



FREE EUROPE EMBRACES THE UZBEK DICTATOR?

Statement by activists and friends of civil society in Uzbekistan

On January 24, President Islam Karimov will visit Brussels, where he plans to meet with the leadership of the European Union and NATO. Meanwhile, the Belgian Foreign Ministry issued a statement that neither official talks with member of the Belgian Government nor an audience with King Albert II. We learned about this visit not from press releases of the EU and the governments of Belgium, but through private channels. Only a few days ago, the website of the President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso posted the headline :

Meeting with the President of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov which, in turn, links to the biography of Islam Karimov posted by the Uzbek government's website. The reader can get the following information about Karimov from this 'biography':

'For his outstanding contribution to education in Uzbekistan, creation of a state based on democratic laws, guarantee of civil peace and national accord, and for courage, I. Karimov was awarded the title Hero of Uzbekistan and the awards Mustakillik (Independence) and Amir Temur.'

This is **propaganda** pure and simple, and President Barroso's website provided a link to this propaganda.

After we made this public, the Public Affairs Unit of the European Commission deleted the above mentioned link from the Commissioner's web site.

In regard to this, we are concerned by the following three circumstances.

First, EU relations with the Karimov regime seem to be **at odds with EU principles of openness**. One gets the impression that the EU is borrowing elements from the dictator's own principles for ruling – of opacity and secrecy.

Second, flirting with the dictator of Uzbekistan, the EU sets a **dangerous precedent**. If the EU has a visit with Karimov, who will they receive next to discuss 'water-energy issues' or the like? Alexander Lukashenko, Robert Mugabe, Kim Jong Il, Than Shwe?

Finally, we are concerned that the attitude of EU leaders towards Karimov during the visit will be **complimentary**, and that the EU will miss the opportunity to impress upon the regime the need to improve its human rights record.

Here is only a brief list of human rights abuses committed by the Karimov regime that we wish to bring to the attention of EU leaders :

1. In May 2005, government troops opened fire on protesters in **Andijan**, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of civilians, among them women, children, and the elderly. Resolution № 60/174 «The situation of human rights in Uzbekistan," adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 16, 2005, speaks of the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force by government troops to quell the demonstrations in Andijan. Assessments by the European Union, also, in the beginning, were quite critical – as indicated by their imposition of sanctions against Uzbekistan. But in 2008, the sanctions were essentially lifted under the pretext of their being counter-productive. But the same document, which ended the sanctions, at the same time, imposed sanctions against Burma. Where is the logic and consistency in the position of the European Council?

The brutal suppression of protesters in Andijan did not stop with the shooting at the demonstrations. Hundreds of citizens, participants, and witnesses to the events were arrested, tortured and convicted in closed court proceedings, in which they were not granted access to a proper defense. There is also evidence of the practice of **mass extrajudicial executions and of death in detention as a result of torture in Andijan**. The government has used medical facilities as a space for interrogation and torture.

The ruling regime still discriminates against the families of Andijan refugees who have been granted asylum in the West. Many refugees have left behind their children and spouses. The Andijan authorities prohibit those who remained in the city, to leave the country and reunite with their relatives. This also violates their right to travel, choice of residence, and private, family life.

We are already receiving information from Uzbekistan that security officials have paid visits to the relatives of refugees now living in Sweden and other European countries, threatening them with reprisals, should the refugees sign a petition or participate in a demonstration protesting Karimov's visit to Brussels.

2. Uzbekistan pledged to implement the main UN conventions on human rights, however, the widespread and **systematic practice of torture** continues throughout the country. It is impossible to investigate torture cases, as the court is beholden to the executive branch of government, as is the medical establishment, including local forensic expertise, which is fully under the control of the secret services. Victims of torture are virtually deprived of the opportunity to undergo an objective examination that would be recognized by the courts.

Law enforcement agencies and prison authorities generally use torture as a means of extracting confessions for both real and imaginary offenses, as well as to intimidate. The principle of presumption of innocence is not honored. The basis for verdicts often is the self-incrimination of defendants, who are pressured, during investigation to make false confessions. There are incidents of rape of women in police stations and prisons. Inmates are increasingly dying from torture, abuse, and denial of medical care, particularly if they are convicted for political reasons.

The systematic practice of torture is a result of the tacit acquiescence and encouragement of this method by the central government, personally by Islam Karimov, who has mastered the vocabulary of violence against his own people. The judges dismiss claims by defendants that they have been tortured during interrogations. Lawyers do not have ready access to suspects. The political leadership of the country has never publicly condemned the practice of torture.

3. There is no **freedom of expression** in the country and those who are trying to exercise their natural right to freedom of expression are victims of political persecution. Over the past five years, 145 human rights defenders and independent journalists have been persecuted. 38 civil society activists are still in prison where they are subject to abuse.

4. There is no **freedom of religion** in Uzbekistan. The state systematically interferes in the affairs of religious believers and religious communities, exposes them to persecution, punishes any who deviate from the officially sanctioned doctrine of Islam, without making the distinction between moderate and radical religious movements.

5. There is rampant **censorship of the media**, as well as a lack of independent media. Uzbekistan is recognized as one of their worst enemies of the Internet, and many independent publications on the web are blocked. Members of the international media are denied accreditation to work in the country and report on the inner life of the country. Were it not for civil society activists, the world would remain completely ignorant of the country's problems. At the same time the official information from the country is based on lies and functions as state propaganda.

6. Islam Karimov has stayed **in power for 21 years**, and has, in fact, usurped it. Every single extension of the length of the presidential term, as stated in the Constitution, has expired. The sole and absolute power Karimov holds and the security agencies, unaccountable to the public, on which his power relies, have led to large scale corruption, linking the authorities with organized crime. The consequences of such a system – was demonstrated by the situation in neighboring Kyrgyzstan. We should not passively wait for what has happened recently in **Tunisia**, where a popular uprising ousted dictator Ben Ali.

Taking advantage of his limitless power, Karimov encourages his siblings and close relatives, as well as his inner coterie to plunder the country's wealth. The president's daughter has **robbed the country** of its wealth, which she has taken out of the country, leaving its population behind living in poverty, spending hundreds of millions of dollars on shopping sprees in Europe, buying luxury villas, and hobnobbing with the wealthy elite. Unfortunately, the current EU policy of flirting with the Uzbek dictator only contributes to the further plunder of Uzbekistan.

7. In the country's cotton sector, the practice of **forced child labor** continues even though the country's laws prohibit the exploitation of children. Those who protect the legitimate interests of children – not only their parents, but also the human rights defenders acting on their behalf, risk great danger by doing so. In 2010, the state continued to exploit child labor. Dozens of companies in the world have already announced a boycott of Uzbek cotton, demanding that Uzbekistan put an end to this shameful practice. But the EU and some European companies importing Uzbek cotton and textiles, actually encourage the practice of forced labor in

Uzbekistan. Nothing else can explain why the European Commission provides preferential tariffs on Uzbek cotton and cotton products within the framework of the **Generalized System of Preferences**.

Dear Sirs,

We urge the EU to take advantage of Karimov's visit to have a candid conversation with him, to try to convince him of the need to respect human rights. This is especially true in light of the abovementioned problems. Should the dictator not heed these appeals, we suggest you take advantage of the influence and leverage of the EU and its Member States to compel him to address them.

We are not against talks with the Uzbek government. But we believe that for a discussion with the government on water and energy issues, **it is not necessary to receive a dictator at the highest level** and even more so, to give him an audience with the king.

Negotiations can be conducted at the level of government functionaries. Receiving Karimov only **legitimizes his brutal regime** and encourages it to continue committing crimes against its people. We believe that the decision to receive Karimov in the capital of Europe is a mistake and significantly **harms the international reputation and the credibility of the European Commission**.

Signed,

International

Eurasian Transition Group

CIVICUS World Alliance for Citizen Participation

Norwegian Helsinki Committee

Association Human Rights in Central Asia Centre

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3. Abduljalil Boymatov, Chairman of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, Ireland
4. Bashorat Eshova, coordinator of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan in Switzerland
5. Gulshan Karaeva, chairman of Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, Kashkadarya Region, Uzbekistan
5. Ismail Dadajonov, chairman of the Democratic Forum of Uzbekistan, Sweden

8. Nadejda Atayeva, president of the Association for Human Rights in Central Asia, France
9. Tulkin Qoraev, the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, Sweden
10. Avaz Fayazov, The international organization Human Rights Defenders, Sweden
11. Yusuf Rasulov, Journalist, Sweden
12. Abdurahimov Abdulatif, Political refugee Sweden
13. Dilmurod Isakov, Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan Ezgulik, Sweden
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17. Rafik Ganiev, Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan Ezgulik, Sweden
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19. Muhiddin Qurbonov, The international organization Human Rights Defenders, Sweden
20. Asadullo Ahmedov, Political refugee, Norway
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22. Daniel Anderson, Political refugee, Norway
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27. Davlat Kozimov, the Democratic Forum of Uzbekistan
28. Saodat Kazimova, the Democratic Forum of Uzbekistan
29. Zahro Kazimova, the Democratic Forum of Uzbekistan
30. Bek Davronov, refugee
31. Ishanov Zubayd, refugee
32. Ibodat Karimova, refugee
33. Anvar Karimov, Political refugee, USA
34. Avaz Karimov, Political refugee, USA
35. Ayub Karimov, Political refugee, USA
36. Inom Bobohonov, Political Party Birlik

37. Ilhom Bobohonov, Political refugee, USA
38. Shamsuddin Isomutdinov, the Democratic Forum of Uzbekistan
39. Rustam Qobimov, the Democratic Forum of Uzbekistan
40. Farida Qosimova, the Democratic Forum of Uzbekistan
41. Karim Suyunov, the Democratic Forum of Uzbekistan
42. Rafik Eshmatov, the Democratic Forum of Uzbekistan
43. Bek Alibekov, the Democratic Forum of Uzbekistan
44. Jamshid Bokiev, Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan Ezgulik, Sweden
45. Muhammadsolih Abutov, "Tayanch", Sweden
46. Dustnazar Hudonazarov, Political Party ERK, Sweden
47. Asror Egamberdiev, Political refugee, Sweden

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58. Олеся Щелкова, журналисты газеты "Взгляд"
59. Владимир Радионов, журналисты газеты "Взгляд"
60. Наталья Щербакова, журналисты газеты "Взгляд"
61. Игорь Зенин - журналисты газеты "Взгляд"
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63. Айсұлу Қадырбаева, ОФ «Қуретамыр», член Союза писателей Казахстана
64. Жасарал Қуанышалин, ОО «Жаса, Азаттық!»
65. Бахыт Туменова, ОФ «Аман-саулық»
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90. Елена Семенова ОО "Оставим народу жилье - Павлодарский регион"
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140. Светлана Григорьева, ОО "Ариадна"
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152. Шакирова Кулайша, ОО «Лига женщин мусульман»

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160. Спицына Татьяна, гражданин Казахстана
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162. Кыдыкова Толкын, гражданин Казахстана
163. Бектурганов Данил, гражданин Казахстана
164. Огай Стелла, гражданин Казахстана
165. Фоминых Татьяна, гражданин Казахстана
166. Аденов Кенже, гражданин Казахстана
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169. Leyla Yunus, Institute of Peace and Democracy
170. Hikmet Hajizade, FAR Center
171. Matanat Azizova, Women's Crisis Centre
172. Ismail Veliyev, "Ganjabasar" newspaper

173. Elchin Mammad, Social Union of Legal Education of Sumgait Youth
174. Hafiz Safihanov, Azerbaijan's Campaign to Band Landmines
175. Zahir Amanov, "Janub Heberleri" newspaper
176. Aloysat Aliyev, Azerbaijan Migration Centre
177. Ilgar Gasimov, "Legal Aid" (Lenkoran city)
178. Mehman Aliyev, "Turan" News Agency
179. Anar Mammedli, Election Monitoring and Democratic Studies Centre
180. Mirvari Gahramanli, Protection of Oil Workers' Rights
181. Elchin Behbudov, Azerbaijan Committee Against Torture
182. Hikmet Hajizade, FAR Center
183. Intigam Aliyev, Legal Education Society
184. Leyla Aliyeva, Center for National and International Studies
185. Hilal Mammedov, "Tolishi Sado" newspaper
186. Emin Huseynov, Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Society
187. Annagi Hacibeyli, Azerbaijan Lawyers Association
188. Alekber Mammedov, Center for Democratic and Civil Control of the Military
189. Shakir Agaev, Newspaper "Novoye Vremya"
190. Eldar Zeynalov, Director Human Rights Center of Azerbaijan

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