Resolution on the persecution of human rights defenders in Azerbaijan

2014/2832(RSP) - 18/09/2014 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the persecution of human rights defenders in Azerbaijan.

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

It reiterated its call on the Azerbaijani government to take concrete steps to **improve the human rights situation** in the country as a matter of urgent priority, including **immediately and unconditionally releasing all political prisoners** and ceasing politically motivated arrests. In this connection, Members called for the immediate and unconditional release of Leyla Yunus, Arif Yunus, Rasul Jafarov, Intigam Aliyev and Hasan Huseyni, who were some of the country's most prominent human rights defenders.

Parliament cited the cases of many more journalists, human rights defenders and activists who were facing legal charges brought against them in Azerbaijan and noted that these cases follow in the wake of dozens of others affecting political activists, rights defenders, journalists, bloggers and social media activists, whom the authorities had imprisoned in the past two years on similarly trumped-up charges, including hooliganism, drug possession, tax evasion, and even treason.

Parliament recalled its resolution on Azerbaijan of 24 May 2012, and called on the Council to consider the possibility of t**argeted sanctions against those responsible for human rights violations,** should these persist.

Noting that the country would host the **European Olympic Games** to be held next year, Members called on the Council and Member States to urge the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to call on the Azerbaijani authorities to stop the crackdown, and make it clear that it expects Azerbaijan to uphold the Olympic Charter's requirement to respect press freedoms. Furthermore, they called on the EEAS to fully apply the EU guidelines on Human Rights Defenders and to **organise regular meetings at the EU Delegation in Baku with independent human rights organisations**, including by coordinating those meetings with EU Member State representations, and to use those meetings to express public support for the work of human rights defenders. The EEAS was asked to monitor closely all trials and judicial proceedings against human rights defenders and report on the matter to Parliament.

Members went on to note that Azerbaijan was a member of the Council of Europe and a signatory to the European Convention on Human Rights, but that the Azerbaijani authorities had not taken into account the opinions of the Council of Europe's European Commission for Democracy through Law (the Venice Commission) on the laws relating to freedom of association, political parties and protection from defamation and had not given due consideration to the findings of the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights in his visits to the country. They called on the Azerbaijani authorities to undertake, without further delay, the human rights reforms that were long overdue, including the many outstanding accession commitments Azerbaijan undertook when joining the Council of Europe, and to **comply with the judgements against Azerbaijan** that had been handed down by the European Court of Human Rights.

Parliament reaffirmed its position that EU support for the ongoing negotiations for a **Strategic Modernisation Partnership,** must be conditional on and include clauses relating to the protection and promotion of human rights, especially with regard to freedom of the media, including guarantees of internet freedom and of uncensored access to information and communication, freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of assembly. It stressed that **Parliament's consent to the signature**

of a partnership agreement with Azerbaijan would be conditional on the satisfactory reflection of the above-mentioned requirements, the release of human rights defenders, the withdrawal of legislation restricting the operations of independent civil society, and the cessation of repression and intimidation of NGOs, independent media, opposition forces, human rights defenders, minority rights activists and youth and social network activists.