Press remarks by President Charles Michel following trilateral meeting with President Aliyev of Azerbaijan and Prime Minister Pashinyan of Armenia

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[Transcribed from original by the Parley Policy Initiative]

We have just finished the sixth meeting with President Aliyev and Prime Minister Pashinyan.

Our exchanges have once again been frank, honest and substantive.

Our meeting was the latest in a series of intensive and productive high-level meetings involving Armenia's and Azerbaijan's leaders, Deputy Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers since early May, in Brussels, Chişinău, Washington, Moscow and on the bilateral border.

We are going through one of the most comprehensive and vigorous stages of negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

I commended the leaders for their strong commitment to the peace process and encouraged them to take further courageous steps to ensure decisive and irreversible progress on the normalisation track.

And even though our meeting took place in the context of a worrying increase in tensions on the ground, I noted important momentum in the political discussions and efforts.

We discussed all issues on the agenda.

1. Sovereignty and territorial integrity
The Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders once again fully reconfirmed their respect for the other country's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Based on the understanding that Armenia's territory covers 29.800 km² and Azerbaijan's 86.600 km².

2. Border delimitation
Both leaders reconfirmed their unequivocal commitment to the 1991 Almaty Declaration as a political framework for the delimitation.

I welcomed the 12 July meeting of the two border commissions. Work has advanced on the statutes of these commissions and on discussions regarding the basis for delimitation.

And — this is very important — the leaders agreed to intensify and accelerate the work of the commissions.

3. Connectivity
On connectivity, the sides have also made clear progress over the past two months in their discussions aimed at unblocking transport and economic links in the region.

We discussed modalities of future transport arrangements which will respect the principles of sovereignty, jurisdiction and reciprocity.

The construction of the railway connection should be undertaken forthwith. The EU would be ready to contribute financially.

Some details still require clarification, but positions on this topic are now getting closer and options are being actively explored.

4. Humanitarian supplies
We discussed the situation of the Karabakh Armenian population and the situation around the Lachin corridor. The current state of affairs is clearly not sustainable and is in no one's interest.

We also discussed possible concrete steps to help bring the situation back to normal.

I emphasised the need to open the Lachin road. I also noted Azerbaijan's willingness to provide humanitarian supplies via Aghdam. I see both options as important and encourage humanitarian deliveries from both sides to ensure the needs of the population are met.

I also welcomed the resumption of medical evacuations by the ICRC.

5. Rights and security
The population on the ground needs reassurances, first and foremost regarding their rights and security.

In this context, I expressed the EU's encouragement for direct dialogue between Baku and representatives of Armenians living in the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast.

This dialogue should provide much-needed confidence for all those involved.

6. Detainees
We also discussed the issue of detainees.

The leaders reconfirmed their commitment to the gentlemen's understanding that the release of soldiers who inadvertently cross to the other side would be facilitated.

I advocated for the release by both sides of detainees.

The importance of ensuring increased cooperation in addressing the fate of missing persons and on demining was also discussed, and I once again called on the sides to exchange as much information as possible.

7. Follow-up
We agreed that our teams will remain in close contact to ensure concrete follow-up on what has been discussed today.

Real progress depends on the next steps that will need to be taken in the near future. As a matter of priority, violence and harsh rhetoric should stop in order to provide the proper environment for peace and normalisation talks.

I also reiterated my intention to invite the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders for another meeting in Brussels after the summer, as well as for another pentalateral meeting, with the participation also of the leaders of France and Germany, in Granada in the margins of the next European Political Community Summit.