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## JOINT STATEMENT

### **by the Spokespersons of EU High Representative and European Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy on the intensifying clampdown on human rights defenders in Azerbaijan**

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

*"The High Representative and Commissioner 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.*

*They 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 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*

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*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."*

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