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**KRISTIAN VIGENIN: TO SETTLE KARABAKH CONFLICT, INTER-PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SHOULD BE INTENSIFIED**

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12.10.2016

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11 October 2016

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Interview with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's Special Representative on the South Caucasus, Kristian Vigenin

Q. What do you think of the current state of bilateral ties between Azerbaijan and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly?

A. Azerbaijan is a valued member of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, with an active delegation led by Bahar Muradova, who also serves in the countrys Milli Mejlis (parliament) as vice-speaker. Having such a high-level leader from Azerbaijan is an advantage to the PA, as it helps raise the visibility of our work in Azerbaijan and the wider region. We also benefit from the engaged leadership of Azerbaijani parliamentarian Azay Guliyev, who serves as Vice-President of our Assembly, and before that was Vice-Chair of the OSCE PAs Committee on Political Affairs and Security.

I was very well received in my visit to Baku last spring, meeting with the President Ilham Aliyev, Speaker of the Parliament Ogtay Asadov, and Minister for Foreign Affairs Elmar Mammadyarov. As I said at the time, there is a need to continue and intensify inter-parliamentary communication in favor of efforts to promote human rights and for a peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Q. Does the OSCE PA intend to send any delegation to Azerbaijan to improve bilateral ties?

A. I am always looking forward to holding discussions with my colleagues in Azerbaijan and other

countries in the region and exploring ways to continue developing our relations. I was pleased to have an opportunity to speak with parliamentarians from the South Caucasus on the sidelines of the OSCE PA Autumn Meetings in Skopje.

It is my hope to visit the region again in the coming months, at a mutually convenient time.

Q. What do you think was the reason behind the OSCE PAs refusal to attend previous elections held in Azerbaijan as well as the September 26 referendum?

A. The Parliamentary Assembly decided not to observe the parliamentary elections last year after restrictions placed on our partners in the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights forced them to cancel their planned election observation mission. As our President said at that time □ it was only appropriate that if our close partner ODIHR could not observe, then we should not observe.

When it comes to the 26 September constitutional referendum in Azerbaijan, I dont believe that the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly was ever invited to observe this. In any event, we generally do not observe referenda, focusing our resources instead particularly on parliamentary elections.

Q. What are the OSCE PAs plans about contributing to the settlement of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict? Are you thinking of organizing a meeting between parliamentarians from both sides?

A. As I have stated on numerous occasions, there is no military solution to the conflict. I have urged all sides to stop aggressive rhetoric and to make space for more constructive efforts for peace, expressing support in particular for the Minsk Process. In this regard, the PA can play an important role by facilitating meaningful dialogue on the parliamentary level, which ultimately can build trust and promote confidence-building measures.

There are some concrete ideas and I'll inform the broader public as soon as we come closer to their fulfillment.

Q. In your previous interviews you had expressed your intention to visit Nagorno-Karabakh. Do you have any plans about realizing it or paying a visit to the region in the near future?

A. I have nothing to report on this right now. In general terms I think it is useful for those that are actively involved in efforts for peace to personally see the situation on the ground. I would only move forward with visiting the Nagorno-Karabakh region if it can be arranged through the appropriate channels, with the agreement of the authorities both in Baku and Yerevan, and if this would be an actual contribution to ongoing efforts.

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