



**Statement by the Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan
1127th Special Meeting of the Permanent Council,
12 January 2017**

in response to address of the Chairperson-in-Office, H.E. Mr. Sebastian Kurz

Mr. Chairperson,

The Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan warmly welcomes H.E. Mr. Sebastian Kurz, Chairperson-in-Office to the Permanent Council and thanks him for comprehensive presentation of priorities of the Austrian Chairmanship in 2017.

Austria's Chairmanship comes at a time when the OSCE region suffers from serious crisis of security. Ongoing violations of the Helsinki Final Act Principles by participating States vis-à-vis each other's territorial integrity, sovereignty over past two decades continues to be the major threat to our common vision of a security community without conflicts, dividing lines and zones with different level of security. In parallel, security and stability of the OSCE region are under growing pressure of numerous threats, notably terrorism, violent extremism, aggressive separatism and radicalization, forced displacement of people due to conflicts and occupation of territories, as well as political-military turmoil in neighboring regions. Rising trend of intolerance and discrimination, especially on the ground of ethnicity and religion, such as Islamophobia challenges our common future. Xenophobic public rhetoric and discriminatory restrictive policies by some participating is a source of serious concern.

The UN Security Council in its relevant resolutions condemned the use of force against Azerbaijan and occupation of its territories, reaffirmed the respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and the inviolability of its international borders. The Council also confirmed that Nagorno-Karabakh is part of Azerbaijan, and demanded the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of all occupying forces from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. In 1994 Budapest summit decision the OSCE participating States confirmed their commitment to these resolutions. The 1995 mandate of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairmen stipulates that they will be guided in their activities by these resolutions of the Security Council. The Budapest summit decision tasked the Minsk Group to conduct speedy negotiations to eliminate the major consequences of the conflict, which primarily means to solve the conflict on the step-by-step basis starting with the de-occupation of the territories of Azerbaijan. These are the parameters of the conflict resolution and the objective of our participation in the Minsk process.

Despite such clear political guidance given to OSCE, the prevailing trend we observe within the Organization is merely to defuse the conflict. Deescalating the conflict without engaging the sides into substantive result-oriented negotiations would not bring solution to the problem, as it has been proved by more than two-decade experience of the Minsk process.

If the OSCE is sincerely interested in maintaining relevance of its mediating activities in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, it should urgently shift the focus back to the implementation of tasks given to the negotiation format, in particular engage both sides in substantive result-oriented talks. This would be in line with the core objective of OSCE to find sustainable solutions for existing conflicts through equal and unreserved application of the Helsinki Final Act principles to all conflict situations with a view to bringing about an end to their violations, as it was expressed in the 2016 Hamburg Declaration of the OSCE Troika.

In this regards, we support the intention of the Austrian Chairmanship to strengthen the existing negotiation formats, including the Minsk Process. The Minsk Group, including its Co-chairmen, the HLPG and the Personal Representative of the CiO are three integral elements of the Minsk Process and are complementing each other in bringing about a sustainable settlement to the conflict. Revitalization of full format of the Minsk Group is a key for restoration of Organization's ownership over settlement process. The HLPG must be strengthened and updated through civilian and police components. Any attempt to undermine their role should be considered as an impediment to settlement of the conflict. We expect the Austrian Chairmanship to ensure better coordination and coherence within the Minsk Process.

Mr. Minister,

As for the negotiation process, there is almost a unanimous position within OSCE that the *status-quo* in the conflict is unsustainable and must change. Azerbaijan is the most interested party in moving beyond the current *status-quo*. In this context, we assess the high-level substantive discussions in Vienna and St. Petersburg as positive steps in the right direction and we are thankful to the Co-chair countries for all the efforts in this regard. We must sustain the momentum and transform the understandings reached in those meetings into concrete actions without further delay. We expect the OSCE and its Minsk Group to play an instrumental role to this end.

Unfortunately, statements that we hear over the last few months from the Armenian side do not give a reason for optimism and indicate the apparent unwillingness of the Armenian side to engage constructively in result-oriented talks. Attempts to precondition the substantive negotiations undermine the Vienna and St. Petersburg agreements. This is a practice by Armenia that we observe when the negotiations are at a critical juncture. Armenia resorts to all kinds of provocations, including along the front line, with the obvious goal to derail the peace process and to maintain the status quo of occupation. One of the recent examples is the refusal by Armenia to return the body of the Azerbaijani serviceman who was killed while halting the Armenian attack and was taken to the Armenian side. Contrary to its obligations under international humanitarian law, as well as to the Joint Astrakhan statement of the Presidents of Azerbaijan, Armenia and the Russian Federation of 2010, Armenia preconditioned the return of remains of the serviceman by attempting to derive political dividends. Such a blackmailing practice by Armenia is by no means in line with our shared values and principles and must not

be tolerated. I have distributed the letter among all OSCE Delegations with request to condemn such inhumane actions by Armenia.

While welcoming the call by the Co-chairmen of the Minsk Group in their latest statement on Armenia to return the body without further delay, we believe that attempts to divide the blame between Armenia and Azerbaijan as well as references to non-existing obligations are counterproductive. We welcome the call by the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe, who urged Armenia to return the body to Azerbaijan. We expect that the OSCE and its participating States will take all necessary measures to persuade Armenia to comply with its international obligations and return the body of the Azerbaijani serviceman without further delay.

Mr. Minister,

As for the extension of the mandate of the OSCE Office in Yerevan we are thankful for the efforts to accommodate our legitimate concerns. Unfortunately, pressure and open blackmailing by Armenia, which engaged in hostage-taking exercise, made it impossible to find a solution to the situation and rendered dysfunctional several OSCE field missions. We remain committed to engage constructively to find a way out of this situation.

Arms control and confidence-and security building measures are integral to OSCE's comprehensive and cooperative concept of security. Azerbaijan supports the idea of a comprehensive and structured dialogue on these matters as outlined in relevant Ministerial Declaration in Hamburg. Given the inter-relation between CSBMs and arms control, and the wider politico-military context, as defined in Hamburg Declaration, we need to address risks and challenges to security in the OSCE area. This should be based on respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of States, strict adherence to the principles of non-use or threat of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any Participant (State Party) and host-nation consent, and aim at strengthening indivisibility of security in the OSCE area with due attention to legitimate needs and concerns of non-block, non-aligned participating States.

The Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan expresses its support to the intention of the Austrian Chairmanship to reinvigorate the economic and environmental dimension and put this issue high on its agenda. The Hamburg MC decision on good governance and connectivity, which reaffirmed the relevance of, and our full respect for all OSCE norms, principles and commitments related to our co-operation in the economic and environmental dimension should serve as the basis in this regard. Further development of mutual economic relations between the participating States and their cooperation in this field should take place in full respect for the principles guiding relations among participating States as reaffirmed in the Helsinki Final Act.

In the third dimension, we underline the necessity of paying adequate attention to the problems of IDPs, in particular restoration of their rights is a violation of our existing human dimension commitments. Discussions over last few years, including within the special meeting of the Human Dimension Committee and Informal Working Group on migration and refugee flows demonstrated urgent need for addressing this important issue. These discussions also testified to interest of overwhelming majority of the participating States to use the OSCE platform to that

end. It is within this understanding that we continue to be of strong view that the issue of forced displacement in the OSCE area should be included into the human dimension package for 2017 and in this regard, we encourage the Austrian Chairmanship to closely look into the matter.

Growing radicalization inspired and instigated by ethnic and religious intolerance and discrimination needs to be urgently addressed. We call on all participating States to engage constructively in implementation of the tasking of the Basel Ministerial Council to adopt declarations on intolerance and non-discrimination against Muslims and Christians. We also underline the important role of the ODIHR in promoting best practices of tolerance in diverse societies. We are looking forward for further steps aimed at enhancing the culture of respect for differences in the OSCE area in cooperation with the Chairmanship and the ODIHR and encourage other participating States to take advantage of the OSCE's assistance to that end.

In light of above-mentioned, the Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan reaffirms its readiness for open and constructive engagement with the Austrian Chairmanship.

In conclusion, we once again thank Distinguished Chairperson-in-Office Minister Kurz for his presence at the Permanent Council and wish him and his able team every success in chairing the Organization.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.