

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT



MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Dear Madame Ashton,

As the world celebrates the International Women's Day, Ms. Khadija Ismail, Radio Liberty Azerbaijan Bureau's correspondent and radio host, has received her own very particular "gift": a package with 6 pictures of an intimate nature and a note that contained insulting, derogatory language and a clear warning to stop her journalistic activities or face the consequences.

We believe this is an outrageous act of blackmail and intimidation directly related to her professional activities. Ms. Ismail is a courageous journalist, who frequently investigates and reports on high-level corruption in Azerbaijan, including the finances and assets of President Ilham Aliyev and his close associates. This is not the first time Ismail has been subject to attempts to silence her because of her work. She has been interrogated by police on several occasions and has been the subject of slander campaigns in pro-government media.

Azerbaijan consistently scores at the bottom of surveys on democracy and freedom in the world. The murder of another investigative journalist Elmar Huseynov committed seven years ago is still unsolved. The climate of violence against journalists and impunity for their attackers is a major factor contributing to Azerbaijan's dismal performance as far as democracy, accountability and transparency are concerned.

Azerbaijan is a neighbour of the European Union and part of the Eastern Partnership initiative, designed to forge closer links with the EU's Eastern European neighbours on the basis of shared values. We urge you, therefore, to raise the issue of Khadija Ismail, and; more broadly, the situation of the freedom of expression in Azerbaijan, with the Azerbaijani government. The government of Azerbaijan, and President Ilham Aliyev personally, should be taken to task to ensure the safety of Khadija Ismail and create environment for the journalists and human rights defenders to carry out their work free from intimidation, blackmail and violence.

Sincerely yours,

Elmar Brok

Barbara Lochbihler

Ana Gomes

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Richard Howitt

Richard Howitt

Nicole Kiil-Nielsen

Nicole Kiil-Nielsen

Jo Leinen

Jo Leinen

Ulrike Lunacek

Ulrike Lunacek

Marietje Schaake

Marietje Schaake

Andrey Kovatchev

Andrey Kovatchev

MOHICA MAEOVEI

Mohica Maovei