Resolution on freedom of expression in Kazakhstan

2016/2607(RSP) - 10/03/2016 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the freedom of expression in Kazakhstan.

The text adopted in plenary was tabled by the EPP, S&D, ECR, ALDE, GUE/NGL, Greens/EFA and EFDD groups.

Parliament stressed its **concerns about the climate for media and free speech in Kazakhstan** and pointed out that freedom of speech for independent media, bloggers and individual citizens is a universal value that cannot be bargained away.

Concerned about the amendments to the Communications Law adopted in 2014, Members regretted the indiscriminate blocking of news, social media and other websites on the grounds that they feature unlawful content. They called on the Kazakh authorities to **quash the convictions of bloggers** and to ensure that any measure to restrict access to internet resources is based on law.

Parliament emphasised that the legitimate fight against terrorism and extremism should not be used as an excuse to ban opposition activity, hinder the freedom of expression or hamper the independence of the judiciary. It called on the Kazakh authorities to:

- release the opposition leader Vladimir Kozlov, who is currently being held under strict prison conditions, pending an independent and impartial review of his case;
- guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights activists and NGOs in Kazakhstan are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals;
- review the articles of the Criminal Code that can be used to criminalise lawful behaviour protected by human rights law, in particular Article 174 on ‘inciting social, national, clan, racial, class or religious discord’;
- implement fully the recommendations of the OSCE/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights before the next parliamentary elections in March 2016;
- implement the national torture prevention mechanism;
- commit to the achievements of the Sustainable Development Goals recently adopted at international level.

Parliament also highlighted the great interest the EU has in a sustainable relationship with Kazakhstan in terms of political and economic cooperation. It stressed that deeper political and economic relations with the EU as envisaged by the recently signed Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement must be b **ased on shared values and correspond to an active and concrete engagement by Kazakhstan to conduct political and democratic reforms** stemming from its international obligations and commitments.

The EU, and in particular on the European External Action Service, are called upon to **monitor closely developments in Kazakhstan**, to raise concerns with the Kazakh authorities where necessary, to offer assistance, and to report regularly to Parliament.