

MELANJ PROJECT CLOSING CEREMONY

Speech by Dr Bulent Tudes, NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency

Deputy Prime Minister, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour to represent NAMSA's General Manager, Major General Karl-Heinz Muenzner, at this ceremony. He has followed the progress of this project with great interest and he regrets that he cannot be here today in person. If he were here he would, like me, congratulate Azerbaijan on the successful conversion of the Melanj rocket propellant oxidizer to a benign substance that can be used to enrich the land.

This programme was financed by the NATO Science for Peace and Security Programme led by Dr Christian de Wispelaere, managed by NAMSA and executed by a contractor, UXB International. However, we must not forget that the Government of Azerbaijan made significant contributions in kind, including the provision of technical expertise through the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, and that nearly all those involved in actually doing the work have been Azeri's.

The success of this programme will provide a template for the conversion of Melanj stockpiles wherever they exist – and they do exist in many

countries as a legacy of former and less happy times. This has been a pioneering project, starting with the design from first principles of a plant to process 5 tonnes of Melanj every day. The successful bidder then had to have the plant manufactured (and I'm proud to say this happened in my own country, Turkey), transported to Azerbaijan, assembled and commissioned.

As in any pilot project, operating the plant was a learning process; and as in any such process, there were mistakes as well as successes. However, the process gradually improved until it was able to achieve its full potential of converting 5 tonnes of Melanj every day, and ultimately to convert the entire national stockpile of Melanj in Älät and Mingäçevir.

The large stockpiles of Melanj that exist in several countries represent an acute threat to the environment and a direct threat to the safety of those living and working close to them. That threat has been removed from Azerbaijan, and we are now looking forward to moving on to Uzbekistan to continue this vital work. NAMSA is proud to have been the Executing Agency for this project, and to have had the privilege of working with so many fine people.