

**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**  
**Anne Brasseur, President,  
Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe**

Brussels, 31 January 2014

**Statement of Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum on NGO law amendments in Azerbaijan**

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**Civil Society Forum urges EU and Council of Europe to press  
President of Azerbaijan to reject restrictive amendments to NGO  
legislation – changes could compel NGOs to re-register every 90 days**

**Dear High Representative, Dear Commissioner, Dear President of the European Parliament, Dear  
Ministers, Dear President, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe,**

The Steering Committee of the Civil Society Forum urges your support in mobilising diplomatic pressure on the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, not to sign the restrictive amendments to the NGO Act and associated legislative amendments passed by the Parliament of Azerbaijan on 17 December 2013. As the President's decision on the legislation is anticipated in the coming days, appeals to his office are necessary as soon as possible. The amendments would give Azerbaijan authorities enhanced powers to arbitrarily fine, and close down, non-governmental organisations that criticise government policies and actions, as well as create new administrative burdens involving receipt and reporting of grants.

If the amendments came into force, the authorities could apply the law such that NGOs would have to re-submit statutory and membership documents to confirm registration every 90 days. The amendments would also permit the Azerbaijan courts to close down an NGO in the event that it has been served notices for infringing any legislative requirements more than twice in a year. The legal changes would also limit the legal forms available to registration of new non-governmental organisations.

Human rights and pro-democracy civil society organisations, including the Election Monitoring and Democratic Studies Center (EMDS), have been repeatedly denied permission to register. The introduction of the new laws in Azerbaijan coincided with the three months' detention order imposed on Anar Mammadli, the Chair of EMDS. 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). The charges against him are entirely unfounded.

The proposed legislative amendments follow changes to the NGO Law in March 2013 that imposed tough requirements for the receipt of funds from international donors.

It is imperative now that the EU also demonstrably supports civil society actors and citizens wishing to express their opinions freely in the Eastern Partner countries. EU support should go beyond financial aid to civil society, and extend to ensuring that all EU representatives travelling to Azerbaijan and other partner countries meet with representatives of civil society, and vocally support their calls for freedom of association and the removal of restrictions on civil society.

Yours faithfully,

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