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**CESD Brief Assessment on the August Trilateral Meeting in  
Brussels**

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In a way towards the peace-building process between Armenia and Azerbaijan as well as in the whole South Caucasus region, diplomatic activity in this vein under the auspices of the European Union gains particular momentum. While the EU provides a prospectively viable alternative for the negotiations on the right path, the development of multidimensional issues are envisaged on the verge of Europe that appear to be economically and politically significant. In this process, for the fourth time in a row, on August 31 President of the European Council Charles Michel held a meeting with the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev and Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan where the EU's commitment to overcoming tensions in the Caucasus and in the peace-building process was further reiterated. The European Union once more demonstrated its positive attitude to progress and showed its continued presence to restore peace in South Caucasus. The focus of the discussions included the recent developments in the region and deepening the relations between both countries and the European Union. The statement stressed that talks have been accompanied by discussions on peace agreement, humanitarian issues, border issues and connectivity.

Both sides reached the consensus to step up and substantiate the work on signing the multifaceted mutual peace treaty that can govern the interstate relations. In practical terms, the preparation of draft texts upon the meeting of foreign ministers could be of exceptional importance.

Concerning the humanitarian issues, more precisely its content highly likely indicate the previous trilateral meetings in this matter.

Border issues were also enshrined in the discussions and it was agreed that the next meeting of the Border Commissions will take place in Brussels in November. The sides also reviewed the progress on unblocking communications and establishment of connectivity.

It should be specifically noted that the statement takes into account the fact of population and public messaging in this regard. As the peace process is hindered by several factors including the demonization of Azerbaijan and fascist ideology cultivated in the Armenian society over the period of historical occupation, the existence of awareness-raising campaigns and cooperation at the level of Civil Society Organizations can constitute a more stable environment between the sides that can positively affect the eventual peace agreement.

The content of the statement and trilateral meeting explicitly shows the need for Armenia to consider the conditions set out by Azerbaijan. Neither status of Karabakh nor the referral

to Minsk is mentioned, which is politically important for Azerbaijan. President Ilham Aliyev underlined that our country broadly supports the protection of the rights and security of the ethnic Armenian population in Karabakh, as stressed by President Michel at the third meeting in Brussels on May 22, 2022. He also added that Azerbaijan is a multinational and multiconfessional state providing equal rights for representatives of all ethnic groups. Stressing that the Armenian population, which has lived within the premises of Azerbaijan for many decades, their rights and security issues will be taken care of.

On the other hand, as part of peace negotiations, the meeting has implications in economic terms as well. As previously mentioned, the peace talks show a progressive and pragmatic approach of the EU taking one step further both sides, which is important for the development of the region. Not surprisingly, unblocking communications, the realization of intercontinental transport infrastructure and massive energy projects are in the interest of both EU and Azerbaijan. However, projects are delayed by Armenian inaction. As the biggest trade ally of Azerbaijan, the EU's role in negotiations is breeding the grounds for an economically viable atmosphere that can act as an additional stimulus for investments in liberated territories. The EU is Azerbaijan's largest trade partner. The trade agenda for the EU-Azerbaijan is mostly concentrated on three areas: energy, logistics and transportation sectors. At present, the share of trade with the EU accounts for 40% out of total. More than 1,700 companies from member states operate in Azerbaijan. The EU invested more than \$21.5 billion in Azerbaijan's economy in the period from 2012 to the year 2021, It is also another indication that Brussels is interested in holding mutually beneficial cooperation with Azerbaijan as an equal partner in a number of modern fields, while holding partnership priorities in certain areas. In accordance with the Economic and Investment Planning Project, the EU aims to widen economic relations with both sides through the participation of the economic advisory platform that will certainly level up the scope of regional relations increasing geopolitical importance and regional trade in the region.

Baku prioritized to form its relationships with the EU on the basis of equal, mutual cooperation. One third of the member states consider Azerbaijan as a strategic partner. One of the main dimensions of the mutual cooperation between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the European Union is energy. The adoption of the "Joint Declaration" on the Southern Gas Corridor between the EU and Azerbaijan in Baku in 2011 constructed the basement of the further economic opportunities. Azerbaijan undertook larger part of financial burden in all the four segments of the project. Furthermore, with new type of legal framework, which is highly

likely to enter into force in the near future, coupled with the opportunities in the post-war period, mutual economic relations between the union and Azerbaijan is going to strengthen. In December 2020, Azerbaijan kicked off exporting natural gas to Europe through the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC), a project with the value of \$33 billion. Although the share of the Azerbaijani gas accounts for minor figure in gas imports of the EU, for some members the Azerbaijani gas seem to be a game change in some aspects bringing energy security for them. For example, Bulgaria will supply 33% of its total gas demand through the SGC. In other terms, the importance of the pipeline for the energy security of Europe has the potential to substantially increase if the talks on Turkmenistan's participation in the project brings successful results.

The resolution of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict provides fertile background for new opportunities for bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Throughout its presence, it has been a challenge for the EU to find mutually beneficial solution acceptable by all interested parties. While Yerevan insisted on the inclusion of the self-determination principle regarding the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, Baku requested Brussels to treat the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan in accordance with international law .The liberation of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan last year and the launch of the negotiations is likely to generate a way more positive political environment for the EU to play role with the regional countries.

In concluding remarks, to reach peace and security in the region, it is crucially significant that this positive atmosphere is preserved, and the commitments enshrined in the trilateral statement are fulfilled.

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