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**Statement by the Delegation of Azerbaijan
at the 918th meeting of the Permanent Council**

ENGLISH only

As delivered by Ambassador G.Israfilov

Mr. Chairman,

I thank the Delegation of France for raising this subject under this agenda item. I would like to use this opportunity to present our view on the current state of affairs in the negotiations process. I believe that the more often we discuss the issues related to the conflict resolution in the Permanent Council, the better OSCE participating States would be informed about the challenges we face on that path. The Azerbaijani Delegation is even ready to go a step further and to engage here in Vienna into the discussions of specific elements related to the peace process in the format of the Minsk Group. We are ready to discuss any issue related to the conflict resolution based on its merits. We are ready to discuss any initiative that will help moving the process beyond the unacceptable status quo and facilitate the soonest resolution of the conflict. We believe that such approach would help us move ahead with other priorities remaining at the OSCE agenda and to formulate common approaches to address them.

Is this not a demonstration of political willingness of the Azerbaijani authorities to accelerate reaching agreement on the conflict? We hope that this readiness to engage into negotiations in the format of the Minsk Group would be duly appreciated by the co-chairing countries and other partners in the OSCE.

As far as the statement itself is concerned, our Delegation read with attention the text of the joint statement of three presidents of France, Russia and the US made at the Los Cabos Summit of the Twenty. The statement demonstrates the level of engagement of leaders of three countries co-chairing the Minsk Group of the OSCE to the resolution of the conflict and Azerbaijan welcomes this trilateral commitment.

Delegations around the table are well aware about the position of Azerbaijan, which is based on the principles of the Helsinki Final Act, relevant resolutions of the United Nations Security Council and documents of OSCE.

Each and every of the above-mentioned fundamental documents adopted by the all OSCE participating States resolutely reject the use of force and support the resolution of conflict through peaceful means. Azerbaijan follows this approach and believes that potential for reaching peace is not exhausted. We are convinced that in order to reach a breakthrough in the negotiations we need to get rid of the factor of presence of the Armenian military force in the zone of conflict. We firmly believe that demilitarization of the conflict zone will create more room for engagement on all possible tracks and stimulate more confidence between both parties as well as between the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities of the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

It is the force that has been used to occupy the territories of Azerbaijan and expel all indigenous Azerbaijani population. It is the force that is being used to prevent any contacts between conflict affected communities. It is the force that is being used to hinder the return of the displaced Azerbaijani population back to their homes of origin in the territories adjacent to the Nagorno-Karabakh region. It is the force that is being used to consolidate the status quo and impose a fait accompli situation. It is the factor of force that is used in the negotiation format to keep hostage the return of Azerbaijani territories around the Nagorno-Karabakh region back under the sovereignty of Azerbaijan. It is the force that being used to kill civilians living in the vicinity of the conflict line.

The difficulties in the negotiations and delay in reaching agreement are caused by the ongoing attempts of the Armenian side to benefit for maximum from the consistent use of force and the presence of her armed forces on the territory of Azerbaijan.

Such a use of force on the part of Armenia represents a challenge to Azerbaijan, to the peace process and entire OSCE community. It is a serious challenge to the realization of vision of Security Community and the OSCE concept of comprehensive and indivisible security in our part of the world.

We recognize the importance of observing the cease-fire regime that should minimize human losses. However, the OSCE community should not settle for only dealing with technical aspects of the cease-fire, which was actually intended in 1994 as a temporary mean to speedily proceed to an agreement on the conflict settlement.

As we reconfirm our commitment to the cease-fire regime, we call on OSCE participating States and co-chairing countries to persuade Armenia to stop using force against the territory of Azerbaijan and in the peace process and to encourage her to demilitarize the zone of conflict. This would allow achieving a breakthrough in the peace process and opening up the region for building trust and confidence.

We encourage the OSCE Chairmanship to provide guidance and dynamism to the OSCE High Level Planning Group to develop as soon as possible a plan for withdrawal of the Armenian troops from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan and deployment of the multinational OSCE peacekeeping force based on the expertise available in the area of police. Such a police-centered OSCE peacekeeping force would provide for the best possible security guarantees for reconciliation of the conflict-affected communities and ensure gradual development of the Nagorno-Karabakh region and adjacent territories. Our Delegation stands ready to work on these issues within the Minsk Group format and with the Co-chairs of the Minsk Group.

Thank you.