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## Swedish Presidency of the European Union

**OSCE Permanent Council No. 768**

**Vienna 9 July 2009**

### **EU statement in response to the report by the Head of the OSCE Office in Baku, Ambassador A. Bilge Cankorel**

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The European Union warmly welcomes Ambassador Cankorel for the first time as Head of the OSCE Office in Baku to the Permanent Council, congratulates him on his appointment and thanks him for his comprehensive report.

The EU supports the Office's activities across the three dimensions, designed to assist Azerbaijan in meeting its OSCE commitments and pursuing its reform and democratization efforts. We are encouraged by Ambassador Cankorel's assessment that the Office is benefiting from a very good level of dialogue and interaction with the government. We encourage the Office to continue its close cooperation also with civil society and to seek intensive NGO participation in its activities, wherever appropriate. We are looking forward to the results of the review of the implementation of OSCE commitments in Azerbaijan which the Office plans to conduct.

In the politico-military dimension, the EU commends the Office for its successful support for the introduction of Community Policing, which is now in the process of being expanded nation-wide.

In the Economic and Environmental Dimension, the EU supports activities that promote good governance and public participation. We therefore highly appreciate the assistance given to the Advocacy and Legal Advice Centres in the capital and in the regions, thus enhancing the government's efforts in the fight against corruption. We encourage the Office to continue supporting the implementation of the Aarhus Convention. On the other hand, we wonder whether and to which extent the Office should engage in training in basic business and farming skills or enhancing the professional level of business management in individual companies.

Concerning the human dimension, we note that Ambassador Cankorel presents a mixed picture of the situation in Azerbaijan. The media situation remains of particular concern to us. We are disappointed by the fact that a number of media workers known for their critical views are still imprisoned. We call again on the Azerbaijani authorities to abide by their OSCE and Council of Europe commitments in this field. We stress the need for the Office to continue its work to enhance the independence

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of the media and the freedom of expression in Azerbaijan. This includes access to international media. We also express our full support for the work of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Miklos Haraszti, and urge the Azerbaijani authorities to make full use of all of his suggestions and recommendations.

In the PC on 18 June, the EU has expressed its concern about the planned amendments to the Law on Non-governmental organisations. These amendments would have seriously restricted the work of NGOs in Azerbaijan. We were encouraged by the decision by Azerbaijan's Parliament last week to drop some of the proposed provisions. This is a positive development, which we welcome. We thank the Office, as well as ODIHR, for the advice they have provided in this matter so far and encourage it to closely monitor the implementation of the adopted law and its effects on the development of civil society.

The EU encourages Baku to take further steps to bring national legislation in line with OSCE commitments, inter alia concerning the laws on Mass Media and on Television and Radio Broadcasting. Likewise, we call for full implementation of the law on Freedom of Assembly, and we support the Office's efforts to this end.

The EU expresses its full support for the Office's activities in the fields of trafficking in human beings, gender equality and electoral practice. With regard to the latter we encourage the government of Azerbaijan, also in view of the parliamentary elections next year, building on the progress of the presidential elections in 2008, to continue close cooperation with the Office and with ODIHR, and to follow up on the recommendations made by the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission in its final report in 2008.

All activities carried out in the framework of the Rule of Law Programme are very valuable, as they enhance the Azerbaijani government's efforts to strengthen an independent, effective and well-managed judiciary. We commend Azerbaijan for the progress made with respect to access to persons in custody and in court rooms. At the same time, we note there are still significant shortcomings concerning the performance of the judiciary. We look forward to the next Trial Monitoring Report and encourage the Office to continue its substantial assistance.

We would like to reiterate the importance the EU attaches to its intensified relations with Azerbaijan and we invite the Azerbaijani government to make full use of the opportunities offered by the European Neighbourhood Policy, including in the context of the Eastern Partnership.

Finally, we would like to thank Ambassador Cankorel and his team for their dedicated work and wish them success in their future activities.

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

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