

## European Center for Artsakh e.V.

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Ladies and Gentlemen

I want you to look at the issue from a slightly different angle, namely in the context of conflicts. While freedom of movement is an unquestionable right widely enjoyed by the majority of people in the OSCE area, it remains “a wish to come true” for those living in conflict zones.

I want to reflect on this, by the example of Nagorno Karabakh Republic. Even in this purely humanitarian issue, Azerbaijan spares no effort to hinder the freedom of movement of the people living in Karabakh. One vivid example of this is the threats of Azerbaijan to shoot down civil aircraft, in response to media reports on rehabilitation of the Soviet time Stepanakert airport. This stance of Azerbaijan is a clear manifestation of its outright disregard for human rights and fundamental freedoms as a continuation of its policy of the collective punishment of the civilian population.

Moreover, it went further by limiting the freedom of movement of foreign citizens, visiting Nagorno Karabakh, by announcing them *personae non gratae* and including them in the black list of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan. This list includes members of parliaments, prominent public figures, culture and art professionals, journalists, students and tourists. The most recent manifestation of this stance could be seen in Azerbaijan’s denying entry to René Rouquet, the Vice President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe , and Guy Teissier, member of the French delegation that were to participate at the session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Baku. The approach was recently used towards Austrian journalist Jutta Bauer accompanying the Austrian Foreign Minister on his official visit to Azerbaijan.

The policy of Azerbaijan aimed at isolation of Nagorno Karabakh does not only violate the basic right of freedom of movement, but also undermines the efforts of bringing peace to the region. Since encouraging people to people contacts and human exchanges could widely contribute to the cause of peace.

As we can see, inaction and the absence of adequate reaction has encouraged Azerbaijan to try and impose its notorious interpretation of human rights upon foreign citizens and high ranking European politicians. Siege mentality of one participating state should not be allowed to put siege on the entire people.

I would like to recommend taking action to eliminate artificial and deliberate barriers in limiting the freedom of movement in conflict zones, thus providing equal rights to everybody in the OSCE area.