

Ms. Kaja Kallas
High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
Vice-President of the European Commission
European External Action Service
Rond-Point Robert Schuman 9A
B-1046 Brussels
Belgium

7 July 2026

Dear High Representative Kallas,

I am writing as the wife of Ruben Vardanyan, an Armenian businessman and philanthropist unlawfully held in Azerbaijan since September 2023. On 17 February 2026, he was sentenced to 20 years in prison by the Baku Military Court – despite being a civilian with no connection to any military institution, and without access to independent international legal counsel. He is one of 19 Armenian detainees currently held in Azerbaijan.

The European Parliament has addressed this situation on multiple occasions, most recently in a resolution adopted in April 2026 calling for the detainees' release and citing serious fair-trial concerns. Yet the humanitarian situation on the ground has not changed. Since the closure of the ICRC delegation in Baku, families have been left without regular, independent humanitarian access to their loved ones. We have no reliable information about their health, conditions of detention, or access to medical care.

In September 2026, I plan to travel to Baku as part of an international women's humanitarian delegation. Its purpose is strictly humanitarian: to seek access to all Armenian detainees at the Umbaki Penitentiary Complex, to deliver letters, photographs and permitted personal items, and to raise directly with the relevant authorities questions regarding correspondence, conditions of detention, and the possibility of regular independent monitoring. I have already written to the Human Rights Commissioner of Azerbaijan and to the President of the ICRC in connection with this initiative.

I am writing to ask for your personal support and would be deeply grateful if your office, and where appropriate the EU Delegation in Baku, could raise with the Azerbaijani authorities the importance of allowing this visit to proceed safely and without obstruction. I would also welcome any support the European External Action Service could offer – through diplomatic communication with Baku, advice on appropriate channels, or broader advocacy for the restoration of independent humanitarian monitoring.

This initiative aims to open a modest but meaningful channel that does not currently exist. The EU's long-standing commitment to human rights and human dignity gives me hope that this support is possible.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter with you or a member of your team. I am ready to share all relevant details, including the proposed composition of the delegation and the list of materials we hope to deliver.

With respect and hope,
Veronika Zonabend