



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council Nr 854
Vienna, 17 March 2011**

EU statement on the arrest of Azerbaijani activists and demonstrators

Recalling the local 'EU Statement on Recent Arrests of Youth Activists in Baku' on 10 March, the EU expresses its concern that several Azerbaijani activists have been detained or arrested recently in connection with their political activities. We also remain concerned about the continuing restrictions on the freedom of assembly in Azerbaijan.

The EU calls on Azerbaijan to ensure due process in all the cases of arrest and detention, especially through transparent investigative processes and fair trials. We expect full access to be granted to the persons who remain in custody.

We recall the importance the EU attaches to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, to which the Heads of State and Government of the participating States recently reconfirmed their commitment in Astana. We reiterate our conviction that a vibrant civil society is a key element for political stability and the democratic and peaceful development of societies. In this context, we encourage the Azerbaijani authorities to maintain an open dialogue with all members of civil society expressing their views and opinions in a peaceful manner. We reiterate our call on the authorities to ensure that the rules for the implementation of laws concerning the right to free assembly are in compliance with Azerbaijan's OSCE

and Council of Europe commitments, and with international practices, including by lifting unwarranted restrictions on the venues of demonstrations.

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 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.