Resolution on the situation in Kazakhstan

2022/2505(RSP) - 20/01/2022 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 589 votes to 35, with 47 abstentions, a resolution on the situation in Kazakhstan.

The European Union and Kazakhstan have been partners since the country's independence in 1991. They signed an Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA) which entered into force on 1 March 2020.

On 2 January 2022, thousands of people started protesting peacefully in the city of Zhanaozen, opposing the government's decision to lift the price cap on liquefied petroleum gas, which led to a steep surge in prices. Protests rapidly spread to over 60 cities and localities, demanding genuine political change, fair elections and effective measures to tackle widespread corruption. Since the protests, the human rights situation in Kazakhstan has deteriorated immensely.

The Kazakh authorities initiated a widespread disinformation campaign, and an internet and media blockade to hide state involvement in violence against its own people. President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev also declared a nationwide state of emergency that includes a curfew, temporary restrictions on movement and a ban on mass gatherings and issued a 'shoot to kill' order against the protesters, whom he described as international terrorists.

Parliament strongly condemned the widespread acts of violence that erupted following peaceful protests in Kazakhstan and expressed its condolences to the victims and their families. It condemned the violations of fundamental freedoms and human rights committed by the Kazakh authorities against demonstrators, media workers and activists, including the indiscriminate use of lethal force by security forces.

The resolution condemned President Tokayev's inflammatory rhetoric, including his general portrayal of the protesters as 'terrorists', unsubstantiated and inflated claims of their numbers (allegedly around 20 000) and the threat to 'kill them'. He is urged to publicly cancel any order to shoot to kill without warning.

The Government of Kazakhstan is called on to:

- drop politically motivated charges and put an end to all forms of arbitrary detention, reprisals and harassment against human rights defenders, 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 arbitrarily detained demonstrators and activists;

- immediately release and fully rehabilitate all political prisoners;

- lift the measures mandating pre-trial detention, house arrest and restrictions on liberty imposed on civil society activists;

- revise the law on public assemblies to guarantee the right to peaceful protest in line with international standards without undue government interference or fear of harassment or politically motivated prosecution;

- publicly recognise and fully respect the importance and role of free media in Kazakhstan;

- refrain from bringing terrorism charges on the basis of overly broad interpretations of the term and to distinguish between peaceful protesters and those who used violence and committed crimes under international norms;

- revise the definition of extremism to bring it into line with Kazakhstan's international obligations.

Parliament called for a proper international investigation into the crimes committed against the people of Kazakhstan. It also urged the Kazakh government to consider setting up a permanent working group under the OSCE's auspices to assess whether the unrest was a result of foreign interference or internal power struggles, and to address the root cause of the unrest.

Lastly, Parliament called on the EU institutions and agencies, including the EEAS and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the World Bank to halt financing programmes in Kazakhstan until the government takes substantial and tangible efforts to improve its human rights record.