

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2800/06

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to the Council

Subject: Azeri demonstrations in Iran

Iran is a country of cultural diversity. The population is made up of several ethnic groups. One of the largest is the Azeris. According to official statistics, they constitute 24%, i.e. 17 million, of the total population of Iran, whereas UN estimates put them at some 30 million, i.e. approximately 40% of the population of Iran. The official language of Iran is Persian. The Azeris' language, however, is closely related to Turkish and is non-Indo-European. Despite the fact that the Azeri community makes up such a large section of the population of Iran, it is subject to severe discrimination, as illustrated by the treatment of the Azeri writer, Abbas Lasani. A century of repression and discrimination recently triggered furious demonstrations in many parts of Iran. The spark that ignited the fury was a number of cartoons in which Azeris were likened to cockroaches. The regime responded to the demonstrations with brutal violence and accusations of 'separatism'. However, it cannot reasonably be construed as separatist for an ethnic group to insist on its dignity and demand its cultural rights. The forces fanning the flames of separatism are the regime which is violating people's rights and dignity.

What initiatives will the Council take to ensure that the cultural rights of Azeris in Iran are examined in the UN and other international bodies?