

Resolution on the human rights situation in Azerbaijan

2012/2654(RSP) - 24/05/2012 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted with 49 votes to 6 with 1 abstention a resolution on the human rights situation in Azerbaijan.

The resolution was tabled by the EPP, Greens/EFA, ALDE, S&D and ECR groups.

Citing reported attacks, harassment, threats and imprisonment of journalists, human rights defenders and others seeking to express their opinions, Parliament calls on the Azerbaijani authorities to stop all actions aimed at suppressing the freedom of expression and assembly, as this is incompatible with Azerbaijan's commitments regarding democracy, the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. It condemns, inter alia, the brutal beating of Idrak Abbasov, journalist for the 'Zerkalo' newspaper and the 'Institute for the Freedom and Safety of Reporters', by the police and security guards of the State oil company SOCAR and also condemns the campaign of blackmail and intimidation carried out against the investigative journalist Khadija Ismaylova due to her investigations into the alleged business interests of President Aliyev's family. The Azerbaijani authorities are called upon to allow peaceful protests and to prohibit police interference in the work of journalists covering demonstrations.

Parliament recalls its position that the Association Agreement between the EU and Azerbaijan currently being negotiated should include clauses and benchmarks on the protection and promotion of human rights, especially with regard to freedom of the media and the right to freedom of expression, association and assembly, which reflect the principles and rights enshrined in the Constitution of Azerbaijan and commitments made by Azerbaijan in the framework of the Council of Europe and the OSCE. Parliament **calls on the Council to consider the possibility of targeted sanctions against those responsible for human rights violations, should these persist.**

Noting that the 2012 **Eurovision Song Contest** taking place on 26 May 2012 in Baku should be an opportunity for Azerbaijan to show its commitment to democracy and human rights, Members express sympathy with the promoters of the 'Sing for Democracy' campaign launched on the occasion of the Eurovision Song Contest hosted in Baku and hope that their action can contribute to bringing about indispensable democratic reforms and substantial improvements in the human rights situation in the country. They call on the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission, the Council and the Commission to monitor closely the situation concerning human rights and fundamental freedoms in Azerbaijan after the Eurovision Song Contest.

Parliament is concerned about the **forced evictions and demolition of buildings** in connection with a major reconstruction plan in Baku partly linked to the upcoming Eurovision Song Contest. It calls on the Azerbaijani authorities to guarantee that the ongoing construction of new buildings in Baku is in line with the relevant legislation and that the resettlement of people is carried out with transparent legal procedures and with fair compensation.

Parliament also calls on the Azerbaijani authorities:

- to adopt the draft law on defamation which provides for the abolition of criminal liability for defamation and insult; It welcomes the discussions on the adoption of such a law within Azerbaijani society, the close cooperation with the OSCE in this regard, and the intention of the Azerbaijani authorities to adopt the draft law before the end of the year;
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to bring the legislation on elections, freedom of assembly, freedom of association and media freedom into line with international standards and ensure its full implementation;

- to step up its efforts to reform all aspects of the judicial system: prosecution, trial, sentencing, detention and appeals;
- to comply with all rulings of the European Court on Human Rights concerning Azerbaijan;
- to guarantee digital freedoms, including uncensored access to information and communication, which are universal rights and are indispensable for human rights such as freedom of expression and access to information, and for ensuring transparency and accountability in public life.