



Azerbaijan



LGBTI issues and communities remain mostly invisible and silent. The only event which brought discussions around LGBTI issues to the surface was a prejudicial projection of the *Eurovision Song Contest 2012*. In the run up to the event, several hostile reactions against the supposed 'gay' nature of the Eurovision, as well as the possible holding of a Pride Parade were made, including by public officials, while official websites related to the event were hacked or disturbed. In response, the European Parliament adopted a resolution condemning the threats.

Bias motivated speech

- In spring, several weeks ahead of the *Eurovision Song Contest* organised from 22 to 26 May in Baku, rumours were spread about the possible organisation of an LGBT Pride Parade in the capital. Hostile reactions amounting to hate speech and direct threats to the LGBT community were recorded. Amongst others, Alchin Manafov, the acting leader of the Islamic Party in the Republic of Azerbaijan made the following statement: “The government of Azerbaijan should know full well that God forbade [...] if this evil [Pride Parade] happens in our country, our blood will be shed to defend Islam and we will do anything to prevent this from happening. They should know that they will have to walk over our bodies to have the Eurovision [...] They should know that if [Pride Parade] happens nothing else will matter to us. We will turn Azerbaijan into a burning hell and are not afraid of a possible civil war in the country.”
- In May, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the human rights situation in Azerbaijan, in which it “strongly condemn[ed] the threats made by radical Islamist organisations and individuals against participants in the upcoming *Eurovision Song Contest*, and in particular those belonging to the LGBT community; strongly support[ed] Azerbaijan’s secular identity and its free choice of foreign policy orientation.”

Freedom of assembly

- In May, following the rumours spread about the organisation of a LGBT Pride event at the time of the *Eurovision Song Contest*, a diplomatic incident happened between Azerbaijan and Iran, when officials from that country accused the Azeri authorities of breaching ‘Islamic values’ by accepting the event. The Azeri authorities clarified that no Pride event was taking place in Baku. At the same time, they also suggested that no Pride could ever take place in the country. At a press conference, senior presidential administration official Ali Hasanov said, “we are holding Eurovision, not a gay parade. [...] There is no word in the Azerbaijani language for gay parade.”

Freedom of expression

- Another incident around the *Eurovision Song Contest* happened with attacks against websites relating to the event. In April, the Eurovision website was the first to be attacked, and in May, the independent Escotoday website was hacked and taken down by hackers that called the song contest “a gay pride”. According to another Eurovision related website, a group called The Devotees of Azerbaijan claimed responsibility for the attack.
- After the end of the contest, the winner, the Swedish pop star Loreen, met with human rights activists and spoke out against Azerbaijan’s bad gay rights records. The Presidency’s administration criticised her for her statements, calling them “attempts of politicisation”.

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