011). The pattern of refusal by Azerbaijan to honor prior agreements seriously questions Baku’s credibility as a negotiating party.

Fourth, almost constant profanation of the Co-Chairs' efforts and the attempts to shift the mediation to other formats have been illustrative of Azerbaijan's intentions to derail the negotiations. It does not come as a surprise that the Co-Chairs in their public statements called on Baku to reverse this stance.

Fifth, the use or threat of use of force by Azerbaijan, regular ceasefire violations and provocations, unnotified military exercises in a blatant noncompliance to the OSCE Vienna document, bellicose statements of the high-ranking officials of Azerbaijan demonstrate that Baku considers the war as a viable option. The Co-Chairs have appealed to Azerbaijan to refrain from the escalation of the situation, to reaffirm the commitment to peaceful settlement. Nobody doubts that it is Azerbaijan that constantly violates the ceasefire and resorts to the escalation of the situation.

Sixth, a serious damage was caused to the negotiation process by Azerbaijan's aggression against Nagorno-Karabakh in April 2016 that was accompanied by the grave violations of international humanitarian law, atrocities against the civilian population, including children, women and elderly persons, mutilation of the bodies, DAESH-style beheadings.

Seventh, after April aggression the Co-Chairs organized two summits in Vienna and St. Petersburg with the participation of the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan to address the consequences of the war. Azerbaijan refused to implement what had been agreed upon and emphasized in the framework of these Summits particularly on the 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 with the aim to increase efficiency of the monitoring capacities on the ground. The reported goal of these agreements was to create conditions for the advancement of the peace process, thus, by rejecting them Baku intentionally hinders the negotiations.

Eighth, Azerbaijan continues to practice anti-Armenian hate speech, it calls all Armenians of the world its enemy number one, it writes in the textbooks that Armenians are genetic enemies of Azerbaijan, it erases all traces of indigenous Armenian cultural heritage and religious sites, it claims that allegedly territories of Armenia are ancient Azerbaijani lands. Azerbaijan has long blacklisted the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, and then it started to put in the blacklist all those who visit Nagorno-Karabakh. Those who genuinely aspire for peace do not do such actions.

Ninth, after many years of negotiations on the Basic Principles, Azerbaijan started to claim that there is no need for adopting them, in a sheer disrespect to other negotiating parties, to the Co-Chair countries and huge efforts and time invested in the process.

Azerbaijan's uncompromising and maximalist stance has become a serious obstacle to the advancement of the peace process and has heavily contributed to the preservation of the status-quo. The Co-Chairs' conflict settlement proposals are a way that could bring to the change of the status-quo. However, Azerbaijan rejects those proposals, doing everything to keep the status-quo intact at the same time claiming that allegedly it is advocating for the change of status-quo.

Azerbaijan's intentions can be easily tracked by its expenditures: Baku spends billions to buy influence in the world capitals, as once again became obvious through notorious "Laundromat" affair, it spends much more for purchases of advanced weaponry, but it has not invested anything so far to prepare its population for peace, as the Co-Chairs have been continuously urging.

If Baku abides to the calls of the Co-Chairs to strictly respect the ceasefire, implements previously reached agreements, reiterates its adherence to the principles of the conflict resolution proposed by the Co-Chairs and constructively engages in the negotiations that will pave the way to move the peace process forward and change the status-quo. We are convinced that there is no alternative to the peace talks and there is a need to conduct intensive negotiations based on the proposals of the Co-Chair countries.

It is with this understanding that I met six times with my Azerbaijani colleague during past year and the last one was just yesterday in the framework of this Ministerial Council. The meetings between the Ministers and the able mediation of the Co-Chairs helped to prepare the Geneva Summit of Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan on October 16th, 2017. This was the first meeting between the Presidents after about sixteen months interval and it passed mostly in a positive mood.

For the first time in about four years at the Geneva Summit it was possible to adopt, although quite brief, a joint statement. On numerous previous occasions Armenia expressed its readiness to join the statements of the Co-Chairs, however, Azerbaijan always refused to have a common statement. This joint statement reflected what Armenia has been long advocating for: to take additional steps to reduce tensions on the Line of Contact. These steps have been identified in the statements made at the Vienna and St. Petersburg Summits of 2016. The Geneva statement also stressed the necessity to intensify the negotiation process, and this too has always been strongly advocated by Armenia.

Unfortunately, just after the Summit Baku again resorted to its language of groundless accusations and warmongering.

Yesterday's meeting with my Azerbaijani colleague generally passed in the positive mood. We will see the developments after it.

Mr. Chairman,

Next year people of Nagorno-Karabakh will mark 30 years of their struggle for the right to choose their destiny, for human dignity and freedom. In three decades people of Artsakh despite the devastating war and all difficulties, succeeded to create a society based on the respect of human rights, fundamental freedoms and democratic institutions. The settlement of the conflict should respect all inherent rights of the people of Artsakh and should ensure their unhindered implementation.

Mr. Chairman,

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

Thank you.