Resolution on the human rights situation in Kazakhstan

2021/2544(RSP) - 11/02/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 598 votes to 43, with 52 abstentions, a resolution on the human rights situation in Kazakhstan.

The text adopted in plenary had been tabled as a joint resolution by the EPP, S&D, Renew, Greens/EFA, ECR groups and The Left.

In 2015, the EU and Kazakhstan signed an Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA) aimed at providing a broad framework for reinforced political dialogue and cooperation in justice, home affairs and many other areas. This Agreement entered into full force on 1 March 2020 following its ratification by all Member States.

However, a worrying deterioration in the general situation of human rights and a crackdown on civil society organisations in Kazakhstan has been noted in the past weeks with harsh restrictions imposed on the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association.

Parliament urged the Government of Kazakhstan to:

- respect human rights and fundamental freedoms as enshrined in the EPCA;

- drop politically motivated charges and end all forms of arbitrary detention, reprisals and harassment against human rights activists, religious organisations, civil society organisations, trade unions, journalists and political opposition movements, and to allow people to freely express their political, religious and other views;

- immediately release and fully rehabilitate all political prisoners and lift without delay the measures of pre-trial detention and house arrest and the restrictions of liberty imposed on civil society and opposition activists, social media users and peaceful protesters;

- implement reforms aim at furthering the country’s modernisation, democracy and stability, to strengthen efforts to reform the political system of Kazakhstan so as to develop parliamentarism and a multi-party system, and to expand civic participation;

- eradicate torture and ill treatment in prisons, respect prisoners’ rights, and ensure proper living conditions, hygiene and a safe environment in terms of addressing the threats posed by COVID-19;

- introduce proper safeguards for personal data and strengthen data protection legislation, as well as to limit the use of invasive digital surveillance technologies and introduce a regulatory framework that clearly prohibits arbitrary and unlawful digital surveillance, including face recognition, in compliance with human rights;

- combat all forms of violence against women, including by criminalising domestic violence as a stand-alone offence, and ensure criminal sanctions against perpetrators;

- ensure the safety of ethnic Kazakhs and other minority groups who have fled China’s concentration camps;

- comply with its pledges of zero tolerance for torture and to ensure that any allegations of torture are fully investigated and those responsible brought to justice.

The EU and its Member States should support civil society and take additional measures to provide support to Kazakh civil society through the Commission, including but not limited to expanding financial grant schemes to civil society organisations that promote human rights, democratic values, the rule of law, and fundamental freedoms in Kazakhstan, especially human rights defenders, and to strengthen people-to-people contacts with the citizens of Kazakhstan.

Lastly, Parliament stressed that human rights should be at the top of the EU's engagement with Central Asia. The Commission and the VP/HR should carry out a comprehensive review of the EPCA in the light of the recent developments and the outcome of the trade policy review.