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Position of the Republic of Azerbaijan On the Issue of the Signing of Protocols between Turkey and Armenia

Azerbaijan understands the importance for Turkey and her efforts to settle historic problems and therefore normalize relations with neighboring Armenia. As the officials of Azerbaijan have repeatedly noted, establishment of relations between states is in principle their sovereign right. Turkey closed the border to Armenia because of the latter's occupation of the Azerbaijani territories. The decision once taken in certain context can not be repealed out of that very context. While the situation has not changed on the ground and the territories are still under the occupation, the opening of borders between Turkey and Armenia at this stage and under current circumstances will have negative consequences not only for Azerbaijan and the settlement of the conflict, but for the whole region of the South Caucasus.

Under the circumstances of continued occupation of the Azerbaijani territories by Armenia, the opening of border by Turkey will seriously damage the efforts of the OSCE-led international community to compel Armenia to observe the norms and principles of international law, respect Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and inviolability of borders, withdraw from all occupied territories, including the Nagorno-Karabakh region, and create necessary conditions for the forcibly displaced Azerbaijani population to return to their homes.

The opening of borders will embolden Armenia to continue her unconstructive stance in the negotiations on the peaceful settlement of the conflict, as it has been already observed twice during the last months. Even a simple statement of Turkey, Armenia and Switzerland on future perspectives of their negotiations on the protocols was enough for Armenia to toughen her position in the negotiations. Followed up by economic exchange between Armenia and Turkey opening of the border will certainly assist the Republic of Armenia to continue occupation. It will consequently block the return of Azerbaijanis to their territories, including the return of the Azerbaijani community of the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

Normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia can not yield positive results for the region, unless Armenia completely withdraws from all occupied Azerbaijani territories.

Opening of the Turkish-Armenian borders could play an important role as an element of the conflict settlement being put in a timeframe together with the withdrawal of the Armenian forces from Azerbaijani territories and re-opening of the Lachin road for the use by all parties. When done, together with this package Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan could have a better chance for economic cooperation. Such an approach will fit in the concept of opening of all borders and communications in the region as a part of the conflict settlement. Otherwise peace and security will hardly be established in the region.

Until withdrawal of the Armenian forces from all the occupied territories, including the Nagorno-Karabakh region, Azerbaijan will not consider any cooperation with the Republic of Armenia. Once Armenia is ready to recognize the territorial integrity of Turkey, Azerbaijan has a natural right to demand the same attitude to the other states of the region, including Azerbaijan.