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MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

with request for inclusion in the agenda for a debate on cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law

pursuant to Rule 122 of the Rules of Procedure

on Azerbaijan
(2012/2654(RSP))

Gerben-Jan Gerbrandy, Marietje Schaake, Jan Mulder, Leonidas Donskis, Robert Rochefort, Ramon Tremosa i Balcells, Graham Watson, Johannes Cornelis van Baalen, Izaskun Bilbao Barandica, Sonia Alfano
on behalf of the ALDE Group

**European Parliament resolution on Azerbaijan
(2012/2654(RSP))**

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on the situation in Azerbaijan,
 - having regard to the ENP progress report on Azerbaijan of 16 May 2012,
 - having regard to European Parliament's recommendations to the Council, the Commission and the European External Action Service on the negotiations of the EU-Azerbaijan Association Agreement of 18 April 2012,
 - having regard to the Local EU Statement on journalist Idrak Abbasov,
 - having regard to the ongoing negotiations between the EU and Azerbaijan on the Association Agreement,
 - having regard to its Rule 122 (5) of the Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas Azerbaijan as a Council of Europe member state has committed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law,
- B. whereas on 22-26 May Azerbaijan will host the Eurovision Song Contest in Baku,
- C. whereas there are reports of forced evictions and violations of property rights by the Azerbaijani authorities, that are linked to Eurovision Song contest,
- D. whereas on 14 and 15 May 2012 peaceful protests demanding release of political

prisoners and respect to the freedom of assembly was broken up by police in Baku,

- E. whereas the use of violence against the peaceful protestors undermines commitments taken by Azerbaijan towards the EU and in the framework of the Council of Europe and Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE),
- F. whereas Idrak Abbasov, journalist of the 'Zerkalo' newspaper and the "Institute for the Freedom and Safety of Reporters", was brutally assaulted by the police and security guards of the state oil company SOCAR, when he was filming the demolition of houses in the Sulutapa settlement in Baku,
- G. whereas Khadija Ismaylova, an investigative journalist and the Radio Liberty Baku Bureau's correspondent was harassed and blackmailed due to the investigations into the business interests of President Aliyev's family,
- H. whereas press and media freedoms are often flouted, unrestricted access to the internet and digital freedom, including freedom of expression and assembly online, are under constant threat,
- I. whereas the Azerbaijani authorities have commenced a public anti-social media campaign portraying the use of the internet and social media as a form of bad citizenship, resulting in limited use of the internet by Azerbaijani, in particular women and girls,
- J. whereas Azerbaijan has a record of impunity for those harassing critical journalists, human rights defenders, bloggers, civil society and others seeking to express their opinions, investigate issues of public interest, or criticize government,
- K. whereas Elnur Mecedli, an activist and a prominent member of the opposition People's Front Party, has been released from jail May 16,
- L. whereas Azerbaijan refuses to grant a visa to the PACE Special Rapporteur on Political Prisoners,

M. whereas there have been threats from radical Salafi and pro-Iranian Islamist groups to disrupt the Eurovision Song Contest and target particularly persons belonging to the LGBT community,

1. Notes the determination of Azerbaijani authorities to use the Eurovision Song Contest in Baku to promote Azerbaijan; considers that violation of Azerbaijani citizens' rights and freedoms goes against this goal;
2. Calls on the Azerbaijani authorities to refrain from the use of violence to suppress the freedom of expression and assembly, as this is incompatible with Azerbaijan's commitments to democracy, human rights and the rule of law;
3. Strongly deplores the practice of intimidating, arresting, prosecuting and convicting independent journalists and political activists on various criminal charges;
4. Condemns the brutal assault of journalist Idrak Abbasov; deplores the campaign of blackmail and intimidation carried out against the investigative journalist Khadija Ismaylova;
5. Considers the cases of Idrak Abbasov and Khadija Ismaylova the latest examples of unacceptable pressure on journalists in Azerbaijan that run counter to the country's commitments to media freedom; calls on the authorities to ensure effective investigation of these incidents and prosecution of the perpetrators responsible for these attacks;
6. Calls on the Azerbaijani authorities to adhere to the recommendations of international organisations and civil society groups and ensure that journalists in Azerbaijan can operate in the environment that is free from violence, harassment and intimidation;
7. Concerned by the reports of the forced evictions and demolitions of buildings, as part of a major reconstruction plan in Baku, partly linked to the upcoming Eurovision Song Contest; calls on the Azerbaijani authorities to guarantee that the ongoing construction in Baku is in line with the relevant legislation and that resettlements of people are implemented with transparent legal procedures and with real market value compensation;
8. Welcomes the release from jail of Elnur Mécidli, a member of the opposition People's Front party; calls on the government of Azerbaijan to grant a visa to the PACE Special Rapporteur on Political Prisoners in order to allow him to undertake a visit to the country, in line with his mandate;
9. Calls on the Azerbaijani authorities to adopt the draft law on defamation which provides for the abolition of criminal liability for defamation and insult;
10. Calls on the Azerbaijani authorities to bring legislation on elections, freedom of assembly, freedom of association and media freedom in line with international standards and ensure its full implementation
11. Reiterates that digital freedoms, including uncensored access to information and communication and access to the internet (internet freedom), are universal rights and are

indispensable for human rights such as free expression and access to information, as well as for ensuring transparency and accountability in public life;

12. Urges Azerbaijani authorities to step up reform efforts in all aspects of the judicial system: prosecution, trial, sentencing, detention and appeals;

13. Calls on the High Representative Vice-President of the European Commission, the Council and the Commission to monitor closely the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Azerbaijan; warns against any possible crackdown on human rights activists, journalists and opposition politicians after the Eurovision Song Contest;

14. Strongly condemns the threats of radical Islamist organisations and individuals against the participants of the upcoming Eurovision Song Contest, particularly those belonging to the LGBT community; strongly supports the secular identity of Azerbaijan and its free choice of foreign policy orientation;

15. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Governments and Parliaments of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, the EEAS, the Council, the Commission, Council of Europe, PACE and the UN Human Rights Council.