



## Annual Review

of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex People in Azerbaijan covering the period of January to December 2018

# Azerbaijan

## Bias-motivated speech

In February, President Ilham Aliyev announced that a snap presidential election would take place on April 11, six months ahead of the original date. Eight candidates were running for the Presidency, several of them making homophobic remarks during a televised election debate. The election, which was boycotted by several opposition parties, secured another seven-year term for Aliyev.

## Bias-motivated violence

Hate crimes and police raids against LGBTI people remained a severe issue in Azerbaijan. Despite civil society's repeated calls, the legal framework still lacks any protections against hate crimes on grounds of SOGIESC.

On 3 February, 21-year-old Elmaddin Aliyev set his father on fire after hearing rumours that he was gay. He confessed to the murder, which he committed with two others.

In August, a video footage was posted by the online platform Rengareng, showing a trans woman being beaten. No further details of the case are known so far.

On 21 August Neyla Aliyeva, a trans woman living in Baku, shared a Facebook post saying that police attacked several apartments of trans people, including hers. She reported that they were taken to police stations. Raids against LGBT people are common in the country. In 2017, at least 200 LGBT people were arrested in a mass raid.

## Family

Eurasianet released an article in September, in which families of LGBT people talked about violence and discrimination against their children. There is no support network for families so far, but some parents are in touch and support each other in emergencies.

## Freedom of expression

In the lead-up to the April snap elections, authorities systematically silenced critical voices online through amending laws and blocking news websites. Hackers attacked independent news outlets. Several journalists were detained over the past year. The situation remains dangerous for LGBTI activists and independent journalists.

On the occasion of IDAHOBIT, the British Embassy in Baku raised the rainbow flag on 17 May. The move was extensively discussed by society, some welcoming it and others heavily criticising it.

## Participation in public, cultural and political life

On April 8, the Gender Mirror Theatre Performance took place in Baku, with over 150 people in the audience. The project was financially supported by the Embassy of the Netherlands in Azerbaijan and implemented by the Y-PEER Azerbaijan Network. The performance by young people living in Barda and Baku, focused on stereotypes, gender based violence, and the rights of women and LGBT people.

## Public opinion

For the first time, the rights of LGBTI people were publicly debated on Strateq.Az website's political show, which is run by former political prisoner and journalist Evez Zeynalli. The guests on the show in May included Iqbal Agazade, Umid party chairman, former MP (2005-2010, 2010-2015), and presidential candidate during the last elections and Panah Huseyn, former MP (2005-2010).

Asked whether he considered LGBT rights a universal value, Agazade said yes. He added that society and people fighting for LGBT rights call for a law allowing LGBT people to get married, it would have to be adopted.

Huseyn stated that he personally reserves for himself the right to be against LGBT communities. When asked what he would do about the fact that an LGBT community and organisations existed in the country, if he intended to kill them, Huseyn did not answer, but Yasemen Garagoyunlu, a member of Azerbaijan National Science Academy, nationalist and head of NGO Global Integration and Dialogue Center, jumped in with a response. He said LGBT people will not be killed, but that the education and cultural policy will make clear that "these kinds of people, communities damage our culture, society, identity and that they will remain a minority, with society kept away from those kinds of habits." Agazade in response noted that democracies must defend the rights of minorities.

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