



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL  
THE PRESIDENT**



Baku, 5 July 2012  
EUCO 135/12  
PRESSE 320  
PR PCE 117

**Remarks by Herman Van Rompuy,  
President of the European Council,  
following his meeting with President of Azerbaijan  
Ilham Aliyev**

Mr President, It is a pleasure to be in Azerbaijan for the first time and during such a dynamic period for your country. Although, I have only been here for a short while, I have seen many signs of rapid modernisation.

In this regard, I should also like to congratulate you and the people of Azerbaijan for the hosting of the Eurovision in May. Being one of the most watched events in Europe it clearly brought Azerbaijan to the wider European public.

We met for the first time when I was Prime-Minister of Belgium. I see my visit in this capacity of President of the European Council, not only as a follow-up to our earlier meetings (in Astana, Brussels and Warsaw), but also as an opportunity to once again highlight the relationship between the EU and Azerbaijan.

We had good discussions today. We went through a whole range of bilateral and regional issues. I would like to make the following three points:

First, let me emphasize: We greatly value the EU-Azerbaijan relationship and the benefits that we both have gained through our cooperation.

Building on the achievements of the past, we want to ensure that, jointly, we reach out to realize the potential of the future. As I see it, this is in the interest of the EU, of Azerbaijan and also the wider region.

**P R E S S**

---

Dirk De Backer - Spokesperson of the President - ☎ +32 (0)2 281 9768 - +32 (0)497 59 99 19  
[press.president@consilium.europa.eu](mailto:press.president@consilium.europa.eu) <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/>

EUCO 135/12

1  
**EN**

We have seen an intensification of our relations in various fields. Bilateral political contacts on all levels have intensified, so have contacts between people and business. We appreciate your support on many crucial international issues. Our energy cooperation continues to develop fast as an important positive dimension of our bilateral relationship.

The ongoing negotiations on the Southern Corridor and on the Trans Caspian Pipeline are of strategic importance to Azerbaijan and the European Union.

In this regard, I welcome that Turkey and Azerbaijan recently formalised the understanding that they reached on the Transanatolian Pipeline. Clearly, this further strengthens Azerbaijan's and also our commitment towards the realisation of the Southern Corridor.

There is, however, still a huge potential to develop and diversify our ties. More can, and should be done. We should in particular be able to push forward on negotiations on a new Association Agreement, including on trade and investments.

I encourage you, President Aliyev, to make better use of the opportunities provided by the Eastern Partnership for Azerbaijan. Since the Warsaw summit, we have been able to register good progress. We are on track in reaching the goals set out in the Roadmap in time for the next Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius 2013.

Second, Azerbaijan is a secular society, and your commitment to the principles of coexistence of religion is important in today's world. The European Union and the region need a stable, progressive, and tolerant Azerbaijan committed to democratic reforms and modernisation.

I made the point to President Aliyev of the importance of fostering a vibrant civil society: It was a force of progress in our own history and they can also be one in Azerbaijan. Also, embracing and furthering reforms and advancing Human Rights, will add to the long-term success and prosperity of Azerbaijan. And it is important for the strengthening of EU-Azerbaijan relations.

In this regard, I welcome the release last week nine imprisoned participants of a rally held on 2 April 2011. This is a positive step taken by Azerbaijan in its efforts to improve civil and political rights, although more steps are needed.

Third, progress on the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict should remain a top priority. Everyday that goes by without a solution is an opportunity missed for all of us. In order to find a solution we need to build confidence, trust and respect. And I am delivering here in Baku literally the same message here today as I delivered yesterday in Yerevan.

It is with great concern that we take note of recent reports of serious armed incidents on the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the Line of Contact, and I deeply regret the loss of life.

Military force will not resolve the conflict. Only a peaceful, negotiated settlement can allow the entire region to move beyond the status quo toward a secure and prosperous future. If a secure and stable regional environment can be prepared, the benefits will be for all in Azerbaijan.

I repeat calls made earlier by the EU, and now most recently again by the Co-chairs of the Minsk Group at the G20: Both Azerbaijan and Armenia need to take decisions to reach a lasting and peaceful settlement based on the Madrid principles. Both countries need to fully implement the commitments made by their Presidents in the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group. Both sides should also strictly respect the ceasefire and exercise restraint on the ground and refrain from hostile rhetoric in public statements.

The EU stands ready to support any confidence building and reconciliation efforts. We have both the means and the experience to do so. The appointment of Ambassador Lefort as the new EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia demonstrates the increased commitment of the EU to the settlement of the conflict and contributing to all aspects of any solution package.

Again thank you for receiving me here in Baku. I am happy that we have been able to confirm our shared commitment to lift the EU-Azerbaijan partnership to a higher level.

---