

23 October 2019

Statement by the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum on the disproportionately violent response of the authorities to the recent demonstrations in Baku, Azerbaijan

The EaP CSF Steering Committee decisively condemns the disproportionately violent response of the police during the two days of protests in Baku on October 19-20 and restrictions on the freedom of assembly guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The peaceful rally organised by the National Council of Democratic Forces (NCDF) on October 19, 2019 turned out to be violently dispersed by the police force. The eyewitness accounts describe the brutal interference by dozens of police officers, which resulted in many protesters being injured, detained and arrested. One of the leaders of the Azerbaijan Popular Front Party (APFP), Ali Karimli, was severely beaten in the police car and at the police station. The total number of arrests on various grounds amounts to 28. During the peaceful rally, the telecommunication services were purposefully interrupted.

On October 20, around 60 citizens, mostly women, gathering to raise their voices and saying no to the violence against women, were paradoxically dispersed by force with the police detaining several of them.

The EaP CSF Steering Committee calls on the government of Azerbaijan to respect the constitutional rights of the citizens, namely article 49 that guarantees freedom of assembly, as well as its international obligations, namely article 21 of the UN's International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights and article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights protecting the freedom of assembly. **All citizens detained on politically motivated criminal charges and administrative charges in connection to those two rallies should be released immediately.**

The EaP CSF Steering Committee calls on the government of Azerbaijan to condemn such an excessive use of force and inhuman treatment of the citizens and **demands the government to hold the responsible police officers accountable.**

The EaP CSF Steering Committee also **calls on the government of Azerbaijan to refrain from illegal wiretapping of civic activists and politicians.** The private calls free of any illegal content between the representatives of the National Council of Democratic Forces and several key diplomatic representations in the country were published by pro-government media. Such practice is unacceptable and violates privacy rights and free speech.

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