

**Giorgi Kvirikashvili**, Prime Minister, Georgia

7 February 2018

Dear Prime Minister,

On 12 January, a court in the town of Balakan in Azerbaijan sentenced Afgan Mukhtarli, a journalist, to 6 years in prison after he was, in all likelihood, abducted from Tbilisi and arrested by Azerbaijani law enforcement officials. According to the prosecution, he “illegally crossed the Georgian-Azerbaijani border carrying a large undeclared sum of money.” The Georgian authorities announced that they would investigate the case and provide answers to the many hitherto unanswered questions posed both in Georgia and abroad. Namely: how did the journalist cross the state border and did Georgian law enforcement representatives participate in this process? While several senior border control officers have been dismissed, this question remains unresolved.

As a result of this incident, Georgia, a pro-European and democratic state, has suffered serious damage to its reputation. Unfortunately, delays in investigating what really happened further exacerbate the harm caused. Georgia is an Eastern Partnership country with ambitions of membership and deeper European integration, which has been setting a positive example for the region. Hence, a lawful political process focusing on the human rights aspects of this case is essential.

The Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum calls upon the Georgian authorities to act in a transparent manner. We believe it is crucial that the Human Rights and Civil Integration Parliamentary Committee should hear a report from Georgian investigative bodies on the latest details in the Mukhtarli investigation. The Committee hearing should be held at the highest standard of transparency, in line with the practices characteristic of democratic societies, and with the meaningful involvement of the public. We urge the Chairman of the Georgian Parliament to facilitate this process.

The Steering Committee also calls for a speedy completion of the investigation by the Government of Georgia in order to dispel all suspicions surrounding this case, while the Public Defender’s active involvement in this case is also of crucial importance.

We hope that the Georgian State will remain faithful to its duty to protect human rights and uphold the rule of law in the case of Afgan Mukhtarli and beyond these particular proceedings.

Yours faithfully,

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