News | 29.03.2012

Eurovision and Human Rights

Singing for Democracy in Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan is determined to boost its international image and portray itself as a modern European country by hosting this year's Eurovision Song Contest in Baku in May. Yet at the same time, reports on human rights violations are spreading across Europe and attracting much media coverage. Green MEP **Ulrike Lunacek** organised a press conference this morning with Azeri human rights activists who wish to highlight the poor human rights record in their country ahead of the contest. The speakers stressed that they were not calling for a boycott of the contest, but quite the opposite. They wished to give a warm welcome to all those who would travel and asked that reporters not be dazzled by the official actions of the ruling president's family and instead see how the rest of the country's families live and report on the reality of life in their country.

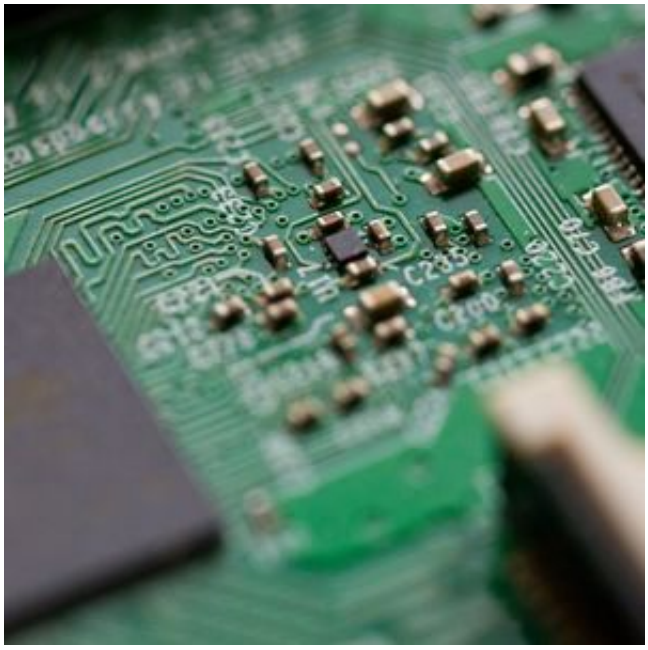


One of the ways the speakers hope to apply pressure on the government is through "Sing for Democracy" (www.singfordemocracy.org). This campaign is using the time before the Eurovision Song contest to raise awareness about human rights violations, hoping to improve the situation in favour of a more sustainable human rights record in Azerbaijan. **Ulrike Luncacek** welcomed the activists and journalists saying: *"Human rights, democracy, the freedom of press, expression and assembly are essential goods and core European values. By hosting our Azeri guests today in the European Parliament, I want to send a message of support to human rights activists in Azerbaijan, and also to the Azeri government, to have the courage to promote and protect these fundamental rights. As a member of the Delegation to the EU-Azerbaijan Parliamentary Cooperation Committee I will be closely following the human rights situation in Azerbaijan also after Eurovision."* She was joined by **Khadija Ismayilova**, an award winning journalist who has exposed several cases of high level corruption in the country. Ms. Ismayilova was the subject of a smear campaign and some MEPs also recently signed a letter on this issue to the President and Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan as well as to EU HR/VP Catherine Ashton. Also participating were **Rasul Jafarov** from the Sing for Democracy campaign; **Vugar Gojayev**, one of Azerbaijan's leading human rights defenders and Director of Human Rights House Azerbaijan and Parvana Persiani, a social media activist who tweets President Aliyev every day on rights issues and social concerns.

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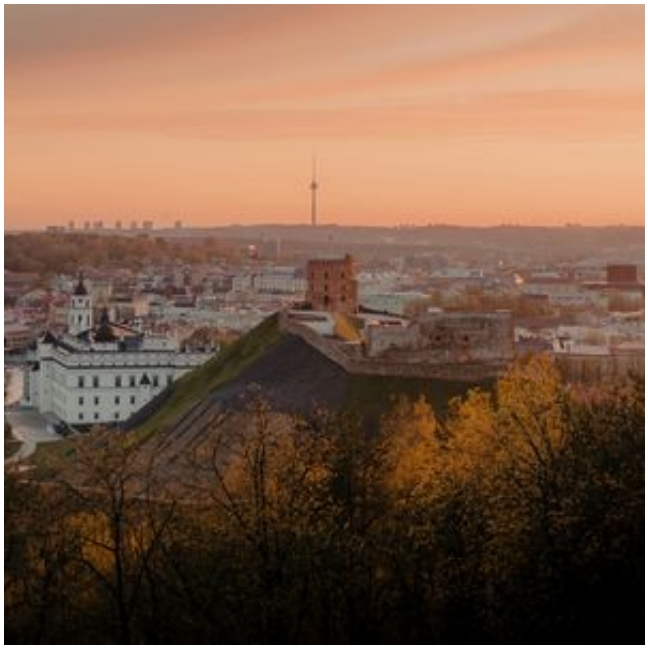
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Ulrike Lunacek

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