



EUROPEAN UNION

**Permanent Council Nr 878
Vienna, 1 September 2011**

EU statement on human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law in Azerbaijan

The European Union continues to closely monitor the situation of human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law in Azerbaijan.

We would like to express our concern about the recent demolition of houses and the expropriation of property in the Baku area. In particular, the EU is worried by the demolition on 11 August 2011 of the Institute for Peace and Democracy's office in Baku. The issue has been aggravated by the fact that the destruction took place in spite of a valid Court Judgement of 24 May 2011. We call on Azerbaijan to thoroughly investigate this case and to honour respective legal provisions in the domain of property rights. The EU will monitor developments related to property rights in Azerbaijan and offers its co-operation to discuss the best international practices that can be used in this area.

The EU also remains concerned about the situation of political prisoners in Azerbaijan. We have been alerted by the fact that on 25 August 2011, six citizens of Azerbaijan have been sentenced to prison terms between 18 months and three years on the basis of their participation in demonstrations that took place on 2 April 2011 in Baku. Eight more defendants are awaiting trial.

We take note that human rights defender Mr Vidadi Iskenderov has been sentenced to three-year imprisonment on 26 August and that he will appeal the

verdict on the basis that court proceedings in his case did not comply with fair trial standards.

In this context, the EU calls on the Azerbaijani judiciary to ensure fair, transparent and evidence-based trials, including appeal processes. We call upon the Azerbaijani authorities to avoid politicisation of the judicial process and to ensure that it is respected.

Moreover, recalling our statement of 19 May 2011, we are concerned about the situation of the now imprisoned youth activists and bloggers Bakhtiyar Hajiyev and Jabbar Savalan. We regret that on 15 August the Azerbaijani Ministry of Justice denied the German Federal Government Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and Humanitarian Aid visiting Azerbaijan access to Mr Hajiyev. The EU is also disappointed to learn that the appeal courts in the cases of both Hajiyev and Savalan have ruled to uphold the imprisonment sentences. We welcome the intervention of the Representative on Freedom of the Media in these two cases.

The EU expects Azerbaijan to fulfil its international obligations in the field of human rights, including those stemming from the European Convention on Human Rights. We call on the government of Azerbaijan to extend an invitation to the Rapporteur of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on Political Prisoners.

Finally, stressing that full respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law is at the heart of the OSCE commitments, as well as of the framework for co-operation within the Eastern Partnership, we remain committed to assisting Azerbaijan in fulfilling its respective commitments, particularly those assumed within the OSCE framework. The EU invites Azerbaijan to provide updates on developments with regard to all the matters we have raised today.

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, 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.