



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL
THE PRESIDENT**



Brussels, 21 June 2013
EUCO 146/13
PRESSE 283
PR PCE 129

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

It is my pleasure to welcome again today the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev. We already met on several occasions before. Last time was on 5 July as I visited Baku and I once again thank you for your kind hospitality.

Today we had a frank, broad and constructive discussion, covering the whole range of areas of mutual interests between Azerbaijan and the European Union, as well as the evolution of our relationship.

Among other aspects our discussion covered energy. I shared my satisfaction about the remarkable progress achieved on the Southern Gas Corridor, which is a vital strategic project for both of us. I thanked President Aliyev for his leadership on this issue. More broadly, I confirmed that Azerbaijan is a very important partner for the EU – we have achieved a great deal working together in the energy field, but we can do even a lot more.

I reminded the President of the European Union's very firm ambition to achieve a long-term association with Azerbaijan, with democracy and shared values at its core, in particular human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We also reviewed and assessed key events coming up in 2013. One of these is of course the Presidential elections. The European Union hopes that these elections are conducted according to the highest standards. We reviewed the evolution of the Eastern Partnership and I expressed my strong desire to see us set up an ambitious new contractual relationship, based on an Association Agreement.

P R E S S

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Finally, we discussed regional and international issues, where I was interested by the President's insights and perspectives. As you will expect, I stressed that the EU considers that stability in the Southern Caucasus cannot be achieved without a fair resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and that we continue to support the mediation efforts of OSCE Minsk Group.

I expressed my support for the statement by the Presidents of the Minsk Group Chair countries made earlier this week in Lough Erne at the occasion of the G8 summit which I attended. The Presidents of the Minsk Group urged the leaders of all the sides to recommit to the Helsinki principles, particularly those relating to the non-use of force or the threat of force, territorial integrity, and equal rights and self-determination of peoples. They appealed for avoiding any actions or rhetoric that could raise tension in the region and lead to escalation of the conflict. I also reiterated our willingness to expand existing measures aimed at bridging the increasing divide between the conflict parties.

The EU-Azerbaijan relations are good. Our long term commitment is to strengthening our relations even further by working towards concluding negotiations on the Association Agreement. With an Association Agreement our relationship can achieve its full potential. Thank you Mr President for your visit.
