Statement by the Spokespersons on the arrest of Rasul Jafarov in Azerbaijan

"We note with dismay that another prominent human rights defender, Rasul Jafarov, has been arrested in Azerbaijan. The charges against Mr Jafarov relate to his work for the Human Rights Club NGO and appear to be directly linked to recent changes in Azerbaijan’s legislation covering non-governmental organisations. We stated our concern at these changes in our statement of 12 February 2014.

The arrest of Mr Jafarov, coming so soon after the arrest last week of Dr Leyla Yunus, adds to the impression that the authorities are systematically restricting the space for public discourse and civil society in Azerbaijan. We have also learned with concern that the husband of Dr Yunus, Mr Arif Yunus, has been sentenced to three months' pre-trial detention yesterday.

We remain concerned by the security situation in the region, and recall our statement of 3 August 2014 regarding Nagorno-Karabakh. We are convinced that the civil society has a vital role to play in defending fundamental freedoms, especially during times of conflict. This was the message delivered by European Commission President Barroso to President Aliyev during his visit to Azerbaijan on 14 June 2014.

We call on the authorities in Azerbaijan to stand by the Council of Europe standards to which they are party. Furthermore, we urge them to reassess their policy towards independent civil society with a view to facilitating an open and inclusive national discourse in line with international standards."

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