

# Prohlášení Statement Déclaration

Vienna 22 January 2009

## **Permanent Council No. 747**

### **EU Statement on Freedom of the Media in Azerbaijan**

Recalling the EU Presidency declaration of 31 December 2008 on foreign broadcasts in Azerbaijan, circulated last week as an OSCE document, the EU regrets the Azerbaijani authorities' decision not to renew the FM radio licences of a number of international broadcasters, namely the BBC World Service, Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

The termination of these stations' broadcasting on FM frequencies removes important, objective and valuable independent sources of public service quality information and thereby restricts media plurality in Azerbaijan. The EU notes the alternatives offered by the Chairman of the National Council on Television and Radio. However we agree with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media that these are not realistic alternatives as internet usage in Azerbaijan is low, the expansion of satellite radio is unrealistic and shortwave radio is unable to provide modern-day reception quality.

The EU would like to remind all participating States of their obligations to adhere fully to their OSCE commitments, including those related to freedom of expression. The timing of this decision is an additional cause for concern, coming as it does less than three months away from a scheduled referendum on amendments to the Constitution.

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In conclusion, the EU urges Azerbaijan to reconsider this decision and again expresses its willingness to assist the Azerbaijani authorities to put in place a regulatory framework that will facilitate a plurality of independent media.

The candidate countries TURKEY, CROATIA\* and FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA\*, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries ALBANIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA and MONTENEGRO, the European Free Trade Association countries and members of the European Economic Area ICELAND and NORWAY align themselves with this statement.

\*Croatia and Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.