



***JOINT STATEMENT BY THE CIVIC SOLIDARITY PLATFORM AND THE
INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP GROUP FOR AZERBAIJAN (IPGA)***

ON THE ARRESTS OF DEMONSTRATORS ON 26 JANUARY 2013

ADDRESSED TO THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

30 January 2013

The Civic Solidarity Platform and the International Partnership Group for Azerbaijan (IPGA) condemn the harsh response by the Azerbaijani authorities to recent protests in the country, and call on the Council of Europe to ensure Azerbaijan respects its human rights obligations as a member state.

Social tensions in Azerbaijan have risen in recent days. On Wednesday, 23 January 2013, the town of Ismayilli was shaken by protests and on Saturday, 26 January 2013, hundreds of people demonstrated in the capital Baku to express solidarity with recent protests across the country. This social unrest was triggered by widespread corruption.

The Baku assembly was brutally dispersed by the police and around 50 demonstrators were arrested. Among them were the prominent blogger Emin Milli, the human rights defender and Rafto Prize winner Malahat Nasibova, the human rights lawyer Intigam Aliyev, as well as the investigative journalist, Fritt Ord Foundation and ZEIT Foundation award winner Khadija Ismayilova.

The highest penalty was imposed on Emin Milli who was sentenced to administrative detention for 15 days. Abulfaz Gurbanli, Chairman of Azerbaijan Popular Front Party (APFP) Youth Committee, Turkel Azerturk, and Tunjay Guliyev, members of this Committee, and Rufat Abdullayev, NIDA Movement member, received 13 days of administrative detention. After a couple of hours the rest of the detainees were released, though some were fined as much as €2,500 for taking part in an unsanctioned peaceful demonstration under recently adopted draconian restrictions on freedom of peaceful assembly. Fines were imposed on 20 demonstrators.

Recent amendments to the law on assemblies significantly increased the fines for organizers and participants of illegal demonstrations, which is worryingly similar to recent legislative amendments in the Russian Federation. The new law increased fines for participation in illegal demonstrations to 500 to 1,000 manat (approx 500 to 1,000 EUR), and mandated fines of 1,500 to 3,000 manats (approx. 1,500 to 3,000 EUR) for organizers who are ordinary citizens, and from 3,000 to 6,000 manats (3,000 to 6,000 EUR) if the organizer is an official.

On Wednesday, 23 January 2013, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) rejected the report comprising the list of political prisoners in Azerbaijan prepared by Christoph Strässer. Many of the Azerbaijani activists who were detained or fined were present at the Assembly in Strasbourg or commented on it in blogs and newspapers.

Another resolution regarding Azerbaijan's commitments as a member of Council of the Europe, which was successfully adopted by PACE last Wednesday, 23 January 2013, stated that "recently adopted amendments to the Criminal Code and the Administrative Code, which have increased penalties for the organisers of, and participants in, "unauthorised" gatherings raise concern. Considering the authorities' ongoing blanket ban on protests in Baku city centre, these amendments are likely to have a further negative impact on freedom of assembly and freedom of expression."

The Civic Solidarity Platform and the IPGA condemn the arrests of participants in the peaceful protest in Baku. We call upon the international community to demand that the Azerbaijani authorities stop punishing critical voices, including those of human rights defenders and journalists. The Azerbaijani authorities should guarantee special protection for human rights defenders, who play a crucial role in monitoring assemblies and assisting detained demonstrators. Journalists exercising their professional duty should not be targeted as their role as watchdog is vital in a democratic society.

We particularly call on the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Nils Muižnieks, to highlight the problem of the detention of demonstrators during his upcoming visit to Azerbaijan.

We call on the CoE Committee of Ministers to undertake a serious debate on the participation of Azerbaijan in the Council of Europe, particularly ahead of its chairmanship which is scheduled for May-November 2013.

The Civic Solidarity Platform calls on the European Parliament to adopt a resolution on these recent detentions in Azerbaijan during the plenary session scheduled for 4-7 February 2013.



Albanian Helsinki Committee



Article 19



Belarusian Helsinki Committee



Belarusian Human Rights House in exile, Vilnius



Bulgarian Helsinki Committee



Centre for Civil Liberties (Ukraine)



Centre for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights (Russia)



Center for National and International Studies (CNIS),
Baku, Azerbaijan



Citizen Army Law (Russia)

CRUDE ACCOUNTABILITY

Crude Accountability

Freedom Files

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Georgian Young Lawyers' Association



Golos Svobody (Kyrgyzstan)



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Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Poland)

Human Rights Centre of Azerbaijan



Human Rights Club (Azerbaijan)



Human Rights House Foundation



Human Rights Monitoring Institute (Lithuania)



Index on Censorship



Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety (Azerbaijan)



International Partnership for Human Rights (Belgium)



Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights



Kharkiv Regional Foundation "Public Alternative"



Legal Transformation Centre (Belarus)



Media Diversity Institute



Moscow Helsinki Group



Netherlands Helsinki Committee



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