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ENLARGEMENT AND EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY

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Mr Elmar Brok, MEP
Ms Barbara Lochbihler, MEP
Ms Ana Gomes, MEP
Mr Richard Howitt, MEP
Ms Nicole Kiil-Nielsen, MEP
Mr Jo Leinen, MEP
Ms Ulrike Lunacek, MEP
Ms Marietje Schaake, MEP
Mr Andrey Kovatchev, MEP
Ms Monica Macovei, MEP
European Parliament
Rue Wiertz 60
1047 Brussels

Dear Members of the European Parliament,

Thank you for your letter of 16 March in which you raise the issue of the lack of respect for human rights in Azerbaijan, referring in particular to the case of the correspondent of Radio Liberty's Azerbaijan Office, Ms Khadija Ismail.

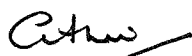
Ms Ismail appears to be the victim of blackmailing and a defamation campaign. The way in which this attack was carried out is particularly shocking. In its statement of 16 March the European Union expressed its deep concern over this intimidation campaign and welcomed the authorities' decision to take all necessary measures to investigate this shameful act.

The lack of freedom of expression in Azerbaijan is indeed a source of concern. The European Union has conveyed this concern to the Azerbaijani side through regular communication channels, including at the highest level. We agreed that this would also be high on the agenda of discussions with Azerbaijani authorities during Commissioner Füle's recent visit to Baku on 2-4 April and a speech addressed to Euronest in the presence of 37 Colleagues from the European Parliament. During this very visit Commissioner also met with Ms Ismail in person, who gave us first-hand information about her case.

We continue to believe that the upcoming Eurovision Song Contest in May in Baku offers a possibility for the Azerbaijani authorities to show progress in the implementation of Azerbaijan's commitments towards the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the EU.

Furthermore, as you know, the European Neighbourhood Policy Progress Report on Azerbaijan, to be released in April as part of a broader ENP package, will take into account the concerns mentioned above, as well as a possible response of the authorities (or the lack thereof).

Yours sincerely,


Catherine Ashton


Štefan Füle