

STATEMENT
by Mr. Elmar Mammadyarov
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan,
at the 115th Session of the Committee of Ministers
Strasbourg, November 17, 2005

Mr. Chairman,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to the Portuguese Government and to Minister Freitas do Amaral for a Chairmanship, successful in implementing the priorities of importance for the Council of Europe. I would also like to congratulate Romania on assuming the Chairmanship and to convey to Minister Ungureanu our heartfelt wishes for success in the work he is about to undertake.

The Third Summit of the Council of Europe marked the beginning of qualitatively new era for the Organization, reinforcing its focus on respect for human rights, democracy and rule of law. Quasi-completion of the enlargement of the Council of Europe will allow the organization to devote its entire efforts to consolidation of achievements in the areas of expertise and further development of the cooperation between member States in these areas. The announced objective of Europe without dividing lines should serve as a guiding principle for all activities by the Council.

I wish to renew Azerbaijan's commitment to contribute to strengthening democratic values at national and regional, as well as sub-regional, levels. We ail recognize that democracy-building has been entailing an enormous complexity that is the reflection of a rich a diverse network of human, cultural, economic and political relations.

It is true; we are young, yet vigorous democracy that has been reacting adequately vis-a-vis those who are either unable or unwilling to adapt to the new environment and new demands of the conscious democratic choice. We are also aware that the consolidation of democracy is an arduous and long-term process, for which harmony of efforts by all sides becomes essential.

Against this background, the past parliamentary elections have brought forth a profound change in Azerbaijan's political development, where an obvious step forward in improving electoral practices was made. Elections allowed to involve different social and political actors in the process, elevate public's trust in its indispensable role in shaping the country's future, thus significantly increasing the Government's implementation of commitments through well-known steps envisaged in President Ilham Aliyev's May 11 and October 25 Executive Orders, a testament to Government's determination.

Now, the authorities are in the process of evaluating the progress and discussing main outcomes and challenges of these elections. I wish to reiterate that we remain committed to ensure that recommendations issued by election monitoring teams, including International Election Observation Mission are followed through by the relevant authorities.

We are well-aware that while elections marked a milestone on the path of democracy, much remains to be done. That is why we in Azerbaijan consider the co-operation with the Council of Europe and its specialized bodies to be an inalienable element in achievement of such a difficult and complex task.

Thus, we have keen interest in encouraging substantive and enhanced dialogue among political parties and NGOs, in promoting all actors to undertake capacity and training programs aimed at strengthening political culture, through working on agenda-building. We should continue building capacity for participation in public sphere through training sessions for citizens about elections, civil and political rights aimed at establishing awareness-raising programs for the youth to increase their involvement and responsibilities in networks of widening grass-roots participation, ensuring gender

equality in the democratic process.

The Council of Europe's role in overcoming the issues of transition by individual countries, strengthening democracy and rule of law, promoting human rights is indispensable. Its contribution to the democratic transformation of Azerbaijan and recent conducting of Parliamentary elections, seen by us as an integral element of overall democratic process, is invaluable, and we are grateful to the distinguished Council and its Secretary General for the positive input, including the action plan.

We welcome the CoE's unwavering attention to all of Azerbaijan's commitments, as undertaken upon accession, which include but are not limited to democratization-related issues. Settlement of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno Karabakh conflict is both an outstanding commitment and obstacle which hampers strengthening democratic environment in both nations. Azerbaijan for its part has made a major step in that direction by making every effort to reintegrate its citizens residing in the occupied territories into the Constitution-provided process of casting votes. Settlement efforts by the international community still have not yielded any concrete results and we call upon the Council and its member-states to energize their approach in that respect.

Re-drawing frontiers through use of force or threat of such, as well as ethnic cleansing, are completely alien to the European values. In line with the Council proclaimed policy of development and cooperation, support of democracy and respect for human rights, encouragement of multi-ethnic and multicultural communities, the Government of Azerbaijan stands ready to utilize the experience of European nations in solving such problems, in a fully democratic, lawful and inclusive way.

Based on such vision, we foresee peaceful resolution of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan through reintegration of territories presently uncontrolled by the constitutional authorities, return of the displaced population to their places of origin, ensuring peaceful co-existence of the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities of the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan with international guarantees of their security.

While re-affirming Azerbaijan's commitments to the principles of the Council of Europe, I reiterate my Government's readiness to play its part in achieving its goals and promote our common ideals and values.

Thank you