



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Special Permanent Council Nr 862
Vienna, 19 May 2011**

EU statement on human rights and fundamental freedoms in Azerbaijan

The EU continues to follow closely the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Azerbaijan.

In view of recent developments, the EU would like to express its concern at the case of political youth activist Jabbar Savalan who was sentenced on 4 May 2011 to two and a half years of imprisonment on dubious charges of drugs possession. On the margins of the trial, members of the audience were allegedly arrested by police forces. The trial and the circumstances surrounding it raise suspicions that it was politically motivated. The EU calls on Azerbaijan to fully guarantee the independence of the judiciary and the right to a free trial and to respect the rights of its citizens to attend and follow court proceedings. We urge the Azerbaijani authorities to review the case against Jabbar Savalan without delay.

Furthermore, the EU would like to ask Azerbaijan for clarification concerning the judicial case of political youth activist and post-graduate student Bakhtiyar Hajiyev who is accused of evading military service and has been sentenced to two years of imprisonment on 18 May. Here again the EU is concerned that political motives have possibly influenced the legal proceedings. We call on Azerbaijan to fully respect fundamental freedoms and to guarantee due

application of the rule of law according to international standards in this case and all others.

The EU hopes that Azerbaijan's commitments on freedom of the media will be strengthened as a result of the recent visit of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media to the country and that remaining problems will be resolved. The EU is pleased to hear that reform of media legislation will continue and calls on Azerbaijan to make use of the Representative's offer of assistance. In this regard, we also welcome the initiative by the OSCE Office in Baku and the Azerbaijani Press Council to contribute to efforts in order to decriminalize defamation in Azerbaijan. The implementation of such a measure would be a major step in safeguarding freedom of expression and freedom of the media.

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.