Azerbaijani trans activist Alex Shah harassed at Moldovan border

article, non-discrimination, freedom of movement, trans activists

Azerbaijani trans activist and TGEU's newly-elected Board member Alex Shah (she/they), legal name Aleks Shahnur, was harassed on Sunday 7 September by border police when entering Moldova. Alex was unlawfully detained for nearly two hours and experienced transphobia and mistreatment by local airport police at Chisinau airport.

She was taken to the immigration police office's room and questioned because of the "mismatch" between her passport name/gender marker and appearance as well as her occupation as a journalist. For context: Alex' home country, Azerbaijan, and many countries in the region repress all independent activism, and LGBTI activists face heightened risks. Moreover, Azerbaijan does not have a procedure for legal gender recognition, making it difficult for trans people to travel abroad.

At the airport in Moldova, **around ten police officers continuously joked about her in Russian, misgendering and shamelessly humiliating her using transphobic slurs**. The Moldovan police refused to investigate the case when Alex called them after the incident, claiming the airport to be solely responsible. She described the whole experience as terrifying and unsafe.

Further developments

Yesterday, on 9 September, Alex visited the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the Republic of Moldova regarding the transphobia and harassment she faced at the airport. The Embassy officials received her complaint letter and promised to establish communication with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Moldova and keep her informed of any further developments.

Solidarity and our demands

We are expressing our full solidarity to Alex about the situation they had to go through. Trans people, and especially trans people from the South Caucasus and Central Asia, must have the same right to freedom of movement as everyone else.

We are deeply concerned about the safety and security of trans people travelling, as incidents of airport and border patrol harassment are happening repeatedly.

As a candidate country to the European Union, Moldova carries the responsibility to uphold human rights and respect democratic principles. Any violations of these obligations stand in contradiction to European values and international law.

In Alex' case, we demand:

- A thorough, fair and respectful **investigation** by the local authorities
- The Moldovan border police officers and security staff present at the incident must be held accountable,

and appropriate legal actions must be taken against them
- An **official apology** must be issued to Alex Shah for the mistreatment, humiliation, and transphobia she endured
- The Embassy of the Republic of **Azerbaijan** in the Republic of Moldova **must act on Alex' behalf to pressure the Moldovan authorities**. Azerbaijan has the responsibility to protect its citizens and their rights
- The case should be reported to independent oversight bodies, such as the Ombudsman or national human rights institutions

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