

**EUROPEAN UNION****OSCE Permanent Council Nr 956
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**EU statement on amendments to the criminal code in
Azerbaijan**

The European Union would like to draw the attention of the OSCE Permanent Council to the 6 June Joint Statement by the spokespersons of EU High Representative Catherine Ashton and Commissioner Štefan Füle on amendments to the Criminal Code in Azerbaijan:

"The High Representative and the Commissioner were disappointed to learn of the final approval to the Criminal Code which will establish punitive measures against slander and insult on the internet. The EU is concerned at curbs on freedom of expression in Azerbaijan.

2013 is an important election year for Azerbaijan, a country which has committed to improve the general environment for democratic elections. One of the preconditions for creating an open platform for democratic competition is freedom of expression in all forms of public media.

The EU has repeatedly expressed its strong conviction that criminal defamation laws are counterproductive. Experience suggests that civil remedies allow justice to be pursued effectively and transparently in cases of alleged slander or insult: such an approach is also in line with international standards and good practice.

The High Representative and the Commissioner call upon the Azerbaijani authorities to create an open space for a pluralistic debate and to engage with the international community in order to meet its voluntarily agreed international commitments. The EU renews its readiness to assist Azerbaijan in this process."

* Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Montenegro 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.