



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Special Permanent Council Nr 952
Vienna, 14 May 2013**

**EU statement in response to the Minister for Foreign
Affairs of Azerbaijan, H.E. Elmar Mammadyarov**

The EU warmly welcomes the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, H.E. Elmar Mammadyarov, to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his presentation.

At the outset we would like to reaffirm that the EU remains committed to strengthening its relations with Azerbaijan in all sectors. We are particularly interested in making further progress on issues related to the agenda of the EU Eastern Partnership in view of the forthcoming Summit in November 2013 in Vilnius.

We welcome the enhancement in our bilateral relations. However, we remain concerned at a number of developments on the domestic political situation in Azerbaijan which not only challenge the implementation of its OSCE commitments but also have an impact on EU-Azerbaijani relations.

The 2013 Presidential elections will be important for Azerbaijan's democratic development. Azerbaijan should be able to conduct free, fair and transparent elections, in accordance with international standards, where opposition candidates are given a real platform to present their views and programs and can compete on an equal footing. We look forward to a timely and unrestricted invitation to OSCE/ODIHR and other international observers to monitor the elections, including the period of the pre-election campaign. We would also urge effective follow-up co-operation with the OSCE/ODIHR, especially with regard to implementation of recommendations including those from previous election observation missions.

Azerbaijan has demonstrated substantial progress in the socio-economic sphere in recent years. However, we are of the view that Azerbaijan needs to do more in

order to meet its commitments on democracy, including the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms and the independence of the judicial system. We remain concerned at the situation of freedom of expression, of the plurality of the media and the safety of journalists, as well as of freedom of assembly and association. Citizens should be given a chance to address their legitimate concerns by peaceful protests. We also remain concerned about arrests of political activists and the independence of the judiciary.

With this in mind, the EU was surprised by the recent Azerbaijani request to review the mandate of the OSCE office in Baku. The EU strongly supports the mandate and the activities of the OSCE office in Baku which we believe can provide the best support to Azerbaijan in the implementation of its OSCE commitments.

While we remain to be convinced by the arguments for amending the existing mandate, we are ready to engage in a constructive dialogue with Azerbaijan on the continuation of the work of the OSCE Office in Baku. In these forthcoming discussions we will, as always, listen carefully to the views of the host nation. However, we will make the point that we believe that the mandate of any OSCE presence in Baku should also remain meaningful both for Azerbaijan and the OSCE.

Turning to the broader OSCE agenda, the European Union looks forward to working with Azerbaijan in a constructive fashion.

The EU also takes this opportunity to reaffirm its support for the Minsk Group and to restate its complete confidence in the commitment of the Co-Chairs to the search for a fair and lasting settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. We urge the parties to focus on constructive dialogue and encourage them to take greater advantage of the efforts being made by the Co-Chairs. We also welcome the monitoring activities conducted by the Personal Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office.

In conclusion the EU thanks again H.E. Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov for addressing the Permanent Council today and looks forward to continuing its

dialogue and co-operation with him as well as with Azerbaijan's delegation to the OSCE.

The Acceding Country Croatia*, the Candidate Countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Montenegro*, and Iceland+, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA country Norway, 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 of the European Economic Area.