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EU statement on the safety of journalists in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan

The European Union would like to underline that freedom of expression is a fundamental principle in a democratic society and vital for the realisation of other human rights. Brutal attacks against journalists have a chilling effect on media freedom and must be taken very seriously and properly investigated. To prevent future cases of violence against journalists, participating States need to ensure that those responsible for such attacks are swiftly brought to justice. A safe working environment for journalists is a top priority for the EU. Only last week, incidents of violence against journalists in two participating States reminded us of the importance and urgency of this matter.

Referring to the local EU statement issued in Baku on 23 April 2012, we condemn the attack carried out on 18 April by private security guards of the company SOCAR against several journalists in Azerbaijan. Among them is Idrak Abbasov from the newspaper Zerkalo/Ayna as well as the Baku-based Institute for the Freedom and Safety of Reporters, who reported on the demolition of a house in Baku's Sulutepe settlement. We share the assessment of the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) that the incident, together with previous similar and still unresolved attacks, gives evidence of a climate of violence in which media workers in Azerbaijan have to

perform their professional duties. We urge the Azerbaijani authorities to investigate all cases of violence against journalists and to restore a climate of safety and confidence as regards the working conditions for journalists in the country.

Furthermore, we condemn the brutal attack against Lukpan Akhmedyarov, a journalist well-known for his criticism of the government, in Uralsk in Kazakhstan on 19 April. We welcome the swift response by the Kazakh authorities in opening an investigation into this attack and look forward to the results. In view of Mr Akhmedyarov's critical reporting, we join the RFoM's call on the authorities to investigate whether the attack was linked to his journalistic work and to bring those responsible to justice.

We wish both Mr Abbasov and Mr Akhmedyarov a speedy recovery and would appreciate being kept informed about the investigations. We encourage the authorities in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan to enhance their efforts in honouring their international commitments regarding democratic principles and human rights, particularly on freedom of expression.

These serious incidents show that OSCE participating States need to do more to prevent violence against journalists and to promote their safety. The EU will continue to support OSCE activities, especially by the RFoM, regarding this issue and we count on all countries in the OSCE to do the same.

The Acceding Country Croatia*, the Candidate Countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Montenegro*, Iceland+ and Serbia*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA country Norway, member of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

* Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

+ Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.