



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council Nr 999
Vienna, 8 May 2014**

EU Statement on the Intensifying Clampdown on Human Rights Defenders in Azerbaijan

The European Union would like to echo the statement on 3 May 2014 of the spokespersons of EU High Representative, Catherine Ashton, and European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy, Stefan Füle, on the intensifying clampdown on human rights defenders in Azerbaijan.

We are deeply concerned to note the detention on 19 April of Rauf Mirkadirov and the circumstances of the interrogation on 29 April of Arif Yunus and Leyla Yunus, well known human rights defenders in Azerbaijan.

We also note with deep concern the harsh sentences of 6 to 8 years imprisonment passed on May 6 to eight members of the “NIDA” and “Free Youth” civic movements for alleged organisation of mass disorder and illegal possession of arms and narcotics. The numerous shortcomings observed during the trial, which was closely monitored by the EU and other international observers, and reported allegations of ill-treatment of the accused during the investigation, are particularly concerning and must be thoroughly investigated by the Azerbaijani authorities.

We note that steps taken by the Azerbaijani authorities in recent weeks seem to target civil society activists who are campaigning for greater respect for human rights, rule of law and fundamental freedoms in Azerbaijan as well as for a people-to-people dialogue as an essential component of reconciliation and conflict resolution. These are areas which lie at the heart of the EU's policy in the region.

The EU calls upon the government of Azerbaijan to fully abide by its OSCE commitments and promote a national discourse in a spirit of inclusivity, in line with its responsibility as the incoming Chair of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers. In particular, the EU urges the government of Azerbaijan to honour the obligations and commitments Azerbaijan subscribed to as a member of the Council of Europe and to act upon the recommendations of the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, Nils Muižnieks, in his recently published report on Azerbaijan.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ICELAND+ and SERBIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate ALBANIA, and the EFTA country NORWAY, member of the European Economic Area align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

+ Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.