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**Statement by the Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan
1159th Meeting of the Permanent Council,
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in response to the report of the Director of the Conflict Prevention Center

Mr. Chairperson,

The Delegation of Azerbaijan joins the previous speakers in thanking Ambassador Marcel Peško for his report on the activities of the Conflict Prevention Center. In the interest of time, we would like to focus on the following two points reflected in the report.

With regard to possible project-based cooperation between Armenia and Secretariat as well as Institutions, we would like once again to underline that any such initiative should be in full compliance with the principles of transparency and accountability without harming legitimate interests of any participating State. It remains to be our principled position that any project realized with Armenia should be confined to its internationally recognized territories, and should not touch any matter related to the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and its settlement process. We expect the Secretariat and the institutions planning to engage in any type of activity with Armenia to make such a clear statement.

As for the issue of expansion of the Office of the CiO Personal Representative on the conflict dealt with by the OSCE Minsk Conference, we regret that the agreement reached in Summit meetings in Vienna and St.Petersburg last year remained unimplemented due to the position of the Armenian side. Experience over past year vividly demonstrated unwillingness of the Armenian side to engage constructively on the matter. On the contrary, throughout the year Armenia made consistent efforts to abuse the issue as a pretext for escaping from substantive negotiations on the settlement of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. To that end, Armenia distorted the essence of agreement on the matter introducing elements beyond the understanding and parameters agreed upon at the highest level.

The expansion of the PR CiO Office was agreed with the understanding that this would not change the mandate and *modus operandi* of the Office and would be synchronized with the political process. As soon as Armenia abandons its efforts to introduce elements contrary to the above-mentioned understanding, Azerbaijan would be ready to engage into discussions on implementation of the said agreement.

Independent of that, the sides should be engaged into the substantive negotiation on the settlement of the conflict without delay. Preconditioning the negotiations is unacceptable and intolerable, as it runs contrary to understandings reached at the high-level meetings last year regarding engagement of the parties into negotiations on the settlement of the conflict. We urge the mediators to take effective steps to that end.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.