

The European Parliament denounces human rights regression in Kazakhstan

Brussels 19 April 2013. In a resolution **adopted yesterday**, the European Parliament denounces the recent human rights deterioration in Kazakhstan and expresses its support for the victims of attempts to reign in free speech and political pluralism. International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR) welcomes the Parliament's attention to this issue and **urges the EU and its member states to use all available tools to actively and consistently push for an end to the crackdown on political opposition, media and civil society in Kazakhstan**, acting upon the Parliament's recommendations and the EU's commitments on human rights in external relations.

The European Parliament resolution, which was adopted as an urgency resolution, points to the "decline in respect for fundamental freedoms" seen in Kazakhstan in the last two years and the "overt crackdown on government critics" in the wake of the December 2011 violence in the city of Zhanaozen. Among others, the Parliament:

- criticizes court bans imposed on the opposition Alga party and key independent media outlets on the grounds of extremism;
- reiterates concerns over the criminal prosecution and unfair trials of opposition activists, journalists and civil society actors;
- calls for the release of individuals imprisoned on "vague criminal charges which could be considered to be politically motivated," referring in particular to Alga party leader Vladimir Kozlov, human rights defender Vadim Kuramshin and oil strike activist Roza Tuletaeva; and
- emphasizes that "the legitimate fight against terrorism and extremism should not be used as an excuse to ban opposition activity, hinder freedom of expression or hamper the independence of the judiciary."

Stressing the EU's commitment to supporting Kazakhstan in creating a free speech tolerant climate, the European Parliament:

- calls on the EU and its member states to "seek guarantees that protect journalists, opposition activists and human rights defenders and their families, and in particular those visiting EU institutions to discuss human rights issues, against any kind of subsequent personal threats, pressures or prosecution";
- advocates a strengthening of the annual human rights dialogues held by the EU with Kazakhstan, underlining that these should be effective and results-oriented and involve civil society actors;
- calls in particular on the European External Action Service (the EU's foreign affairs department) to closely monitor human rights developments in Kazakhstan and raise concerns with the authorities of the country; and
- asks for a "more proactive role" by the EU delegation in Astana with respect to trial observation, prison visits and other human rights monitoring.

The European Parliament resolution reflects major concerns raised by human rights NGOs, including IPHR and partners (a recent overview of human rights concerns compiled by IPHR together with Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law is available [here](#)). IPHR urges

relevant EU institutions and EU member states to take effective measures to help put an end to the ongoing campaign against free speech and alternative views in Kazakhstan, in accordance with the Parliament's resolution and EU commitments on human rights promotion in external policies. **The EU should integrate systematic efforts to promote fundamental rights into all its relations with Kazakhstan and use negotiations on an enhanced EU-Kazakhstan partnership and cooperation agreement to push for concrete improvements with respect to addressing the concerns identified by the European Parliament.** In this way, the EU should ensure that progress on the negotiations on the new agreement depends on Kazakhstan's progress on political and human rights reform, as also previously requested by the European Parliament and pledged by the European External Action Service.