



Mr Donald Tusk  
President of the European Council  
Rue de la Loi  
B-1048 Brussels  
Belgium

17 June 2015

Dear Mr Tusk,

As members of the Sport for Rights campaign, supported by the undersigned Members of the European Parliament, we are writing regarding your plans to visit Baku, Azerbaijan this week. We believe that visiting at this time, amidst the country's worst human rights crackdown to date, would send the wrong message about the EU's seriousness to defend human rights. We urge you to postpone your visit, and to call for the immediate and unconditional release of the country's jailed journalists and human rights defenders.

In the run-up to the European Games, the Azerbaijani authorities worked aggressively to silence all forms of criticism and dissent. As a result, there are now dozens of political prisoners in Azerbaijan, including eight journalists and five human rights defenders, as outlined in the appendix. As written by jailed Azerbaijani journalist Khadija Ismayilova in a letter smuggled out of prison just last week, "Azerbaijan is in the midst of a human rights crisis. Things have never been worse".

We call your attention to the statement of 28 May signed by members of all political groups of the European Parliament.<sup>1</sup> We strongly agree with the call of these MEPs for "all Members of the Council and the Commission not to attend any official events or ceremonies around the European Games to be held in Baku before all human rights defenders, opposition figures, activists, journalists and political prisoners are unconditionally released from detention".

Travelling to Azerbaijan during the ongoing European Games would go against this call by the European Parliament, and would effectively serve as a political endorsement of the ruling regime and the widespread human rights violations it is carrying out. The Azerbaijani government is using the games in an attempt to distract attention from the dire human rights situation in the country. We urge you not to allow the EU to become part of this cover-up, and to take this opportunity instead to show that the EU values human rights in its relations with Azerbaijan.

Sincerely yours,

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.marietjeschaake.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Joint-Statement-Azerbaijan.pdf>

Marietje Schaake, Member of the European Parliament (ALDE)

Ulrike Lunacek, Member of the European Parliament (Greens/EFA)

Marie-Christine Vergiat, Member of the European Parliament (GUE/NGL)

Róza Gräfin von Thun und Hohenstein, Member of the European Parliament (EPP)

Kati Piri, Member of the European Parliament (S&D)

Ignazio Corrao, Member of the European Parliament (EFDD)

Thomas Hughes, Executive Director, ARTICLE 19

Robert Hårdh, Executive Director, Civil Rights Defenders

Nina Ognianova, Europe and Central Asia Program Coordinator, Committee to Protect Journalists

Mary Lawlor, Executive Director, Front Line Defenders

Jodie Ginsberg, Chief Executive Officer, Index on Censorship

Karim Lahidji, President, International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

Simon Papuashvili, Project Coordinator, International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR)

Petra Havlikova, Project Coordinator of the Women's Rights Are Human Rights Program, NESEHNUTI

Harry Hummel, Executive Director, Netherlands Helsinki Committee

Karin Karlekar, Director, Free Expression Program, PEN American Centre

Ivana Skalova, Head of the Eastern European Program, Center for Human Rights and Democracy, People In Need

Emma Hughes, Strategy Director, Platform

Joanna Furmaga, Chairperson, Polish Green Network

Yulia Slutskaia, Director, Solidarity with Belarus Information Office

Gerald Staberock, Secretary General, World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

## APPENDIX: LIST OF JAILED JOURNALISTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

### *Jailed journalists:*

1. **Nijat Aliyev** – editor-in-chief of the website azadxeber.az, serving a 10-year prison sentence on spurious charges of drug possession and the illegal import and sale of religious literature.
2. **Araz Guliyev** – editor of the website xeber44.com, serving an eight-year prison sentence on spurious charges of illegal possession of weapons, inciting hatred, and offensive action against the flag or emblem of Azerbaijan.
3. **Parviz Hashimli** – *Bizim Yol* newspaper reporter and editor of the moderator.az website, serving an eight-year prison sentence on spurious charges of organising the sale of weapons from Iran.
4. **Seymur Hezi** – *Azadliq* newspaper reporter and presenter of the Azerbaijan Hour satellite television programme, serving a five-year prison sentence on spurious hooliganism charges.
5. **Khadija Ismayilova** – Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty journalist detained on spurious charges of embezzlement, illegal entrepreneurship, tax evasion, abuse of power, and inciting someone to attempt suicide.
6. **Hilal Mammadov** – editor-in-chief of *Tolishi Sedo* newspaper, serving a five-year prison sentence on spurious charges of drug possession, treason, and inciting hatred.
7. **Rauf Mirkadirov** – *Zerkalo* newspaper columnist, detained on spurious treason charges, awaiting trial.
8. **Tofiq Yagublu** – *Yenu Musavat* newspaper columnist, serving a five-year prison sentence on spurious charges of organising mass riots and using violence against police officers.

### *Jailed human rights defenders:*

1. **Intigam Aliyev** – human rights lawyer and Chairman of the Legal Education Society, serving a 7.5-year prison sentence on spurious charges of tax evasion, illegal entrepreneurship, and abuse of power.
2. **Rasul Jafarov** – Chairman of the Human Rights Club, serving a 6.5-year prison sentence on spurious charges of tax evasion, illegal entrepreneurship, and abuse of power.
3. **Anar Mammadli** – Chairman of the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Centre, serving a 5.5-year prison sentence on spurious charges of tax evasion, illegal entrepreneurship, and abuse of power.
4. **Arif Yunus** – historian and academic, detained on spurious charges of treason and fraud, awaiting trial.
5. **Leyla Yunus** – Director of the Institute for Peace and Democracy, detained on spurious charges of treason, fraud, forgery, tax evasion, and illegal entrepreneurship, awaiting trial.