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**Statement by the Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan
1139th Meeting of the Permanent Council,
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challenges to the Minsk Process posed by provocative actions of Armenia

Mr. Chairperson,

With reference to my letter distributed under reference number SEC.DEL/122/17 on 27 March, I would like to inform the Permanent Council on the challenges to the Minsk Process posed by provocations of Armenia.

In blatant violation of norms and principles of international law, relevant resolutions of the UN Security Council, documents and decisions of the OSCE, since last week the armed forces of the Republic of Armenia have been conducting military exercises in the occupied territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The President of Armenia personally attended the exercises on March 25, “awarded military servicemen who excelled in the combat duty” and made belligerent provocative statements threatening sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan. He attempted to introduce a religious dimension to the conflict as he praised the Armenian armed forces as upholders of Christianity. President Sargsyan, *inter alia*, admitted involvement of the armed forces of Armenia in occupation of the Azerbaijani territories and his own personal responsibility in this regard. In the course of exercises, the Armenian tanks targeted ruined houses of expelled Azerbaijani population in Aghdam. This is a clear testimony of mindset of the senior leadership of Armenia built upon series of crimes against humanity, war crimes, acts of genocide committed against Azerbaijan and its civilian population. This is the understanding of peace, tolerance and co-existence by the Armenian leadership.

Armenia’s actions clearly violate the ceasefire regime. Over the last year, Armenia entrenched and built-up military positions, transferred military equipment and hardware to the Line of Confrontation and, thus, took advantage of relatively calm period of ceasefire for consolidating the status-quo of occupation. This has been explicitly recognized by the President of Armenia in his statement.

Provocative warlike actions by Armenia and bellicose rhetoric of its high-ranking officials are clear manifestation of continued illegal use of force by Armenia against Azerbaijan, and the OSCE should act in unity to reverse such a flagrant violation of basic principles of inter-State relations as enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act.

Against this background and the appeal of the Permanent Mission of Azerbaijan distributed on 27 March, silence on the part of OSCE participating States and its Minsk Group is nothing less than an appeasement of the policy of aggression by Armenia. We call again on those Delegations who see no military solution to this conflict to be consistent and

condemn this demonstration of force by Armenia, which instigates tensions and a new wave of armed hostilities. Lack of reaction to such provocations strengthens sense of impunity in the Armenian leadership and undermines credibility of the calls for peaceful resolution of the conflict.

As for the statement by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group of 29 March, we regret that it is excessively technical, rather than substantive, and far from being adequate to the challenges to peace process. The fact that Armenia's military exercises in the occupied territories were held during the Co-Chairs' trip to the conflict zone is a direct challenge to their mission and failure to react to such a challenge discredits their mediating efforts. Absence of proper reaction to deliberate attempts by Armenia to derail the peace process may lead to unpredictable consequences.

As for the attempts to precondition negotiations with creation of favorable atmosphere, we recall our previous statement that the cease-fire regime can hardly be sustainable, if there are no substantive negotiations towards resolution of the conflict.

The Azerbaijani Delegation strongly urges the OSCE participating States, the OSCE Minsk Group and its Co-Chairmen and the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship to publicly condemn Armenia's flagrant violations of ceasefire regime, demand from Armenia to put an end to its aggression against Azerbaijan, withdraw its forces, and to engage in good faith in substantive negotiations with a view to finding lasting political solution to the conflict.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.