

Statement by Representatives of Azerbaijani Civil Society

written by briadmin

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The Council of Europe's principles must guide its relations with Azerbaijan

We, civil society organisations from Azerbaijan, call on the institutions and member states of the Council of Europe to respond in a principled manner to the Azerbaijani government's systematic violations of its membership obligations and its threats to withdraw from the Organisation.

This call stems from the need both to protect human rights in Azerbaijan and to safeguard the fundamental values of the Council of Europe. It is worth recalling that the European Convention on Human Rights establishes the collective protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law as a shared responsibility of the Organisation's member states.

It is precisely on the basis of this shared commitment and responsibility that we call on Council of Europe member states to take coordinated and consistent action through the Organisation's institutions to ensure that Azerbaijan complies with its membership obligations.

The Azerbaijani authorities' policy of pressure and confrontation towards the Council of Europe

Azerbaijan's accession to the Council of Europe in 2001 was one of the most important political and legal choices made by the country since independence. This choice also reflects Azerbaijan's commitment, enshrined in its Constitution and the Constitutional Act on State Independence, to protect rights and freedoms in accordance with international law. In this context, since 2002, the European Convention on Human Rights

has provided Azerbaijani citizens with access to international legal protection, while the European Court of Human Rights has become, against the backdrop of ineffective domestic remedies, the only remaining avenue for an effective remedy.

Nevertheless, the Court's judgments concerning numerous and recurring human rights violations in Azerbaijan have not resulted in improvements in the country's human rights situation. Its judgments have exposed serious structural problems involving politically motivated arrests, electoral rights, freedom of expression and association, torture and ill-treatment, as well as property rights.

Rather than addressing these problems, however, the Azerbaijani authorities have pursued a policy of portraying the Council of Europe's monitoring mechanisms as interference with the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. In doing so, they have sought to undermine the legitimacy of the Organisation's institutions and restrict their work through unlawful interference. Corrupt practices and illicit influence operations widely known as "caviar diplomacy" have also represented one of the serious challenges to the institutional integrity of the Council of Europe.

Campaigns to discredit the Council of Europe, accompanied by insulting rhetoric and threats to withdraw from the Organisation, continue to this day. This is despite the fact that the Council of Europe has consistently supported Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and the rights of internally displaced persons, and called for the Karabakh conflict to be resolved within the framework of international law.

The human rights crisis and political repression in Azerbaijan

The intensification of repression since 2022 has led to an unprecedented human rights crisis in Azerbaijan. The space for independent civil society, media and political opposition to operate freely has been systematically dismantled. Repressive

legislation that is tightened every year, large-scale politically motivated arrests and transnational repression extending beyond the country's borders have become key tools for silencing dissent and eliminating independent civic activity. Reports by independent organisations indicate that there are at least 328 political prisoners in the country. Civil society representatives, journalists and political activists are being sentenced to severe prison terms of up to 10–15 years, while repression continues inside places of detention.

During the first six months of 2026, torture and ill-treatment of political prisoners, including sexual harassment of women political prisoners, have created a situation that goes beyond isolated human rights violations and constitutes a serious affront to human dignity. The denial of adequate medical care in detention and continued pressure on political prisoners and their families have further aggravated the situation. This inhumane policy of repression requires an urgent and commensurate international response.

According to Council of Europe data, Azerbaijan has the highest rate of non-implementation of ECtHR judgments among the Organisation's member states, with 68% of judgments against it still awaiting implementation. Azerbaijan is the only Council of Europe member state where independent civil society and media have been dismantled to this extent and hundreds of political prisoners are held in inhumane conditions. A comparable situation exists only in the Russian Federation, which was expelled from the Organisation in 2022, and Belarus, which has never been admitted to it.

Upholding the Council of Europe's principles in its relations with Azerbaijan

Despite the deep human rights crisis in the country, contacts and cooperation between the Azerbaijani government and the Council of Europe have continued in certain areas over the

past two years. The Council of Europe Office in Baku has remained operational, engagement has continued under individual conventions and monitoring mechanisms, implementation of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Azerbaijan for 2022–2026 has continued, and the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) has resumed its dialogue with and visits to Azerbaijan.

While recognising the importance of such engagement, we believe that it must not serve to legitimise the situation in Azerbaijan or remove the government's policy of repression and its serious consequences from the agenda of bilateral relations. Existing cooperation should not continue against a backdrop of Azerbaijan's refusal to implement judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, the steadily growing number of political prisoners, and a status quo that excludes genuine cooperation with PACE. In particular, the fact that the CPT delegation visiting Azerbaijan in September–October 2025 did not visit the Baku Pre-Trial Detention Facility, where numerous cases of ill-treatment and torture of political prisoners have occurred, raises serious concerns about the value and usefulness of such engagement.

A commensurate response to the Azerbaijani authorities' failure to implement judgments of the European Court and their open defiance of the Council of Europe's monitoring mechanisms is important not only for Azerbaijan. Such a response would also establish an important precedent affirming that Convention obligations are binding on all member states.

We believe that the Council of Europe's firm defence of its fundamental principles does not mean isolating Azerbaijani society from the wider democratic world. On the contrary, turning a blind eye to systematic violations of these principles risks eroding them, weakening the binding nature of the obligation to implement judgments of the European Court, and undermining confidence in the Convention system as a whole. Allowing the Council of Europe's founding principles to

be compromised for the sake of preserving the membership of one state could have more serious and long-term consequences for the Organisation and all its member states. We recognise that a principled response may lead the government of Azerbaijan to accelerate its withdrawal. Responsibility for that outcome would lie with the Azerbaijani government, not with the Council of Europe.

The Council of Europe should not repeat the experience of other international organisations where the responsibilities of membership have been pushed into the background and persistent human rights violations have become normalised.

We, civil society organisations from Azerbaijan, believe that regardless of the future of institutional relations, the demand within our society for human rights, freedom, justice and the rule of law will continue.

We regard PACE's decision in January 2024 not to ratify the credentials of the Azerbaijani delegation as an important step in defence of the obligations arising from Council of Europe membership. We consider the Azerbaijani government's response – suspending cooperation with PACE and threatening to withdraw from the Council of Europe – to be contrary to the interests of Azerbaijani society. Such a policy serves to isolate Azerbaijan from the European space to which it belongs and deprives its citizens of the rights and freedoms more effectively protected within that space, as well as the mechanisms available for their protection.

For these reasons, we call on the Council of Europe, its member states and relevant institutions to take the following steps:

- The Committee of Ministers to initiate proceedings under Article 46 § 4 of the Convention at its next Human Rights (DH) meeting, as it did in *Ilgar Mammadov v. Azerbaijan* in 2017, in response to Azerbaijan's suspension of cooperation with the Committee and its failure to implement the European Court of

Human Rights' judgments in the Mammadli group of cases concerning politically motivated arrests;

- The Secretary General to formally request an explanation from the Azerbaijani government under Article 52 of the Convention concerning the human rights crisis in the country and the failure to implement judgments of the European Court;
- PACE, the Committee of Ministers and the Secretary General to keep the human rights crisis in Azerbaijan on their agenda and take coordinated institutional action aimed at securing the release of political prisoners, documenting human rights violations and ensuring future accountability;
- Council of Europe member states to adopt a unified and principled approach in their relations with Azerbaijan, defend the Organisation's values and institutions against authoritarian pressure, and strengthen support for political prisoners, human rights defenders, journalists and civil society.

Signatory organisations:

Independent Lawyers Network

Khazar Research and Analysis Center (KHAR)

Open Azerbaijan Initiative

Free Voice Collective

The Institute for Democratic Initiatives

This statement is open to endorsement by Azerbaijani civil society organisations, human rights defenders and representatives of the public who support its content and calls.