



## EUROPEAN UNION

### **OSCE Special Permanent Council No 1064 Vienna, 19 August 2015**

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#### **EU Statement on Human Rights in Azerbaijan**

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The European Union remains concerned about the continued deterioration of the situation of human rights and civil society in Azerbaijan. We note with dismay the most recent actions against human rights defenders, adding to the impression that the authorities are systematically restricting the space for public discourse and civil society in Azerbaijan.

In this context, we are deeply concerned by the sentencing on 13 August of the prominent human rights defenders Leyla and Arif Yunus to 8.5 and 7 years imprisonment respectively. The legal process was, as reported by the international monitors observing the trials, seriously flawed. In addition the charges seem to be connected solely to their human rights work. The sentencing confirms the negative trend when it comes to Azerbaijan's respect for its OSCE and other international commitments on human rights and fundamental freedoms. We call on Azerbaijan to release Leyla and Arif Yunus, while their cases need to be reviewed in a transparent and fair process. Pending their release, proper medical treatment for Leyla and Arif Yunus needs to be ensured.

This latest sentencing comes in the context of the ongoing imprisonment of other prominent members of Azerbaijani civil society. These include journalist Khadija Ismayilova, human rights lawyer Intigam Aliyev, and democracy campaigner Rasul Jafarov. Of additional concern are allegations that politician Ilgar Mammadov was subject to ill-treatment while in detention.

The EU supports the principles of freedom of expression and freedom of the media, which are fundamental elements of a democratic society. In this context, the death on 9 August of the journalist Rasim Aliyev who was allegedly attacked and beaten by supporters of a local football player in Baku following Mr. Aliyev's criticism in social media was particularly distressing. We express our sincere condolences to his family,

colleagues, and friends and call for a full and transparent investigation to identify the perpetrators and bring them to justice. We note that an investigation is under way. Azerbaijan needs to ensure journalists' safety, enabling them to freely carry out their work without fear of violence or persecution.

The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media has raised the issue of intimidation and imprisonment of journalists and members of the media in Azerbaijan numerous times during the past year, including the issue of impunity from prosecution of assailants. We encourage the government of Azerbaijan to accept the Representative's long-standing offer to assist Azerbaijan in much-needed improvements to media freedom and safety of journalists.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, ICELAND+ and ALBANIA\*, and the EFTA country NORWAY, member of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

\* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

+ Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.