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**Statement by the Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan
1135th Meeting of the Permanent Council,
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in response to France on behalf of the Co-Chairmen of the OSCE Minsk Group

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to thank the distinguished representative of France who delivered the statement on behalf of the Co-Chairing countries of the OSCE Minsk Group. The Delegation of Azerbaijan has made its position clear under previous agenda items on most of the elements touched upon by the distinguished French Ambassador in her statement.

I will take this opportunity to dwell upon the issue of cease-fire agreements of 1994, referred to by the representative of Armenia since the practice of previous years shows that their interpretation is in a very narrow sense.

On a general note, I wish to emphasize that 1994 cease-fire accords are stemming from and based on relevant UN Security Council resolutions and the Bishkek Protocol of 5 May of 1994. The UNSC resolution 822 of 1993 sets explicit connection of cessation of all hostilities with establishment of a durable cease-fire and immediate withdrawal of all occupying forces from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. The Bishkek Protocol, in addition to cessation of fire and all military activities in the conflict zone, required both sides to pursue a set of specific measures such as withdrawal of troops from the occupied territories, deployment of international observers, restoration of communications, return of displaced population and continuation of negotiation process. Therefore, the ceasefire accords of 1994 established a clear linkage between the cessation of fire and military activities, on one hand, and the withdrawal of the Armenian troops from the occupied territories, the restoration of communications and the return of internally displaced persons to their homes, on the other. The same elements are reflected in relevant OSCE documents of 1992, 1994 and 1996 with a slightly different wording. Let me be clear that these measures and linkage between them also remain the same in 2017 as they are presented by the Co-Chairs to both sides in negotiation process.

Therefore, while speaking about violations of the cease-fire agreements of 1994, one shall not have in mind only registered cases of cross-fire between the two sides. It is imperative to check adherence of both sides to implementing all measures emphatically referred to in the Bishkek Protocol of 1994, which was the basis of ceasefire.

One cannot demand to respect the ceasefire regime limiting its scope of application only to exchange of fire across the LoC from different types of weapons. Violations of ceasefire regime includes such cases as attempts of consolidating the occupation of territories, entrenching and building-up military positions, transferring military equipment and hardware,

conducting large-scale military exercises, refusing to withdraw from the occupied territories, denying the return of IDPs to their homes of origin. These are the major elements of the policy and practice that Armenia openly pursues over last decades in direct violation of the cease-fire agreements of 1994. However, we do not hear any condemnation of these violations of the cease-fire regime on the part of Co-chairing countries neither in the OSCE, nor in the public.

On the second note, I wish to stress that in the ceasefire accords of 1994, Azerbaijan and Armenia clearly affirmed their commitment to accelerate and intensify the negotiations for the conclusion of a political Agreement on cessation of the armed conflict. Armenia downplays and often passes in silence over this important aspect of ceasefire accords. This commitment is a key element and an integral part of the ceasefire regime, which identifies its overall purpose. The cease-fire regime can hardly be sustainable, if there are no substantive negotiations towards resolution of the conflict. Yet, the Armenian leadership refuses to engage in substantive talks, but insists on strengthening the cease-fire regime.

One can hardly expect that strengthening of the cease-fire regime will be helpful to resolution of the conflict, until negotiations resume and measures of strengthening are synchronized and linked with corresponding stages of political negotiations. Azerbaijan views these two parallel tracks of the peace processes as complementing each other and unifying. Therefore, we proceeded in the high-level meetings in Vienna and Saints-Petersburg last year namely from this position. Based on this understanding we distributed in the OSCE our proposal on expanding the Ambassador Kaspzyk office as well as approached to the initiative of investigation mechanism. However, we have not seen any intention neither on the part of Armenia, nor on the part of mediators to discuss them here in the OSCE.

The ceasefire accords must be respected and implemented fully and unreservedly. One cannot demand to abide by a ceasefire regime to the extent it fits its interests, but ignore its violations when it is not. We expect the co-chairmen of the OSCE Minsk Group to consider the cease-fire agreements in their totality and strive to ensure their implementation without political or other preferences.

One of the arguments that we often hear is that the sides should implement Vienna and Saints-Petersburg agreements that would create an environment conducive for negotiations. In fact, this argument is in direct contradiction with the cease-fire agreements of 1994, which imply that if there are no substantive talks, the cease-fire will not be held. And recent escalation proves this relationship.

In this context, recent call by the co-chairmen of the OSCE Minsk Group “to demonstrate greater flexibility and to resume comprehensive negotiations on reaching a lasting settlement as soon as possible”, reflected in their statement of 17 February 2017, is welcome, given persistent unwillingness of Armenia to engage in substantive negotiations and attempts to put preconditions. We also welcome the statement of 27 February 2017 by the UN Secretary General in which he “urges the resumption of substantive negotiations leading to a peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict without delay”.

Thank you.