

Statement by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance concerning the pardoning in Azerbaijan of a person convicted of hate crime

Strasbourg, 4.9.2012 - The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) of the Council of Europe wishes to express consternation at the pardoning and release of Ramil Safarov, shortly after he had been transferred from Hungary to Azerbaijan in order to serve there a sentence of life imprisonment imposed by a Budapest court for the murder of a Armenian army officer in 2004.

ECRI's position has always been that hate crime should be adequately punished. It is, therefore, concerned that developments such as those in the Safarov case risk cultivating a sense of impunity for the perpetrators of racist offences of the most serious nature. This could undermine in a fundamental manner the fight against racist violence, which unfortunately continues to plague many European countries.

ECRI is, in addition, apprehensive about the impact that the pardoning and release of Ramil Safarov might have on the general climate of opinion concerning the Armenian community in Azerbaijan. ECRI has repeatedly recognised the link between the harsh comments regularly made in this country about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the discrimination that Armenians coming under Azerbaijan's jurisdiction encounter in their daily lives. ECRI considers that, today more than ever, considerable efforts are needed on the part of the Azerbaijani authorities to ensure that these persons do not feel threatened.

ECRI wishes to draw the Azerbaijani authorities' attention to the need to respect the values it has always promoted and to which they have subscribed when becoming a member of the Council of Europe. It urges them to take whatever measures are possible to redress the situation created by their handling of the Safarov case.

ECRI is a human rights body of the Council of Europe, composed of independent experts, which monitors problems of racism, discrimination on grounds of ethnic origin, colour, citizenship, religion and language, as well as xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance, prepares reports and issues recommendations to member states. For more information on ECRI: www.coe.int/ecri

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