

Brussels, 12 June 2020

## **Statement of the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum on excessive measures adopted in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in Azerbaijan**

The Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum expressed concern in its statement of 24 March at the apparent intention of the authorities in Azerbaijan to use the COVID-19 public health emergency to initiate an unacceptable crackdown on civil liberties in the country. Ahead of the online meeting between EU and EaP leaders on 18 June, we are compelled to call again on the government of Azerbaijan to immediately cease violations of civil liberties in the context of the measures taken to mitigate the COVID-19 crisis.

On 4 June, the Operational Headquarters under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan took the decision to impose a strict lockdown regime in Baku, Sumgayit, Ganja, Lankaran and Absheron districts from 00:00 on Saturday 6 June to 06:00 on Monday 8 June. During this time, residents were forbidden from leaving their homes, except for medical emergencies, and grocery stores, markets, pharmacies and other essential outlets were closed.

The Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum is greatly distressed at the use of excessive measures by the police to enforce citizens' compliance with this already-draconian weekend lockdown regime. In particular, it decisively condemns the police force in Baku for its actions on 8 and 9 June, when dozens of its officers raided an apartment building in the Yeni Yasamal area, detaining 11 people in an apparent 'revenge operation', after residents had expressed their displeasure at the arrest of a man for lockdown violations in the area on 7 June. One of those arrested in that operation, Karim Suleymani, has since alleged that he was subjected to 5 hours of physical abuse by more than 30 officers during his detention.

The case of Qiyas Ibrahimov is a further cause for concern. Mr. Ibrahimov was arrested on 9 June after having denounced the raid in Yeni Yasamal in a one-man protest on the roof of his apartment building, during which he displayed a banner bearing the slogan 'Don't be silent, speak out'. Released from custody on 10 June, charges of 'petty hooliganism' under Article 510 of the Code of Administrative Violations have nonetheless not been dropped.

The above cases are blatant examples of excessive use of force by members of Azerbaijan's police force, and the Steering Committee condemns them without reservation. Further, it urges the Azerbaijani government, notably the Minister of the Interior, Mr. Vilayat Eyvazov, to ensure that any measures it undertakes in response to the COVID-19 pandemic are lawful, necessary, and proportionate, and are compatible with the country's international human rights commitments, including its obligations under the Eastern Partnership policy.

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