Joint Statement by the spokespersons of
EU High Representative Catherine Ashton and Commissioner Štefan Füle on amendments to the Criminal Code in Azerbaijan

The spokespersons of Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the Commission, and Štefan Füle, EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, made today the following statement:

"The High Representative and the Commissioner were disappointed to learn of the final approval to the Criminal Code which will establish punitive measures against slander and insult on the internet. The EU is concerned at curbs on freedom of expression in Azerbaijan.

2013 is an important election year for Azerbaijan, a country which has committed to improve the general environment for democratic elections. One of the preconditions for creating an open platform for democratic competition is freedom of expression in all forms of public media.

The EU has repeatedly expressed its strong conviction that criminal defamation laws are counterproductive. Experience suggests that civil remedies allow justice to be pursued effectively and transparently in cases of alleged slander or insult: such an approach is also in line with international standards and good practice.

The High Representative and the Commissioner call upon the Azerbaijani authorities to create an open space for a pluralistic debate and to engage with the international community in order to meet its voluntarily agreed international commitments. The EU renews its readiness to assist Azerbaijan in this process."

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