

Remarks by President Charles Michel after his meeting in Baku with the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev.

Thank you very much, Mr President.

I would like to thank you for your hospitality and for this opportunity to meet you. As you mentioned, we have been able to have detailed and intensive discussions on the essence of the relationship between the European Union and Azerbaijan.

This was the first point we addressed because we wanted to look, with you, at how we could give additional impetus and even a more strategic dimension to the partnership between the EU and Azerbaijan. This morning I had the opportunity to visit, here in Azerbaijan, a number of future-oriented innovation projects both in the satellite sector and concerning infrastructure, which are designed to increase the port of Baku's level of ambition as regards development, including at regional level. And we are well aware – it came up in our discussions in fact – that the partnership between the EU and Azerbaijan is not primarily a partnership based on financial support provided through subsidies. It is a partnership based on the desire to make a joint commitment to innovation in the technological sector and to dialogue on economic matters. In keeping with this, the EU's two priorities in terms of economic development – climate change and the digital revolution – can be at the heart of the projects that, together, with our respective teams, we are going to make all efforts to pursue.

The second topic was of course preparations for the Eastern Partnership summit, which will take place in December. It was important for us to discuss this in order to identify our respective expectations in relation to preparations for the summit. And you are right, my visit to several Eastern Partnership countries is a signal. It sends a message about the EU's commitment to this region and our desire to underpin this commitment for the benefit of security, stability and prosperity in the region by mobilising the EU's resources, strengths and capacities, in dialogue with all our partners and taking into consideration the differing expectations of the various Eastern Partnership countries.

The third point, as you mentioned, was the situation as regards the relationship between Azerbaijan and Armenia. I would like to thank you because, even before this visit, several weeks ago, we had the opportunity to speak by phone on a number of occasions and discuss our respective analyses of the situation in the region. I would also like to thank you for the commitments which were made and which have been honoured – these are first steps in relation to both the mapping of mines and the question of prisoners. These are important topics where first steps have been taken and we hope that further progress will follow quickly.

We also had the opportunity to consider in more concrete terms topics where efforts must be made to try to arrive at solutions which have the potential to be sustainable. I expressed the willingness of the European Union to support efforts to make progress on various issues, for example, the question of demarcation of borders, in respect of which we are ready to mobilise European experts and resources for monitoring, if this would be appropriate and is desired. In connection with the demarcation of borders, the question of troops located in the vicinity of disputed areas is a matter which, I believe, should also be discussed.

There was also a fourth point in our discussions, to which you have made extensive reference, and on which we are of the same mind – the importance of regional cooperation, in a number of areas:

- the importance of the energy sector, as you mentioned, for the entire region and even beyond;
- the importance of infrastructure, in particular in the transport sector, and of the various transport corridors. We discussed this latter topic too, and it is also an area in which the European Union would like to be involved in order to encourage regional cooperation. This is a message that we want to convey to all parties and countries that can get involved and play a role in this area. It is also a topic that will be on the agenda and the subject of reflection during my visit to Georgia this evening and tomorrow.

In addition, we believe that peace, lasting peace, is only possible if good agreements can be reached and respected. This means that there are other questions that will also need to be addressed sooner or later in order for this lasting peace to become a reality, in the interests of stability, prosperity and security.

Finally, we had the opportunity to discuss a number of wider geopolitical situations, and also to take note of action taken by Azerbaijan on a number of occasions, in particular in relation to matters such as, for example, the secular nature of the country.

On such issues, we were able to make links with debates that have taken place elsewhere in the world.

Mr President, thank you once again for our discussion. The European Union is a political project which defends values – democratic values and values linked to the promotion of freedoms and human rights. But it is also a political project through which we seek to develop strong partnerships with a number of parties in order to identify projects of mutual interest. Thank you for having given us this opportunity to strengthen the ties between your country and the European Union.

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