



## EUROPEAN UNION

### OSCE Permanent Council N°1089 Vienna, 11 February 2016

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#### **EU Statement in Response to Deputy Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan, H.E. Araz Azimov**

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The European Union warmly welcomes H.E. Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov to the Permanent Council today. Your Excellency, we thank you for your visit, and for the presentation of your views.

Mr Chair, the long-standing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is of great concern. The status quo is unsustainable and the peaceful resolution of this conflict remains a priority issue for the EU. We are concerned by the escalation of violence along the line of contact as well as along the international border between Azerbaijan and Armenia, involving the use of heavy weapons and targeting of civilians, over the past year. This is unacceptable and it undermines the peace process under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group and its Co-Chairs. It is crucial to maintain direct high-level contacts between the conflict parties to develop the political will to facilitate a conflict settlement process. The European Union once again calls on all sides to refrain from actions and confrontational rhetoric that heighten tensions and undermine the peace process.

The conflict does not have a military solution and needs a political settlement addressing key outstanding issues, in accordance with international law. We underline our support to the mediation efforts of the Minsk Group, which is the only internationally accepted format for negotiations, endorsed by the UN Security Council. We also reiterate our support for the regular monitoring activities led by the Personal Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office, Ambassador Kasprzyk and his team. We furthermore support the HLPG and the aim of creating a mechanism to investigate along the front line, as agreed by the sides on several occasions. The European Union further supports and complements the Minsk Group through the

activities of the EUSR for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia, Herbert Salber, and through peacebuilding activities. The European Union stands ready to further support peace- and confidence building activities and people to people contacts across the contact line. We will continue this support through the Eastern Partnership and the European Partnership for the Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and we urge Azerbaijan to further facilitate these activities.

Azerbaijan is an important partner for the European Union, including within the Eastern Partnership. In this context, we welcome the progress made in defining a stronger basis for an upgraded contractual framework for EU-Azerbaijan relations in all areas of mutual interest. We have concrete cooperation in a variety of sectors. We commend Azerbaijan for its role as key enabler and implementing partner of the Southern Gas Corridor, a project that will positively contribute to the energy security of the European Union and promote socio-economic development along the whole trajectory. Strengthening ICT infrastructure and developing a more harmonised transport and logistics system are among key priorities of the European Union in the region. We see value in efforts towards enhancing transboundary cooperation in this field, at regional and sub-regional level, including with relevant international organisations. The OSCE could play a role as a platform for dialogue, exchange of information and best practices in this regard.

Mr Deputy Foreign Minister,

We welcome your visit to the OSCE today as it represents an important sign of engagement of Azerbaijan with the OSCE. Cooperation and constructive engagement across all three dimensions of security by all participating States are critical to ensure the functioning of our organisation. We all can contribute to and benefit from the work of the OSCE.

Current security challenges in the OSCE region and beyond, notably stemming from the rise of religious extremism and terrorism, need to be tackled through a common and coherent approach in full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Azerbaijan, through its strategic location, its traditions of religious tolerance, and its strong network of diplomatic relations, is well suited to play a role in the elaboration of a regional concept of stability and the fight against common threats and

challenges. In this sense, we are pleased that the Seventh Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilisation is scheduled to take place in Baku on 26 and 27 April this year.

Democracy, human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law are important issues in the EU's relationship with Azerbaijan. They lie at the core of the OSCE's comprehensive security concept. We reiterate the importance of the full implementation of OSCE human dimension commitments and our full support for the indispensable work and mandates of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Representative on Freedom of the Media, which provide vital support and important recommendations to participating States. Participating States have committed to cooperate closely with OSCE institutions and it is very much in our collective interest to continue to do so. We encourage Azerbaijan to take further steps in this area. The European Union will continue to engage with Azerbaijan on these issues.

We reiterate that an OSCE field presence can support Azerbaijan in promoting socio-economic and democratic reforms and safeguard long-term stability, including through the promotion of democratic structures, human rights and the rule of law. A field presence is one of the most effective ways to support any participating State with implementing its OSCE commitments across the three dimensions of security and could therefore bring a positive contribution to the cooperation of Azerbaijan with the OSCE.

Mr Deputy Foreign Minister, we thank you for your address to the Permanent Council today and we look forward to further developing our cooperation and partnership with Azerbaijan in the future.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, SERBIA\* and ALBANIA\*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

\* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.