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TEXTS ADOPTED

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**P9\_TA(2022)0293**

**The situation in Tajikistan's Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province**

**European Parliament resolution of 7 July 2022 on the situation in Tajikistan's Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province (2022/2753(RSP))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Tajikistan,
- having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,
- having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,
- having regard to the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment,
- having regard to the 12th EU-Tajikistan annual Human Rights Dialogue,
- having regard to the EU statement on the latest developments in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region in Tajikistan at the OSCE Permanent Council No 1375 in Vienna of 26 May 2022,
- having regard to the joint statement of 18 May 2022 on Developments in GBAO from the Delegation of the European Union to Tajikistan and the Embassies of France, Germany, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America,
- having regard to the UN Special Rapporteurs' joint letter to the Government of Tajikistan of 11 March 2022,
- having regard to the statement of 20 May 2022 by the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues,
- having regard to the previous reports and statements of the UN Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights in Tajikistan,
- having regard to the UN Human Rights Council outcome of the Universal Periodic Review of Tajikistan adopted on 23 March 2022,
- having regard to Rules 144(5) and 132(4) of its Rules of Procedure,

- A. whereas protests erupted in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) in May 2022, following months of persecution of local residents after the protests of November 2021; whereas Tajik citizens in the GBAO were peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly in order to protest against abuses against their community when the law enforcement agencies initiated their violent crackdown;
- B. whereas on 25 November 2021, a group of law enforcement agents tortured and killed a young representative of the Pamiri minority, Gulbiddin Ziyobekov, who they accused of attacking a deputy prosecutor; whereas following his death, peaceful civilian protests took place, demanding an investigation into the circumstances of the killing, the withdrawal of most of the military troops stationed in Khorugh, the dismantling of the military checkpoints in Khorugh, and the removal of the newly appointed Governor Alisher Mirzonabotov; whereas, as a result, the police shot into a crowd, killing several protesters and injuring many others;
- C. whereas from November 2021 to May 2022, the government and the protest leaders tried to negotiate a resolution to the crisis; whereas on 16 May 2022, the protests started again as a reaction to the lack of an investigation into the killing of Gulbiddin Ziyobekov in November 2021;
- D. whereas the Tajik authorities claim the protests were organised by criminal groups with connections to terrorist organisations; whereas the police violently dispersed the protests, with military support deployed from the capital, Dushanbe; whereas on 18 May 2022, the Tajik authorities announced a special ‘anti-terrorism operation’ and reportedly used tear gas grenades and live ammunition against protesters;
- E. whereas human rights organisations have accused the Tajik authorities of violating basic human rights, as cases of torture of detainees, kidnapping and looting by law enforcement agencies have been reported; whereas several people were killed during the violent clashes, with reports of alleged extrajudicial killings; whereas the Tajik police detained a significant number of Gorno-Badakhshan locals in connection with the protests;
- F. whereas the independent media and civil society are increasingly being subjected to intimidation, arbitrary detention and attacks; whereas Ulfatkhonim Mamadshoeva, a prominent representative of the Pamiri minority, independent journalist and civil rights activist, was arbitrarily arrested and charged with the criminal offence of publicly calling for violence to force the government to change the constitutional order; whereas she faces up to 15 years’ imprisonment; whereas the police have categorised her case as ‘secret’, which makes monitoring it impossible;
- G. whereas freedom of the media and expression have been continually suppressed in the country since 2015, and the recent violence in the GBAO has further increased pressure on the media not to report on events, under threat of closure, or to report only the state-supported version of events, including smear campaigns against local residents; whereas a court in Dushanbe recently ordered two independent bloggers, Daleri Imomali and Abdullo Ghurbati, to be detained for two months pending trial on charges of cooperating with banned organisations and political parties and allegedly beating a police officer;

- H. whereas at least 13 members of the civil society organisation ‘Commission 44’, including the director of the Pamir Lawyers’ Association, Manuchehr Kholiknazarov, and Faromuz Irgashov and Khursand Mamadshoev, were detained on 28 and 29 May 2022 in the GBAO on trumped-up charges;
- I. whereas the central government cut internet and mobile connections in the GBAO in May; whereas connections had previously been cut in November and only partially restored in late March, leaving GBAO residents with no internet for four months; whereas this has made international civil society organisations’ communication with the region extremely difficult and has deprived the region’s population of their right to access information;
- J. whereas most of the population of the GBAO belong to a linguistic and religious minority; whereas the GBAO has traditionally been distinguished by its relatively strong and well-developed civil society and non-government sector; whereas since 2012, harassment and persecution by the Tajik authorities in the GBAO has periodically escalated to violent stand-offs between the population and the military; whereas under the current president, Emomali Rahmon, the autonomous region has gradually come under the complete control of the Tajik authorities through the purging of local leaders from government and the suppression of civil society and journalists in particular;
- K. whereas the GBAO is the poorest region in Tajikistan, with the highest unemployment rate, and suffers from an unequal distribution of income from the exploitation of precious stone mines, the main natural resource of the province; whereas the GBAO has been severely hit economically by Russia’s illegal, unjustified and unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine and the subsequent economic sanctions;
1. Deeply regrets the loss of life in the GBAO and strongly condemns the Tajik authorities’ violent crackdown on protesters, journalists, bloggers, lawyers and activists in November 2021 and May 2022 for expressing their opinion and protesting peacefully; expresses its grave concerns about the deteriorating human rights situation in the GBAO;
  2. Urges the Government of Tajikistan to respect and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including people’s right to life, peaceful assembly, freedom of association, freedom of expression and freedom of the media, in the GBAO and in the rest of the country, in line with international law; calls on the Tajik authorities to refrain from excessive use of force against protesters and from targeted harassment of residents of the GBAO;
  3. Condemns all attempts to intimidate media workers, human rights defenders, independent lawyers and civil society, or interfere with their legitimate work, and calls on the Tajik authorities to stop all harassment against them, so they can carry out their work without any hindrance or fear of reprisals;
  4. Calls on the Tajik authorities to immediately release those who have been arbitrarily detained and to drop all charges against them, as well as to stop the political persecution of human rights defenders and influential supporters of the protesters, including Ulfatkhonim Mamadshoeva, Daleri Imomali, Abdullo Ghurbati, Manuchehr Kholiknazarov, Faromuz Irgashov, Khursand Mamadshoev, Chorshanbe Chorshanbiev and Amriddin Alovatshoev;

5. Calls on the Tajik authorities to immediately set up an effective and independent investigation into the violent clashes in the GBAO during and after the May 2022 and November 2021 protests, in particular into the use of force by law enforcement representatives, the deaths of civilians and the reports about the alleged acts of torture by the security forces, including alleged extrajudicial killings of peaceful protesters and regular residents of several GBAO villages, as well as the killing of Gulbiddin Ziyobekov that occurred on 25 November 2021, as peacefully demanded by the protesters; insists that all those responsible be brought to justice and that the victims be compensated;
6. Stresses the importance of the right to a fair trial and calls on the Tajik authorities to stop classifying investigations and prosecutions as ‘secret’; urges the Tajik authorities to give defence lawyers and activists fair, open and transparent trials, to provide substantive protections and procedural guarantees, in accordance with Tajikistan’s international obligations, and to authorise the reinvestigation by international organisations of all reported violations of human rights and dignity; insists that all those detained in connection with the protests and situation in the GBAO must be protected from torture and ill treatment, have free and unimpeded access to a lawyer of their own choice and to independent doctors and be free to communicate with their family members, in accordance with international law; recalls that the admission of guilt obtained under torture in any proceeding violates the rights to due process and a fair trial and is prohibited without exception;
7. Urges the Tajik authorities to fully restore communications and full internet access in the GBAO to ensure that residents are able to access information, and to refrain from cutting communication links in the future; calls on the Tajik authorities to stop spreading disinformation about the protests and developments in the GBAO on state television;
8. Urges the Tajik authorities to allow immediate, unlimited and unconditional access to the GBAO, including its Rushon District, to international humanitarian and human rights organisations so they can monitor the situation, document human rights violations and provide assistance to the victims; calls on the Tajik authorities to open invitations to all UN Special Rapporteurs and implement the recommendations of international and regional bodies, including those of a group of UN Special Rapporteurs issued in March 2022;
9. Calls on the Tajik authorities to reopen access to the GBAO for residents, to keep transport routes open to the whole region and to make every effort to stop a humanitarian crisis from unfolding there by providing goods and medical care for the population;
10. Calls on Tajikistan to address the concerns of GBAO residents in good faith and to engage in a constructive dialogue with the residents of the GBAO and civil society representatives, such as ‘Commission 44’, in order to achieve a sustainable settlement and peaceful future for the region, as well as to implement conflict prevention measures that meet international human rights standards;
11. Echoes the calls of the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Fernand de Varennes, for an end to be put to the repression of the Pamiri minority in the GBAO and for their protection; recalls the importance of implementing international standards on

non-discrimination and the protection of indigenous and minority populations in Tajikistan, including in the areas of education, health, culture and business;

12. Emphasises that the legitimate fight against terrorism and violent extremism should not be used as a pretext to suppress opposition activity, hinder freedom of expression or hamper the independence of the judiciary; recalls that the fundamental freedoms of all Tajik citizens must be guaranteed, as well as the rule of law;
13. Reiterates that the free and independent work of civil society organisations and the media is a cornerstone of any democratic society; calls, therefore, on the Commission, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Member States to increase support for civil society, independent non-governmental organisations, human rights defenders and the independent media active in Tajikistan, including funding and emergency visas for those in need of protection;
14. Calls on the EU delegation and the national diplomatic representations in Tajikistan to closely monitor the situation and trials in situ, to publicly raise cases of human rights defenders, to support victims of human rights violations and to ensure that independent investigations take place;
15. Calls on the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR) and on the Member States to continuously raise the issue of human rights in Tajikistan and the GBAO at international organisations, such as the UN; calls on the Tajik authorities to ensure proper follow-up to and implementation of the Universal Periodic Review outcome recommendations;
16. Calls for the UN and the EU to closely monitor the implementation of the rule of law in Tajikistan, especially the freedoms of assembly, association and expression, even in security-related crisis situations; calls on the EU delegation in Dushanbe to continue to play an active role in resolving this crisis; calls on the VP/HR and the EEAS to raise these concerns with the Tajik authorities, in particular as part of the next EU-Tajikistan Human Rights Dialogue, and to take all necessary diplomatic measures to effectively enhance respect for human rights by Tajikistan's authorities;
17. Asks the Council, the EEAS and the Commission to mainstream human rights and civil society consultations across any dialogues between the EU, its Member States and Tajikistan, as well as to live up to the EU's commitment to gender mainstreaming;
18. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Council, the Commission, the EU Special Representative for Central Asia, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the UN Human Rights Council, and the President, Government and Parliament of Tajikistan.