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**Statement by the Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan
1182nd Meeting of the Permanent Council,
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on presidential election in Azerbaijan

Mr. Chairperson,

The Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan would like to inform the Permanent Council that on 11 April 2018 early presidential election took place in Azerbaijan. In free, democratic, fair and transparent presidential election, the citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan once again expressed their will. 74.3 percent of voter turnout was registered, demonstrating high public confidence in election process.

According to the final results, 86.02 percent of voters who participated in the election voted for the incumbent President Ilham Aliyev, which is a reflection of wide public support for a social, political and economic reform policy carried out in the country throughout the past years. Official results coincide with findings of surveys and “exit-polls” conducted by several prominent national and international organizations before and on election day. It once again testifies to the fact that the election results reflect the will and vision of the people of Azerbaijan.

Following the approval of election results by the Constitutional Court, inauguration ceremony took place on April 18. Taking this opportunity, we would like to thank to Delegations of Turkmenistan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, the Russian Federation, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus and Turkey for their statements and congratulations addressed to our Delegation and Azerbaijan. We will communicate them to the capital.

The presidential election held on 11 April became another important milestone in democratic development of our country and strengthening of democratic institutions. It has demonstrated the democratic maturity of the electorate and testified to unwavering commitment of Azerbaijan to strengthening democracy and the rule of law. This is confirmed by the vast majority of observers, who assessed the presidential election as free, fair and transparent, and hailed the voting as an outstanding improvement.

Positive trends were also observed in development of culture of political competition. Quite harsh criticism addressed to the Government by several presidential candidates is seen as a sign of improvement in political relations among the political opponents. The President-elect Ilham Aliyev has already expressed his determination to carefully study suggestions made by his opponents and take them into account during his next tenure.

Preparations for the election were made in compliance with the legislation and with quality; all conditions were created for the political parties and other initiative groups putting forward candidates to conduct election campaigns freely. All preparatory measures were taken effectively and in a timely manner to ensure that citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan

exercise their constitutional right to vote. Specific measures were put in place to facilitate voting for persons with disabilities, the CEC provided Braille ballot sleeves for visually impaired voters and installed ramps at all polling stations where voters with physical disabilities are registered to vote.

Fundamental rights and freedoms, including the freedom of assembly and expression were ensured. The presidential candidates were provided equal opportunities and conditions envisaged in the law for campaigning. 168 indoor and outdoor venues throughout the country were designated for that purpose. In the run-up to the election, political parties held public rallies in the downtown of Baku.

Azerbaijani authorities demonstrated exemplary openness and transparency in this electoral cycle. 118 representatives of 51 foreign media outlets, and nearly 60,000 of local observers, including 4041 observers registered by different NGOs and 894 international monitors, representing 59 countries, and 61 international organizations observed the election.

The observers were provided with all opportunities to freely and independently monitor the election process. Alongside with on-site observation, full-time online monitoring was provided in 1000 polling stations through installed web cameras. International observers, including those from OSCE/ODIHR, were invited to all sessions of the Central Election Commission, which were also well-attended by the media and representatives of the presidential candidates.

Against this background, it is deeply regrettable that the election observation mission consisted of the OSCE/ODIHR, OSCE PA and the PACE displayed unfair attitude and came up with preliminary conclusions based on subjective allegations and biased political considerations. The report of the mission on preliminary findings contains numerous contradictions and unfounded allegations, which cannot but cast doubt on the impartiality, objectivity and professionalism of the observation mission. Generalizing isolated technical irregularities and applying them to the entire election process is assessed as overstepping the mandate. Results of some polling stations, where shortcomings were identified were annulled by the CEC. We do not consider the preliminary findings of the observation mission as fair and objective, and we fully reject it.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan summoned the representatives of the observation mission, protested its preliminary findings and communicated its position. The Central Election Commission of the Republic of Azerbaijan in its statement of 13 April gave detailed analysis of the alleged shortcomings identified in the preliminary findings of the election observation mission, and expressed its hope that necessary corrections will be made and the shortcomings will be removed in preparation of the final report.

As far as the statement delivered by the EU, also on behalf of aligned countries, is concerned, we would like to stress the followings.

We saw the statement by the spokesperson of the EEAS and the congratulation letter of President Tusk, which sharply contrast with the statement by the EU Delegation to the OSCE. Unfortunately, this policy of double standards of the EU Delegation takes place in spite of our objections delivered officially and informally.

Achievements of Azerbaijan are ignored in Vienna for some reasons and the EU Delegation and those aligned continue to maintain negative agenda with regard to Azerbaijan in the OSCE. Regardless of how transparent, fair and free elections are conducted in Azerbaijan, we have not seen to date just assessment by ODIHR and this Delegation.

Azerbaijan is ready for cooperation, but on equal and mutually respectful basis. As soon as we see the demonstration of such an approach by EU Delegation and those aligned, we will be able to consider offered opportunities of cooperation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.