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**EUROPEAN UNION**

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## **EU statement on the situation of fundamental freedoms in Azerbaijan**

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Recalling its statement of 17 March on the arrests of youth activists in Baku the EU remains deeply concerned at the continued lack of respect of fundamental freedoms in Azerbaijan.

The EU expresses its concern about the fact that on 2 April 2011 a peaceful demonstration in Baku was systematically dispersed and that a large number of participants were arrested and immediately sentenced to administrative detention without proper legal defence. Some journalists were prevented from reporting and filming the demonstration and four journalists were temporarily arrested. In addition, opposition party members had been arrested or confined to house arrest ahead of the demonstration. Some have been charged with criminal offences in relation to the conduct of this peaceful movement. We call on the Azerbaijani authorities to immediately release all individuals concerned.

Furthermore, the EU calls on Azerbaijan to guarantee the right of journalists to freely exercise their profession and promote the necessary conditions to allow them to do so in safety. In this context, we are concerned about the severe beating by persons unknown of the Azadliq newspaper reporters Seymur Haziyev on 26 March and Ramin Deco on 4 April. We support the statement by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media on the first case and we call

upon the Azerbaijani authorities to condemn these incidents publicly, to do their utmost in order to bring the perpetrators of violence against journalists to justice and to prevent future incidents of this kind.

These developments run counter to Azerbaijan's OSCE commitments in the fields of freedom of assembly, expression and freedom of the media, recently reaffirmed by all participating States at the Astana Summit. We reiterate the assertion of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office during his recent visit to Baku that freedom of assembly was essential to any democratic state. We urge Azerbaijan to go further with democratic reforms.

The EU stands ready to continue to support further reforms in Azerbaijan guided by the values laid down by the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the EU. Finally the EU reiterates the importance it attaches to intensified relations with Azerbaijan and invites the Azerbaijani Government to make full use of the opportunities offered by the Eastern Partnership and the European Neighbourhood Policy.

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

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

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