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## **EU statement in response to the Head of the OSCE Office in Baku, H.E. Ambassador Bilge Cankorel**

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The EU warmly welcomes His Excellency Ambassador Cankorel back to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his comprehensive report.

The EU supports the Office's activities across all three dimensions. We are pleased to note that the Office makes full use of its mandate by closely cooperating with numerous relevant state and non-state partners and by including various regions of the country into the range of its activities.

We would like to commend Ambassador Cankorel for carefully monitoring the political, legal, economic and human rights situation during the period of review. The activity and spot reports of his Office continue to be a very valuable source in order to assess the state of fulfilment of OSCE and other international commitments in Azerbaijan.

In the first dimension, we welcome the comprehensive support the Office grants to the Azerbaijani police authorities in such fields as community policing, police training and development, the fight against terrorism and organized crime, as well as the combat against corruption in the police and trafficking in human beings.

Concerning the economic and environmental dimension, the EU supports activities that promote good governance and participation. By contributing to the implementation of the National Strategy on Increasing Transparency and Combating Corruption as well as by creating flexible instruments of legal counselling and entrepreneur training, the Office successfully addresses itself to public as well as private partners. We also back the efforts undertaken to help to develop the non-oil sector and to create better awareness for energy and environmental security.

Mr Chairman,

Turning to the human dimension, some individual cases of journalists and media workers who are serving prison terms, mentioned in Ambassador Cankorel's report, show that there is still room for significant improvement in the situation of freedom of the media in Azerbaijan. The Office should continue its efforts to assist Azerbaijan in this area, drawing on the considerable expertise of the Representative on Freedom of the Media. We also encourage the Office to continue addressing individual cases, including through contacts and visits, and to provide us with relevant first hand information.

Against this backdrop, the EU underlines the need for continued support of Azerbaijan's efforts to reform its judicial system. We commend the Office for having launched a new trial monitoring programme and for continuing to foster the rights of detained persons, also seen in light of the Office's spot report from 28 June referring to the cases of Mr. Nasirli

and Mr. Babayev in which the General Prosecutor's Office is now investigating allegations of torture committed during their detention. In addition, training and capacity building measures for legal professionals undertaken by the Office are also adequate means of increasing compliance with fair trial standards. Besides, we see the Office's existing or planned Legal Resource Centres as a useful tool to facilitate the population's access to legal advice.

Mr Chairman,

In view of the forthcoming parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan the EU highly welcomes the Office's various activities aiming at fostering a fair and transparent organisation of the electoral process, as well as at stimulating more robust public participation in the parliamentary elections. In the run-up to the Parliamentary elections, the EU encourages the Azerbaijani authorities to address the recommendations made by the ODIHR during previous electoral consultations, in particular as for enhanced access to media for political parties and improved implementation of the Law on Freedom of Assembly. In this context, while we also welcome the recent agreement reached between the Office and the Baku City Executive Authority to establish a joint working group on public assembly notifications, the Office Spot Report of 6 July illustrates that further progress is required.

Finally, we would like to underline the importance of the issue of Gender equality for Azerbaijan and we encourage the Office to continue its cooperation in this field both with Government and civil society.

Before concluding, the EU would like to reiterate the importance it attaches to intensified relations with Azerbaijan and we invite the Azerbaijani Government to make full use of the opportunities offered by the Eastern Partnership and the European Neighbourhood Policy.

In conclusion, the EU reiterates its strong support for the important work of the Office. We wish Ambassador Cankorel and his team well for the future and thank them for their hard work.

The candidate countries TURKEY, CROATIA\*, the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA\* and ICELAND, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries ALBANIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, MONTENEGRO, the European Free Trade Association country and member of the European Economic Area NORWAY align themselves with this statement.

\*Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.