



EUROPEAN UNION

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**EU Statement on the sentencing of journalist Afgan
Mukhtarli in Azerbaijan**

The EU expresses its concern over the sentencing of journalist Afgan Mukhtarli to six years in prison by the Balakan District Court in Azerbaijan on 12 January. Mukhtarli is an investigative journalist known for his critical reporting on social and political issues. Echoing the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, the EU also raises significant doubts regarding his sentencing, which amounts to a clear attack on free media.

Mukhtarli, who left Azerbaijan in 2015 and fled to Georgia, was allegedly abducted in Tbilisi last summer and subsequently appeared in Azerbaijan where he was detained and prosecuted on alleged charges of trespass of State border, smuggling and resistance to officials. The EU calls for the relevant Georgian authorities to conclude their on-going investigation on Mukhtarli's alleged abduction in a thorough and transparent way.

The EU has repeatedly expressed concerns regarding freedom of expression and the media as well as rule of law in Azerbaijan. There has been a pattern of politically motivated detentions of journalists and human rights defenders. Mr Mukhtarli's arrest and prosecution in Azerbaijan continue to demand thorough and transparent investigation. All cases of incarceration related to the exercise of fundamental rights should be reviewed urgently by Azerbaijan. We call on the authorities in Azerbaijan to immediately release Afgan Mukhtarli, pending review of the case, and to restore the respect for freedom of expression and the media. We urge Azerbaijan to honour its international commitments and to cooperate closely in this regard with international structures, including with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

The EU will follow-up on this case and will welcome the co-operation and reporting of the delegation of Azerbaijan on concrete steps taken in this matter.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, 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.