North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Joint press point

with the NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen and President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan
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OANA LUNGESCU (NATO Spokesperson): Good afternoon. The Secretary General and the President of Azerbaijan will start with a few introductory remarks and then will take just a couple of questions. Secretary General.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN (NATO Secretary General): Good afternoon. I'm very glad to welcome President Aliyev of Azerbaijan at NATO Headquarters.

NATO greatly values its partnership with Azerbaijan. We are grateful for Azerbaijan's contribution in Afghanistan. We share many political priorities and security interests. And we have built up our cooperation and dialogue over many years. Our relationship contributes to regional and Euro-Atlantic security. And we wish to take it forward in that way.

Mr. President, your visit to NATO today shows the importance NATO attaches to consultations with partners ahead of the NATO Summit in Chicago. And we have had a very good, very fruitful meeting. We discussed our cooperation and our concerns both in the region and internationally. And we discussed how we could work together even more in the future.

In a moment, we will sit down with all 28 NATO Allies to discuss our work together and to listen to one another's concerns. That is NATO's commitment to our partners. And we take it very seriously.

In particular, I would expect us to discuss our operation in Afghanistan. Azerbaijan gives that operation welcomed support both through troop contributions and through over-flight rights. We value that support highly.

Our cooperation covers other areas too. In December, we agreed a new individual partnership action plan with Azerbaijan. This new action plan will provide a sound basis to take forward our practical cooperation in the next two years. So our cooperation is good and it is growing. Azerbaijan is an important partner in an important region. And I look forward to working together further in the future.

ILHAM HEYDAR oglu ALIYEV (President of Azerbaijan): Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary General for your kind words about our country. And thank you very much for invitation. I'm

very glad to be back to NATO Headquarters and to discuss important issues of our bilateral relations.

Relations between NATO and Azerbaijan have a very good history, history of success. And since early 1990s, Azerbaijan was very active in its aspirations to integrate with Euro-Atlantic institutions. And we made a big progress in that respect. We conduct reforms in our armed forces, and are trying to bring them in accordance with NATO standards. Therefore, this part of our cooperation already has a very important impact on the situation in our armed forces.

At the same time, participation in NATO operations in various parts of the world also helped our servicemen to increase their capability and to learn from NATO colleagues a lot.

We were from the very beginning in Afghanistan. And as Secretary General mentioned, we provide over-flights, land transportation. And I'm very glad that importance of Azerbaijan as a transit for cargoes to Afghanistan is growing. Today, we discussed our future activity in this respect. And we're ready to consider new proposals in order to expand our cooperation in this area.

At the same time, we provide our military servicemen to serve in Afghanistan. And that is also part of our commitment as far these ISAF operations are concerned.

Today, I also informed Mr. Secretary General that we are seriously considering to contribute to Afghan National Army Trust Fund and to consider in the future continuation of these financial contributions. At the same time, we provide training for Afghan diplomats in our diplomatic academy, in our border security academy. And we work on demining and other humanitarian issues and are ready to expand our cooperation.

Today, we also discussed the regional security issues, particularly situation with respect to negotiations on Nagorno Karabakh settlement. I informed Mr. Secretary General what is the current status of these negotiations. And once again, expressed our hope that this conflict will be resolved as soon as possible. And territorial integrity with Azerbaijan will be restored. There is a very good legal basis for that. United Nations Security Council adopted four resolutions demanding unconditional and immediate withdrawal of Armenian troops from occupied territories. And we expect Armenia to comply with these resolutions.

Part of our discussion today was devoted to energy security. This is a very important element of national security of countries, both producers and consumers. And Azerbaijan is becoming... and I'm sure will become a substantial contributor to European energy security. And our consumers in Europe will be member states of NATO. Therefore, this is also... is part of our overall discussions and consultations.

Once again, I'd like to express my gratitude to the Secretary General for the invitation; satisfaction with the way how relations develop and are transforming. And I hope that these

relations will continue successfully and will be based on mutual interest and shared values. Thank you very much.

OANA LUNGESCU: We have time for just two questions: one over there; one over here. Azeri Television.

Q: (Inaudible)... Secretary General, Azerbaijan is significantly contributing to NATO operations in Afghanistan in terms of troops, training, and especially transit. How do you think Mr. Secretary General, is Azerbaijan's involvement becoming more important and indispensable for the success of operations?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: Yes, indeed. Azerbaijan's contribution to our operation in Afghanistan is crucial both as regards to troops and training and transit as you mentioned. We appreciate very much the work done by Azeri troops in Afghanistan. Today, the president and I have discussed how we could possibly enhance our cooperation in the future also when it comes to the transit arrangements.

We discussed the future perspectives of our operation in Afghanistan. As you know, we will gradually hand over lead responsibility for the security to the Afghan security forces from now on until the end of 2014.

I appreciate very much that the president today has announced that Azerbaijan is prepared to contribute financially to the Afghan security forces also in the longer-term perspective. That's absolutely crucial. Because when we leave Afghanistan, we have to make sure that the Afghan security forces can actually take full responsibility. And to that end, they also need money. We need to finance. So I very much welcome today's announcement. I also appreciate the Azeri contribution to humanitarian assistance. So across the board, Azerbaijan plays a very important role in Afghanistan.

OANA LUNGESCU: Italian news agency.

Q: Yes, I'm (Inaudible) for the Secretary General; but it is another issue. It's about Syria. Just a couple of days ago, the Arab League asked the United Nations to plan a peace mission on the... on Syria for humanitarian reason basically. And my question is: "Any role of NATO in this new perspective for Syria especially in order to provide humanitarian corridor to allow help for the population?" Thanks.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: No, NATO has no intention whatsoever to intervene in Syria. We appreciate very much all the efforts to find a solution to the conflict in Syria. I appreciate the work of the Arab League. I do believe that a regional solution has to be found. Having said that, of course, we strongly condemn the crackdown... the security forces' crackdown on the civilian population. The only way forward in Syria is to accommodate the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people to introduce freedom and democracy.

OANA LUNGESCU: Thank you very much.

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