



United States Mission to the OSCE

Ongoing Concerns About the Freedoms of Expression and Media in Azerbaijan

As delivered by U.S. Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 8, 2016

At the Copenhagen meeting in 1990, participating States affirmed that “everyone will have the right to freedom of expression including the right to communication. This right will include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.” Twenty years later at the Astana Summit, participating States acknowledged that “we value the important role played by civil society and free media in helping us to ensure full respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy, including free and fair elections, and the rule of law.”

With these and other shared commitments on human rights and fundamental freedoms in mind, the United States is concerned by the apparently arbitrary arrests and detentions that have taken place in Azerbaijan since the government announced its planned constitutional referendum on September 26. We are troubled by the August 12 arrest of Azerbaijani opposition Republican Alternative (REAL) Movement Executive Secretary Natig Jafarli. We understand that two days ago the Nasimi District Court of Baku rejected his request for release on bail. We are also concerned by reports of additional arrests and detentions of opposition figures.

We urge the Azerbaijani government to release these and other activists incarcerated in connection with exercising their fundamental freedoms, and to allow an open and public dialogue about the direction of the country and freedom of expression in the media. As the draft constitutional amendments also affect freedom of expression, we also urge the government to submit the constitutional amendments to the Venice Commission and ODIHR for a Joint Opinion.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.