

**Catherine Ashton, Vice-President, European Commission,  
and High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, European Council**  
**Štefan Füle, European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy**  
**Martin Schulz, President, European Parliament**  
**Ministers of Foreign Affairs, EU member states**  
**John Kerry, Secretary of State, United States of America**  
**Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary-General, Council of Europe**  
**Anne Brasseur, President, Parliamentary Assembly, Council of Europe (PACE)**  
**Didier Burkhalter, Chairperson-in-Office, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)**

3 June 2014

**Statement of Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum on escalation in number of prisoners of conscience and abuse of human rights in Azerbaijan**

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**Civil Society Forum calls for immediate release of Anar Mammadli, respected monitor of elections and nominee for Václav Havel Human Rights Prize**

*Baku court sentencing of Anar Mammadli to five years, six months in prison is a travesty of justice. Imprisonment of prisoners of conscience and harassment of human rights defenders is a breach of international commitments of Azerbaijan, which currently chairs the Council of Europe*

**Dear High Representative, Dear Commissioner, Dear President of the European Parliament, Dear Ministers, Dear Secretary of State, Dear Secretary-General, Dear President of PACE, Dear Chairperson-in-Office,**

The Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum strongly condemns the prison sentence of five years, six months handed to Anar Mammadli, Chair of the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Centre (EMDS), by the Baku Grave Crimes Court on 26 May 2014. The Civil Society Forum calls upon all EU member states, the government of the United States, and members of the Council of Europe to exert maximum pressure on the government of Azerbaijan to cease its legal and extra-judicial harassment of civil society organisations, opposition politicians, independent journalists and concerned citizens working to strengthen and protect freedom of expression and human rights in the country.

Anar Mammadli is a greatly respected civil society activist, and the reports produced by EMDS are considered highly credible in Azerbaijan and abroad. Prior to October 2013, Anar Mammadli was Working Group 1 Co-ordinator of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (working group for democracy, human rights, good governance, and stability). He has been nominated in 2014 for the Václav Havel Human Rights Prize, an annual award presented by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. On 16 May 2014, Azerbaijan assumed the Chairmanship of the Council of Europe: the existence of political prisoners in Azerbaijan is not compatible with membership of this organisation.

The Civil Society Forum considers the charges of tax evasion and illegal business levelled against Anar Mammadli to have been completely unfounded, which was even confirmed in court by 19 persons identified as victims by the prosecution, and by the testimony of other witnesses. Similar unfounded charges resulted in a jail sentence of three years and six months for Bashir Suleymanli, the Executive Director of EMDS, issued in the same trial on 26 May 2014. The politically driven investigation commenced two weeks after the Azerbaijan Presidential elections of 9 October 2013 following the attention drawn by EMDS to the fact that the elections failed to meet international standards for free and fair elections.

The Civil Society Forum calls for diplomatic pressure to bring about an end to this repression of dissent.

In his speech to the court on the day of sentencing, Anar Mammadli stated: "Our unbiased and objective election monitoring helped to record the alternative history of the Azerbaijani election system and keep trace of political processes of our country... We are absolutely sure that it will be impossible to establish social

justice, rule of law, respect to human rights and liberties, and of course territorial integrity and national security unless the government is elected by free and fair elections.”

The Civil Society Forum urges the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to denounce the persistent breaches of fundamental human rights and freedoms by the authorities in Azerbaijan, and to urge the Government of Azerbaijan to comply with its international commitments to human rights and civil liberties as a member of the Council of Europe, of which Azerbaijan currently holds the chairmanship.

The Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum urges the authorities in Azerbaijan to release Anar Mammadli and other prisoners of conscience immediately. The government must understand that every additional political prisoner in Azerbaijan undermines the country’s image abroad and its position in the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and weakens the country’s relations with the democratic world.

We, representatives of civil society, urge the European Commission, the EU delegation in Baku, Members of the European Parliament, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to condemn his imprisonment in the strongest terms, and to support the Civil Society Forum in pressing the Azerbaijan authorities for his immediate release.

Yours faithfully,

**Steering Committee, Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership**