

Statement of Rep. Thaddeus McCotter
U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE)
July 29, 2008

Thank you, Chairman Hastings, for allowing me to participate in this important, and timely, hearing on Azerbaijan. My interest in the Caucasus region and Azerbaijan in particular, stems from my days on the Foreign Affairs Subcommittees on Europe and the Middle East and Central Asia. I know just how important the Caucasus are to regional stability and to counterterrorism and energy security.

The Helsinki Commission and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) process is so important in this region, particularly with respect to free elections, human rights and the rule of law. I was pleased to work with you in the development--and co-sponsorship--of House Resolution 183 dealing with the human rights situation in Azerbaijan. The Resolution highlighted a human rights case many in the international community believe was politically motivated from the beginning: the case of former Cabinet Minister, Farhad Aliyev, and his brother, Rafiq, former President of Azpetrol Oil Company.

Farhad was a well regarded reformer who advocated more integration with the West. They were arrested during the October 2005 parliamentary campaign; some 300 opposition activists and parliamentary candidates were also arrested. The original charges against Farhad alleged fomenting a coup. In his Application to the European Court of Human Rights, Farhad stated his brothers were also arrested, his wife was forced from her medical job, and her brother in law and uncle were arrested. They also rounded up his assistant and bodyguard. He testified at his trial authorities wanted him to admit he was part of an "orange revolution" incited by the US, Britain and Germany.

The Resolution called for the Government of Azerbaijan to immediately release the Aliyevs during trial, to assure their right to a fair and open trial before an impartial tribunal will be carried out, and to comply with its international human rights commitments respecting the rule of law. It also calls on Azerbaijan to release imprisoned journalists and to prosecute individuals who attack journalists.

Since the introduction of the Resolution a year ago, the Aliyevs have been tried, convicted and sentenced on unrelated financial charges after a 5 month show trial. The political nature of case is shown by Farhad's sentence: 10 years in prison, confiscation of property, and deprivation of the right to hold key government positions for 5 years.

The Resolution was intended to shed light on the human rights situation and the Aliyev case without making any claims of guilt or innocence. At the time, the Aliyevs were held in lengthy pre-trial detention in the isolation unit of the National Security Ministry, without family visitation or proper medical care, while the government mined through their personal and business records. Credible observers raised serious concerns about irregularities and violations of OSCE Rule of Law commitments. I am very disappointed there has been no movement whatsoever to address the issues raised in the Resolution.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to make the Resolution part of the hearing record.