

**Communication by Mr Elmar MAMMADYAROV
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Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers
to the Parliamentary Assembly**

Strasbourg, 2 October 2014

Ms President,
Mr Secretary General,
Distinguished members of the Parliamentary Assembly,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to once again address this distinguished Assembly in my capacity of Chairman of the Committee of Ministers. I will not particularly focus on all the achievements of the Committee of Ministers since the last session of the Assembly in June, of which you can read the details in the activity report provided.

Instead, I will focus on the most significant developments linked, on the one hand, to the current crisis unfolding in Europe and, on the other hand, the priority areas of our chairmanship.

Summer 2014 will go down as a particularly dark time for our continent. Last July, like many political leaders throughout the world, I could not but express, on behalf of the Committee of Ministers, my profound indignation over the crashing of the Malaysia Airlines plane in eastern Ukraine.

Like you, Ms President, I made a point of reiterating the strong call to all the parties involved for an independent inquiry to quickly establish the exact circumstances of this disaster. The independent experts have produced their initial conclusions and I hope that they will be able to progress in their work and fully elucidate this tragedy. To continue their investigations, they should be provided immediately with safe and unrestricted access to the crash site.

As demonstrated by your current affairs debate yesterday, the situation in Ukraine remains at the heart of the current concerns of all Council of Europe bodies. For their part, the Ministers' Deputies have continued to discuss the conflict in Ukraine at each of their meetings. In this connection, they held an extraordinary meeting at the beginning of September at which the Secretary General reported on his visits to Ukraine and the Russian Federation at the end of the summer. More recently, the

Deputies also held an exchange of views with the Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr Muižnieks, after his visit to Crimea.

In the light of those exchanges, the Committee of Ministers recently adopted a set of important decisions on the situation in Ukraine. Those decisions are intended firstly to reiterate a number of fundamental principles of international law, in particular the peaceful settlement of disputes and the necessity of respecting States' territorial integrity. They also aim to foster the emergence of a peaceful and sustainable solution to the conflict. In this respect, the Deputies welcomed the Protocol signed in Minsk on 5 September 2014 and called on all parties to respect and scrupulously apply the twelve principles laid down in it.

The Committee of Ministers also sought to provide political support for the efforts made to resolve the crisis: it gave a clear brief to the Secretary General to continue to assist the Ukrainian authorities in carrying out their reforms, and notably in preparing the parliamentary elections to take place on 26 October. The holding of free and fair elections, in line with international standards throughout the territory of Ukraine, will be an important step in consolidating the democratic progress made by that country and in resolving the conflict. I am pleased to see that your Assembly has decided to send an observer mission and make its own contribution to the smooth running of the elections.

In the humanitarian field, the Committee of Ministers encouraged the Secretary General to examine how the Council of Europe can address, in co-ordination with other international organisations, the humanitarian needs and the human rights consequences of the military operations in Ukraine. In particular it underlined that the people living in Crimea, including the Tatars, must fully enjoy the protection afforded to them by the European Convention on Human Rights.

The Committee of Ministers will continue to closely monitor developments in Ukraine.

In a few weeks' time, on 13 November to be precise, we will hand over the chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers to Belgium but in the meantime we will continue to implement our priorities. In this respect, the adoption of the Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions by the Committee of Ministers last July is a source of great satisfaction for the Azerbaijani Chairmanship.

This Convention is very much in keeping with the Council of Europe's long-standing commitment to sporting ethics. It is also a contribution to the fight against corruption, which is one of Azerbaijan's main priorities. I am particularly pleased that, at the 13th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport held in Macolin, Switzerland on 18 September, no fewer than 15 member States, including my own country, signed the Convention. I hope that the Convention, which is open to both member and non-member States, will quickly secure the number of ratifications required for its entry into force. We would wish this could take place before the 2015 European Games in Baku, which have served as one of the reasons of our consistent support to the adoption of this important legal framework. The selection of Baku as one of the cities to host the UEFA Euro 2020 matches will definitely encourage us to continue the promotion of this convention well beyond our chairmanship tenure.

Under this particular chairmanship priority, a conference on international standards and national experiences in the fight against corruption was organised in Baku on 30 June – 1 July 2014, together with GRECO and the International Anti-Corruption Academy (IACA). Three dedicated plenary sessions allowed for profound exchange of views on a variety of issues like the implementation of anti-corruption legislation and its role in increasing of the efficiency of the judicial-legal system, fighting corruption through education, preventive measures against corruption, economic development and fight against corruption, international cooperation between specialised anti-corruption agencies, protection of participants of the criminal process during the investigation of corruption crimes. The participants had the chance to learn about the success stories and challenges of individual countries.

The cooperation with the International Anti-Corruption Academy proved efficient on this particular occasion and the conference can be viewed as a good example of the Council of Europe – IACA interaction in the field of fight against corruption. The decision taken by the IACA to hold its third Assembly next month in Baku is, to some extent, the logical outcome of this successful chairmanship event.

Another important event Azerbaijan organised within its chairmanship agenda was the international conference on “Public service delivery in the context of human rights and good governance” last week in Baku. It’s worth noting this particular topic was addressed by the Council of Europe for the first time. The event allowed participants to get acquainted with the work of successful models of individual countries, including Azerbaijani State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations - ASAN Service – which, by the way, had been hailed by Secretary

General Jagland during his April visit to Azerbaijan, as a unique model to be benefited by many European countries. One of the important messages coming out of the discussions was the proposal of the Azerbaijani side to establish an international association of public service delivery agencies as a platform to exchange best practices. We hope that this proposal will be followed up duly.

Under the chairmanship priorities relating to the consolidation of culturally diverse societies based on mutual respect and understanding, the first Council of Europe Platform Exchange on Culture and Digitisation entitled “Creating an enabling environment for digital culture and for empowering citizens” was held in Baku early July 2014 as part of the follow-up to the 10th Conference of European Ministers of Culture held in Moscow in April 2013. Discussions placed a special focus on the impact of digitisation on culture, transition from the pre-digital to the digital era, needs of the cultural sector and its actors, as regards access to, creation and dissemination of cultural content, empowerment of citizens and creation of enabling environment for digital culture. It was important to note that the platform meeting highlighted the potential place and the role of the Council of Europe as an appropriate forum for drafting common standards and mechanisms that could further strengthen cooperation in this field. Within this context, relevant policy guidelines will be developed soon.

The next important event under this chairmanship priority, the Council of Europe 2014 Exchange on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue was held in Baku in September. The Parliamentary Assembly also contributed to this event through highlighting the role of the Assembly in strengthening intercultural and interreligious dialogue. The theme of the exchange, “Intercultural dialogue: interaction between culture and religion”, led to a rich and lively debate. Participants highlighted the role of religions and non-religious convictions in combating discrimination and intolerance. Important references were made to preservation and protection of cultural and religious heritage as one of the integral elements of people's identity and essential resource for peaceful coexistence. The latest edition of Exchange in Baku in our view once again testified to the importance of this platform as a valuable Forum and gave rise to proposals regarding the future prospects for the exchanges. The Committee of Ministers will examine the conclusions of the 2014 Exchange in the weeks ahead.

Let me inform the distinguished Assembly of another major event that started its work today in Baku, namely the 4th session of the Baku Humanitarian Forum. This Forum is an annual gathering of famous representatives of political scientific and cultural elite of the world including famous statesmen, Nobel Prize winners in the

various fields of science and leaders of international organizations. This year's Forum will discuss among others the topical themes such as the philosophy of multiculturalism, the political and legal aspects of concepts of national identity and the practice of cultural diversity, multiculturalism as a policy of the tolerant co-existence of different cultural practices. Although this event was not included into the list of Azerbaijani chairmanship events, it will certainly contribute to our chairmanship priority dealing with the consolidation of culturally diverse societies.

During my June statement here in this hemicycle, I informed you of my Government's intention to host in Baku a high-level event - the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations VII Global Forum in 2016. During the time elapsed since your last session, considerable progress has been achieved in this direction. Just a few days ago, a formal decision on this matter was taken by the Alliance of Civilisations in the margins of the 69th session of the United Nations General Assembly. Moreover, in order to promote understanding, dialogue and reconciliation among different cultures through concrete projects, "Action Plan on Joint Activities" was signed between the Government of Azerbaijan and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations earlier during the Bali session of the Alliance. Implementation of this Action Plan will be a humble contribution of my Government to the practical approach towards the global challenges.

Under our chairmanship priority dealing with social cohesion, we have organised in Baku on 10-11 September a Conference to review the Council of Europe Social Cohesion Strategy and Action Plan. This conference provided an excellent opportunity to take stock of the progress achieved since the adoption of these important instruments in 2010. It also served as a platform for tackling important themes such as social cohesion and European social model in times of economic crisis, diversity in European societies, current and future challenges for more inclusive societies.

As I had a chance to inform the distinguished Assembly last time, my Government expressed its intention to host the next Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Social Cohesion in Baku. I hope that the Committee of Ministers will take positive formal decision on that very soon.

Within its next chairmanship priority, Azerbaijan also sets great store by education and protection for young people. The Council of Europe campaign to stop sexual violence against children, launched in 2010, has been enjoying considerable success. It is widely appreciated and provides an effective tool for combating one of the worst kinds of violation of children's rights. As a result, the Ministers'

Deputies decided, last July, to extend the ONE in FIVE campaign for one year, until the end of 2015. Besides protecting the physical and psychological integrity of children, more efforts must also be made towards young people, particularly to involve them more in decision-making. I am pleased to see, therefore, that the next World Forum for Democracy to be staged here in Strasbourg, on 3 to 5 November, will look at ways of engaging young people in rethinking the democratic arenas of today, including via the new technologies. The title of this year's Forum is "From participation to influence: can youth revitalise democracy?" Allow me to remind you in this connection that Azerbaijan will host the United Nations Global Forum on youth policies at the end of October in Baku with the institutional support of the Council of Europe.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Developing the Council of Europe's policy regarding neighbouring regions remains on the Committee of Ministers' agenda and is another strong focus of our Chairmanship. Thanks to our favourable location at the crossroads of the continents and historic relations with the countries of the immediate neighbourhood of the European continent, Azerbaijan is well placed to have taken the initiative of organising a high-level conference on the neighbourhood policy, to be held in Baku on 7-8 November 2014. The conference is meant to serve as a useful platform for taking stock of the achievements made so far in our Organisation's quest for promoting dialogue, cooperation and deepening of engagement with several countries of the neighbouring regions through strengthened political dialogue and exchanging views on how to better shape the future course of this policy.

I hope that your Assembly will be able to participate in and contribute to this major event marking our Chairmanship. In this context, I welcome the fact that the Committee of Ministers recently granted Tunisia's request to be invited to join the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity, better known as the North-South Centre. Co-operation between the Council of Europe and neighbouring countries, be they on the southern shore of the Mediterranean or in Central Asia, is constantly strengthening. Your Assembly, which pioneered the "Partner for democracy status", will certainly view these developments with a keen sense of satisfaction. For its part, the Committee of Ministers is currently considering arrangements for a reinforced partnership with a number of countries covered by the neighbourhood policy for the period 2015-2017. Your Assembly will be kept informed of the outcome of this work which, if all goes well, should be completed by the end of the year.

As we stated at the very beginning of our chairmanship, Azerbaijan has always been supportive of strengthening synergy and partnership between the United Nations and regional organizations. In this context, we would like to emphasize the importance and relevance of the traditional Resolution on cooperation between the United Nations and the Council of Europe which we expect to be adopted by consensus by the United Nations General Assembly. Azerbaijan will be privileged to conduct the negotiations on this draft resolution this year as the current Chairman of the Committee of Ministers.

When it comes to the OSCE, co-operation between the two Organisations in the fight against terrorism and trafficking in human beings will be on the agenda of the next meeting of the Coordination Group which will be held in Vienna on 31 October.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in a few moments I will be happy to reply to your questions but first, as I am addressing you in my capacity of Chairman of the Committee of Ministers for the last time, I would like to say that I am honoured to be so closely involved in our Organisation's work. The Council of Europe has a mission to help all our countries along the path of democracy and human rights. I am convinced that, to accomplish this task, it is vital that your Assembly and our Committee continue to work in close collaboration. I would like to thank you for the support you have provided throughout our Chairmanship. I would also like to thank the Secretary General for his commitment and availability.

Mr Secretary General, after being elected by a substantial majority of this Assembly in June, he was recently sworn in by the Committee of Ministers. We have taken note of his strategic vision for his second mandate as how to increase the relevance and efficiency of the Council of Europe. I am convinced that he will succeed in carrying out the numerous and difficult tasks that will be entrusted to him over the next five years.

Last but not least, I would like to assure you that we will continue, after the completion of our chairmanship term next month, to render our support to Belgium and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the implementation of the shared priorities that the three countries have subscribed to.

Thank you for your attention.