

Ilham Aliyev, President, Republic of Azerbaijan

Novruz Mammadov, Prime Minister, Republic of Azerbaijan

Ogtay Asadov, Speaker of the Parliament, Republic of Azerbaijan

Elmar Mammadyarov, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Azerbaijan

Donald Tusk, President, European Council

Jean-Claude Juncker, President, European Commission

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

Johannes Hahn, European Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations

Antonio Tajani, President, European Parliament

Ministers of Foreign Affairs, EU Member States

António Guterres, Secretary-General, United Nations

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

Michele Nicoletti, President, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General, Council of Europe

Dunja Mijatović, Commissioner for Human Rights, Council of Europe

George Tsereteli, President, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir, Director, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

Thomas Greminger, Secretary General, Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

28 May 2018

Statement by the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum on the 100th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence of Azerbaijan

The Steering Committee (SC) of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) notes with regret the failure of the authorities of Azerbaijan to take any meaningful steps to restore democracy in their country to commemorate the centenary of the declaration of the establishment of Azerbaijan as the first democratic republic in the Islamic world in 1918.

The pardon act declared by the authorities on this anniversary, which has freed a mere twelve political prisoners falls far short of what could be expected if the government wanted to signal its intention to re-establish democracy in the country in anticipation of the Comprehensive Agreement currently being negotiated with the European Union.

The Steering Committee notes that the European Parliament in its draft report on the Recommendation to the Council, the Commission and the HR/VP Federica Mogherini on the negotiations on the EU-Azerbaijan Comprehensive Agreement has called for the release of

“political prisoners and prisoners of conscience including among the most emblematic cases, Ilgar Mammadov, Afgan Mukhtarli, Mehman Huseynov, Ilkin Rustamzada, Seymur Hazi, Rashad Ramazanov, Elchin Ismayilli, Giyas Ibrahimov, Beyram Mammadov, Asif Yusifli and Fuad Gahramanli, [and the lifting of] their travel bans once released, including those of journalist Khadija Ismayilova and lawyer Intigam Aliyev, and [full implementation of] the decisions of the ECtHR, notably as regards Ilgar Mammadov; to secure the release and improvement of the situation of these individuals, including their reinstatement, and that of their families via the judiciary and the application of the rule of law and to protect Azerbaijani dissidents in the EU”.

The Steering Committee also welcomes the fact that the European Parliament calls for political prisoners to be released before the negotiations on the Comprehensive Agreement are concluded.

It is all the more regrettable that three Popular Front Party of Azerbaijan (PFPA) activists Aghil Maharramov, Ruslan Nasirli and Babek Hasanov were detained on the eve of a public rally to celebrate the anniversary in the village of Novkhany, the birthplace Mammad Amin Rasulzade, the leader of the first Republic. It is ironic that the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the declaration of the democratic Azerbaijani Republic by the Musavat Party in 1918 comes as political freedoms continue to be stifled, the rule of law and freedom of speech is not respected and the activities of the civil society organisations are still hampered amidst rampant corruption at the highest levels of the government.

It also has to be noted that the Azerbaijani authorities are working actively to undermine democratic institutions in Europe, such as the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and are failing to work constructively with OSCE/ODIHR, the OSCE pro-democracy agency, thus betraying the aspirations the 1918 Republic founders.

It is our firm belief that the time will come when the democratic aspirations of an independent Azerbaijan promulgated in 1918 will once again be respected, political prisoners will be released and the rule of law will be re-established in the country.

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