

Ref: CommHR/DM/sf 018-2021

Mr Ilham ALIYEV
President of the Republic of Azerbaijan

Strasbourg, 20 April 2021

Your Excellency,

I have been following closely human rights-related developments following the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan in recent months and I was pleased to learn about the ceasing of hostilities that was marked with the trilateral agreement.

I trust you would agree that efforts to deal with the past should now become the priority to ensure the path towards reconciliation and lasting peace for all people affected by the conflict.

In view of a very tense situation on the ground and bitter relations between the ethnic communities residing in and around Nagorno-Karabakh, it is imperative to ensure continuous, free and unimpeded access of international humanitarian and human rights actors to all places within the country's internationally recognised borders where conflict-affected populations reside, not only to ensure effective relief and recovery but also to uphold the human rights of the victims of the conflict and their families. This should be at the core of state policies aimed at reconciliation and recovery.

At the same time, the utmost care should be taken in order not to perpetuate and multiply the already deeply-running grievances between the communities affected by the conflict.

In this context, I regret to learn that you recently inaugurated the 'Trophy Park' in Baku, which has been opened to the public since 14 April and can be visited by everyone, including small children. This park reportedly displays Armenian military equipment taken as a trophy during the war. From information and the images which are publicly available, I noticed that it shows dehumanising scenes, including wax mannequins depicting dead and dying Armenians soldiers. I consider such images highly disturbing and humiliating.

This kind of display can only further intensify and strengthen long-standing hostile sentiments and hate speech, and multiply and promote manifestations of intolerance. Even more so, such developments significantly hamper any chance of genuine reconciliation among the communities affected by the conflict. In a recent statement, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) recalled that, "in several country reports, it has warned against the dangers of developing adversarial narratives and the depiction of specific groups of concern to it as "enemies" in relation to confrontations and unresolved conflicts, even more so where this is embodied in political and other public discourse. ECRI repeatedly called on the member states concerned to take action against such trends, regardless of their responsibilities, real or presumed, in the outbreak of hostilities."

I call on you to use your authority and to take a firm stance against any rhetoric or actions which lead to triggering animosity or hatred and instead, provide your full support and political backing towards efforts aimed at promoting peace and reconciliation between the populations affected by the conflict, particularly bearing in mind the wellbeing of the future generations of Azerbaijan and Armenia.

As the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, I would like to confirm my availability and willingness to travel to Azerbaijan at the earliest convenience, provided that, in accordance with my mandate, I have access to all places of human rights relevance within the country's internationally recognised borders.

I look forward to receiving your reply and continuing a constructive dialogue with you.

Your sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dunja Mijatović', with a large, stylized initial 'D'.

Dunja Mijatović