

Press Release

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Council of Europe Secretary General expresses concern about the freedom of expression in Azerbaijan

Strasbourg, 03.05.2007 – "I am most concerned about the threat to freedom of expression in Azerbaijan. In recent months, several journalists have been imprisoned on charges of criminal defamation or physically attacked in incidents which appear to be related to their work. This worrying trend has culminated on 20 April, when editor Eynulla Fatullayev was sentenced to two and a half years in prison for an internet posting which was considered to be criminally libellous and insulting. It is unacceptable and greatly damages the international reputation of Azerbaijan.

Criminal sanctions for defamation should be abolished in any democratic country which respects human rights and the rule of law. Governments should protect the truth by guaranteeing that journalists can work safely and freely without any undue influence and pressure from the authorities or anyone else. Freedom of expression is a clear, legally defined concept protected by the European Convention on Human Rights. We are ready to assist the authorities in Azerbaijan in order to help them to bring both their legislation and their administrative and judicial practices in protecting the freedom of expression to the level expected from a member state of the Council of Europe."

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A political organisation set up in 1949, the Council of Europe works to promote democracy and human rights continent-wide. It also develops common responses to social, cultural and legal challenges in its 46 member states.