

PRESS RELEASE

Brussels, 6 September 2012

Safarov crisis: Europe in full solidarity against Azerbaijan's anti-Armenian xenophobia – provocation to escalate Karabakh conflict should receive clever response

European Friends of Armenia strongly welcomes the unprecedented condemnations of Azerbaijan's anti-Armenian xenophobia by all European institutions and the international community (see list below). We are appalled that the open provocation and physical threat by Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev against Armenia and Armenians around the world has put the Karabakh conflict to the next level of escalation. This may be in the short term internal political interest of the President, who is facing "elections" in 2013. However, given his autocratic and so far unchallenged power base, the risk for him and his country and the damage caused stand in no relation to the short-lived political gain achieved through anti-Armenian nationalism and xenophobia.

MEP Elmar Brok, Chairman of the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee and member of the Europe-Armenia Advisory Council commented: *"I am deeply concerned about the decision to pardon Ramil Safarov upon arrival in Baku, to publicly glorify him, promote him to Major rank, pay him 8 years of salary and offer him an apartment. Azerbaijan had given a written promise to the Hungarian authorities that Mr Safarov would continue to serve his life sentence for at least 25 years when he arrives in Azerbaijan. Now Azerbaijan has broken this promise. Safarov is an Azerbaijani soldier who murdered the Armenian officer Gurgen Margaryan at their NATO training camp in Budapest in 2004. With the decision to set him free, Azerbaijan is circumventing the valid conviction of the court of an EU Member State and is presenting a murderer as a role model to cheering children in Baku."* It is noteworthy that Safarov killed Margaryan with 16 strikes of an axe to the head, while the latter was sleeping, and showed no remorse when convicted.

In the light of these events and following the repressions which became apparent during the Eurovision contest in Baku, EuFoA demands that the EU finally accepts that it must treat Azerbaijan more critically than Belarus, which is known to have the same internally repressive regime style, but without Azerbaijan's militarisation or the state-promoted xenophobia. We were informed and strongly welcome that the EU's Foreign Ministers will debate the issue at their upcoming GYMnich meeting and that the European Parliament will debate an urgency resolution next week.

"Why we implement EU funded programmes with the oil-rich and notoriously anti-democratic government of Azerbaijan and conclude large-scale energy deals with them, while we apply sanctions against Belarus cannot be explained to European voters" comments EuFoA Secretary General Dr Michael Kambeck. *"Towards Armenia we can only direct the warning not to step into the provocation trap which Aliyev has set up. I share the emotions for calls to now take harsh steps against Azerbaijan, but Armenia should be like a clever chess-player and keep an eye on the long-term interests."*

EuFoA also calls for steps to mend the relations with Hungary in time. While the extradition decision was at least very naïve, Hungary and Armenia share hundreds of years of historic ties and are both old Christian countries. Azerbaijan's dirty game should not be allowed to destroy such links. Hungary is a bridge between Eastern and Western Europe and will need Armenia to enlarge this function. Armenia will need Hungary for the upcoming EU visa-facilitation decision and later for the Association Agreement. We welcome that the Hungarian government has quickly issued the strongest condemnation and that the Armenian President has called for a stop to burn Hungarian flags. Now some work needs to be done behind the scenes to overcome the problem.

List of all official statements:

- Statement by Mr Milan Cabrnock, Chairman of the European Parliament Delegation to the EU-Armenia, EU-Azerbaijan and EU-Georgia Parliamentary Cooperation Committees on the case of Ramil Safarov (6 September 2012)
- "Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe's President concerned by the serious deterioration in relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan following the decision to pardon Ramil Safarov" (5 September 2012)
- Elmar Brok, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament: "Azerbaijan: pardoning and glorification of Ramil Safarov" (5 September 2012)
- Council of Europe Secretary General Jagland: "Making a hero out of a murder convict is unacceptable" (4 September 2012)
- "The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights concerned about the pardon of Azerbaijani army officer convicted of murder" (4 September 2012)
- "European Parliament President Schulz on pardoning Ramil Safarov in Azerbaijan" (4 September 2012)
- Statement by the spokespersons of EU High Representative Catherine Ashton and Commissioner Štefan Füle on the release of Ramil Safarov (3 September 2012)
- Statement by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs: "Azerbaijan – Pardon granted to M. Safarov" (3 September 2012)
- OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs meet with the Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan (3 September 2012)
- Statement by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the extradition of Azerbaijani soldier by Hungary (3 September 2012)
- Commentary by Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) Secretary General Nikolay Bordyuzha on the situation around the decision of the Azerbaijani authorities to pardon the murderer of Armenian officer (3 September 2012)
- US Department of State: "Pardon of Azerbaijani Soldier" (31 August 2012)
- Statement on behalf of President Barack Obama on Azerbaijan's Decision to Pardon Ramil Safarov (31 August 2012)

Links to all of the above-mentioned statements can be [found here](#).

EuFoA is happy to provide commentary or background analysis in English, German, French, Italian, Polish, Russian and Armenian. Members of the Europe-Armenia Advisory Council may also be available for comments; for enquiries please contact our secretariat.

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