Civil society organisations call on OSCE participating States to block an Azerbaijani bid for the Chairpersonship-in-Office

We, the undersigned civil society organisations, are writing to express our firm opposition to a potential Azerbaijani OSCE Chairpersonship-in-Office (CiO) and call on participating States to block any such decision. The Azerbaijani government is not a reliable security, environmental, or human rights partner and is unfit to chair the organisation.

In recent discussions at the Permanent Council, including on 19 November 2026, participating States discussed the possibility of an Azerbaijani CiO 2027. This is deeply troubling, especially given the understandable focus of many participating States on putting the organisation on more stable footing. But leaving the organisation in the hands of an authoritarian government would seriously question the legitimacy and credibility of a body tasked with promoting a comprehensive security approach which includes human rights among its core pillars.

As OSCE participating States reassess security priorities in the face of growing authoritarianism, geopolitical instability, and hybrid threats, they must recognise that authoritarian States, including Azerbaijan, increasingly threaten European security through disinformation, corruption, political interference, transnational repression, and efforts to undermine democratic institutions. A strong, independent, and resilient civil society is an essential component of a comprehensive security architecture. Yet, Azerbaijan has, since 2013, implemented a massive crackdown on independent Azerbaijani civil society, including NGOs, media outlets, and human rights defenders, including journalists and human rights lawyers. The crackdown has intensified since the end of 2023, with further restrictions to the civic space and public participation in Azerbaijan. There are over 300 political prisoners behind bars, as documented by Azerbaijani human rights groups, with dozens of civic actors imprisoned in retaliation for their legitimate human rights and media work, including abroad.

In recent years, the European Court of Human Rights, the European Commission for Democracy through Law (the Venice Commission) and the UN Committee against Torture have found that Azerbaijan's legislation is not in line with international standards regarding the regulation of civil society and media organisations. In October, the European Parliament adopted by a wide margin a resolution condemning the misuse by Azerbaijani authorities of national security laws to silence NGOs and the media, and transnational repression against dissenting and opposition voices. The resolution also criticised the Azerbaijani authorities for the on-going politically motivated incarceration of human rights defenders, including Anar Mammadli, who was detained in 2024 following his advocacy at the OSCE, among other multilateral institutions. A resolution adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in June 2026, recognised the systemic silencing of dissent in Azerbaijan, including the dismantling of independent media, the rise in reported political prisoners, the misuse of criminal law, and the role of restrictive NGO and media legislation in suppressing civic space. At the European Court for Human Rights, Azerbaijan remains one of the States with the highest percentage of non-implementation of judgements, demonstrating an unwillingness to meet its commitments under the European Convention on Human Rights.

The office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) has condemned the Azerbaijan authorities "harassment of media workers". The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and Council of Europe's Venice Commission have repeatedly found that Azerbaijan's legal framework governing elections, media, political parties, and civil society restricts fundamental freedoms and falls short of OSCE and CoE commitments and international standards. The European Court of Human Rights has noted in Azerbaijan a 'troubling pattern of arbitrary arrests and detentions of government critics, civil society activists and human rights defenders through retaliatory prosecutions and misuse of criminal law in defiance of the rule of law.'

Against this backdrop, we implore participating States to reject any candidacy for the CiO by the Azerbaijani authorities.

Signed:

Batani Foundation	Russia
Belarusian Association of Journalists	Lithuania/Belarus
Belarusian Helsinki Committee	Belarus
Belarusian Human Rights House	Belarus
Belgrade Centre for Human Rights	Serbia
CAP Liberté de Conscience	France
Center for Civil Liberties	Ukraine
Center for Civil Liberties	Ukraine
Center for Environment	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Civic Initiatives	Serbia
CrimeaSOS	Ukraine
Crude Accountability	USA
Educational Human Rights House-Chernihiv	Ukraine
European Prison Litigation Network	France
Fondacija CURE	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Freedom Files	Poland
Freedom Now	US
Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Banjaluka	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Vanadzor	Armenia
Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia	Serbia
HRM "Bir Duino-Kyrgyzstan"	Kyrgyzstan
Human Constanta	Belarus
Human Rights Center of Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan
Human Rights Center Viasna	Belarus

Human Rights Centre ZMINA	Ukraine
Human Rights House Foundation	Norway
Human Rights House Zagreb	Croatia
Hungarian Helsinki Committee	Hungary
Independent Lawyers Network	Azerbaijan
International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders	France
Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law	Kazakhstan
LGBTQ+ group Coming Out	Russia
Memorial Human Rights Defence Centre	Russia
Mental Health and Human Rights Info	Norway
Netherlands Helsinki Committee	Netherlands
Norwegian Helsinki Committee	Norway
PEN Belarus	Belarus
Political Prisoners Support. Memorial	Russia
Promo LEX	Moldova
Public Association "Dignity"	Kazakhstan
Rights Georgia	Georgia
Sphere Foundation	Russia
The Georgian Centre for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation of Torture Victims - GCRT	Georgia
Turmenistan Helsinki Fund for Human Rights	Turkmenistan
Voices	Switzerland
World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders	Switzerland