

Ilham Aliyev, President, Republic of Azerbaijan

Ogtay Asadov, Speaker, National Assembly, Republic of Azerbaijan

Donald Tusk, President, European Council

Federica Mogherini, Vice-President of the European Commission, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Jean-Claude Juncker, President, European Commission

Johannes Hahn, European Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations

Martin Schulz, President, European Parliament

Ministers of Foreign Affairs, EU Member States

Michel Forst, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

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

Nils Muižnieks, Commissioner for Human Rights, Council of Europe

Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General, Council of Europe

Ilkka Kanerva, President, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

Lamberto Zannier, Secretary General, Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

Michael Georg Link, Director, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

18 December 2015

**Statement by the Steering Committee
of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum
on the Release of Leyla Yunus and on Civil Society Activities in Azerbaijan**

The Steering Committee of the Civil Society Forum welcomes the decision of the government of Azerbaijan to transfer the human rights defender Leyla Yunus and her husband Arif Yunus from prison to home on health grounds. We hope, that this step will be followed in the cases of other imprisoned human rights defenders and representatives of civil society in such a way that they will be able to return home and normally continue their activities.

We continue to be concerned about the imprisonment of civil society activists such as human rights defenders Intigam Aliyev, Rasul Jafarov, Anar Mammadli, journalists Khadija Ismayilova and Rauf Mirkadirov and the politician Ilgar Mammadov. We consider that the government of Azerbaijan should be interested in making a humanitarian gesture by releasing them and eliminating all obstacles to their public activities. In particular, the Steering Committee hopes that a safe space for cooperation with international donors in Azerbaijan will be re-established and cooperation between NGOs and government will be renewed.



We note that the removal of the restrictions imposed in 2014 on the projects of the organisations which were cooperating with the Coalition for Increasing Transparency in Extractive Industries proves that the government can make such positive steps without any serious consequences.

In the context of restored negotiations between the government of Azerbaijan and the European Union, the Steering Committee calls for creation of a suitable environment for the activities of civil society and deepening the relations in the direction of Euro-integration. Noting the importance of civil society's role in the reforms process, and particularly in the implementation of public oversight of the changes, the Steering Committee of the Civil Society Forum states its readiness to support civil society in Azerbaijan.

Members of the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum