



21 April 2014

Side Event at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

For a Europe without political prisoners: The case of Azerbaijan

When: Tuesday 21 April 2015, 13:00 – 14:00

Where: Strasbourg, Council of Europe, Palais de l'Europe, room 5

Hosts: Norwegian Helsinki Committee, European Stability Initiative, International Federation for Human Rights, Forum 18

Sponsor: Tiny Kox (The Netherlands)

Join us for a discussion of the role of the Council of Europe (CoE) in addressing Azerbaijan's grave violations of the European Convention on Human Rights. We will update you on latest developments in the country and present suggestions for action. You will also meet Dinara Yunus whose parents Levla and Arif Yunus, prominent members of Azerbaijani civil society, have been kept in prison since last August.

During its CoE Chairmanship in 2014, Azerbaijan imprisoned and sentenced to long prison terms the country's leading human rights defenders and dissidents. Many of them have been valued interlocutors for PACE and other Council of Europe institutions. Credible estimates put the number of political prisoners in Azerbaijan currently at more than 90. Among them are also representatives of religious communities. Azerbaijan also tightened NGO legislation, making any independent work impossible.

Just last Friday, leading human rights defender Rasul Jafarov was convicted to 6.5 years of imprisonment on politically motivated charges. He ran the "Sing for Democracy campaign" before the Eurovision contest in Baku in 2012 and last year initiated a similar campaign – "Sports for Rights" – to raise awareness of the repression of civil society in Azerbaijan ahead of the European Games in June 2015.

Speakers:

- Nils Muiznieks, Commissioner for Human Rights
- Tiny Kox, Member of PACE (The Netherlands)
- Pieter Omtzigt, Member of PACE (The Netherlands)
- Souhayr Belhassen, FIDH Honorary President, Laureate of the North-South Prize of the Council of Europe: Crackdown on human rights defenders intensifies as Baku Games approach
- Alexandra Stiglmayer, European Stability Initiative, Senior Analyst: How the Council of Europe can restore its credibility
- Dinara Yunus, daughter of political prisoners Leyla and Arif Yunus, Azerbaijan
- John Kinahan, Forum 18: Behind the tolerance façade: Freedom of religion or belief restricted

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