



**Statement by the Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan
1104th Meeting of the Permanent Council,
09 June 2016**

in response to Special Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office for the South Caucasus

Mr. Chairperson,

The Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan welcomes Ambassador Günther Bächler, Special Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office for the South Caucasus to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his report.

The South Caucasus represents one of the important, yet volatile regions of the OSCE area. The Special Representative has a specific mandate to translate OSCE's contribution for regional peace and development into concrete actions. In this context, we attach high importance to his activities and value his recent visits to the region, which provided ample opportunity for exchange of views on the issues that occupies agenda of our deliberations here in Vienna.

Despite consistent efforts taken by several regional countries supported by international partners with regard to transforming the region into a platform for mutually beneficial cooperation, serious challenges remains to be addressed, especially in terms of eliminating consequences of unresolved conflicts. We are yet to materialize a vision for the South Caucasus that is free from dividing lines, conflicts and illegal foreign military presences.

In particular, the region represents vast untapped potential in terms of promoting regional and trans-regional connectivity, trade, energy and transportation. Ongoing projects, such as East-West Trans-Caspian Trade and Transport Corridor (Middle Corridor) are practical examples of successful cooperation among the regional countries. Azerbaijan, Turkey, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan established an informal working group on promotion of the said corridor in line with the German Chairmanship's priority on sustainable connectivity in the OSCE area. It is within this context that we would be interested in hearing Mr. Bachler's views on Chairmanship's possible support to promoting economic connectivity along the corridor.

Unresolved conflicts with their harsh consequences remain the most serious threat to security and development in the region. Latest high-level discussions held in Vienna on May 16 provided good opportunity for reinvigorating perspectives of peaceful resolution of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. We fully concur with the Chairmanship that current status-quo in the conflict is neither sustainable nor acceptable, as reliance on fragile status-quo runs a risk of serious escalation of the situation. Therefore, resumption of substantive negotiations on a comprehensive settlement of the

conflict without further delay is of urgent necessity and fully in line with agreements reached in Vienna on May 16.

Progress in substantive negotiations on comprehensive settlement accompanied by implementation of confidence-building measures to strengthen the ceasefire can produce much-desired breakthrough in moving beyond the status-quo. Confidence-building measures must compliment the political track on the settlement and should be considered in the context of elimination of the results of ongoing occupation of Azerbaijani territories by Armenia. Earliest withdrawal of Armenian occupying forces will significantly change dynamics in the region and pave the way for normalization of relations to the benefit of the people of the region. Any precondition put for resumption of substantive talks is a serious blow to peace process and undermines agreements reached in Vienna.

In the meantime, we remain to be of the strong view that absence of solution to political issues should not prevent addressing military, security, social, economic and humanitarian consequences of unresolved conflicts in the OSCE. In this context, lack of adequate attention to the issues of IDPs and refugees continues to be source of deep regret, especially in light of existence of wide-range OSCE commitments related to protection and promotion of rights of this vulnerable group. We recall that series of events dedicated to this matter under previous chairmanships, which produced several recommendations and reiterate our call on the German Chairmanship to introduce this important topic into the human dimension events package.

In conclusion, we once again thank Ambassador G. Bächler for his presence at the Permanent Council and wish him every success in his future endeavors.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.