



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

**MEMO**

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**Azerbaijan: remarks of Commissioner Štefan Füle at the press conference after the Cooperation Council**

We are glad to see Azerbaijan and the European Union moving closer to each other. Our cooperation is bearing fruit. In the energy sphere - which is an area of strategic partnership - significant steps have been taken on the Southern Energy Corridor. The ratification by the Azerbaijani parliament of the agreements with Turkey on the construction and operation of the Transanatolian Pipeline (TANAP) is very welcome. We are expecting in the next months the final decision of the Shah Deniz consortium on the preferred EU route of the pipeline. On the Transcaspien Pipeline, we have confirmed with Minister Mammadyarov our joint commitment to work closely with Turkmenistan with a view to finalize our trilateral agreement, paving the path for the energy South Corridor.

As for other issues: the negotiations on the Association Agreement have gained strength in the last months even though we would like to accelerate the pace on certain issues. Negotiations on Agreements on Visa Facilitation and Readmission started in March and will be intensified next year with a view to an early conclusion. This will enable us to boost people to people contacts, as an important element of our cooperation.

Another key element of our partnership with Azerbaijan in the framework of the Eastern Partnership are the fundamental freedoms. It is important to see progress in the area of democratic reform and the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We welcome progress made by Azerbaijan to fully respect its commitments towards the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the EU. It is a long process and there are still challenges in areas such as freedom of the media, freedom of assembly and freedom of association. It is equally important to bring electoral legislation in line with the recommendations of the OSCE/ODIHR. This needs to happen very soon so that Azerbaijan can have a fair and transparent presidential election in October next year.

In all these areas, Azerbaijan can count on the EU's support. Our commitment is to continue and to deepen our dialogue – no issue will be sidestepped or avoided in this dialogue. It is only by frank exchanges that we can build a solid relationship. And we are doing exactly this.

Let me conclude by congratulating Azerbaijan for having been chosen to host the first European Olympic Games in 2015. After another important event - the Eurovision Song Contest last May – the Games will be yet again a window to the world for Azerbaijan. But it will also be a window through which Europe will be looking not only at the sporting places but also at the country overall.