

Iconic gymnastics image selected as winner of TEAS photographic competition

Press Release: After painstakingly sifting through more than 300 entries from ten countries, submitted by over 50 photographers, the iconic image *Gymnast with Pink Ribbon* by Azerbaijani professional photographer Dilaver Najafov has been selected by a panel of three leading photographers as the winner of the *Azerbaijan – Sport in Focus* competition, organised by The European Azerbaijan Society (TEAS).

Dilaver is one of the few Azerbaijani photographers to have devoted his entire career to the art of photography. He initially became interested in the art form during his childhood, following the purchase of a camera and other photographic equipment by his father. He is renowned for capturing the essence of sporting achievement, and has worked as staff photographer for the Azerbaijani Ministry of Youth and Sport for nearly 20 years. His work is frequently included in the official periodical of the Ministry.

The topic of the competition reflected Azerbaijan's forthcoming hosting of the inaugural European Games, which will take place across the country from 12–28 June 2015. The photographers were invited to capture such themes as Azerbaijan, sport, universality of sports and the meaning of the European Games.

The second prizewinner was *Ipanema – Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)* by Paris-based French photographer and videographer Paul Robion, a former journalist, who strives to achieve naturalistic photographs. His evocative, sepia-toned, virtually silhouette image encapsulates the enormous popularity of football amongst the Brazilian population.

The third prize was won by Azerbaijani photographer Rufat Abas, who specialises in street photography, for his photo *Final Instructions*, which captures a tense moment at the start of a Formula 1 race. In 2012, he published his first book *Life in Black and White* and last year saw his first exhibition *Street, Life, Emotion* open in Baku. He also won the *Photographer of the Year* award from the Azerbaijan Photographers' Union in 2011.

The judging panel comprised the American photojournalist, Ed Kashi, co-founder of the VII Photo Agency and winner of the 2011 *World Press Photo* competition, whose work has been published in the *National Geographic*, *New York Times* and *Newsweek*, amongst other publications; German photographer Philipp Rathmer, who is renowned for his celebrity portraits of Michael Schumacher, Lady Gaga and Sophia Loren, yet also undertakes reportage; and Azerbaijani photographer Agdes Baghirzade, who specialises in capturing the faces and nature of her homeland, for which she has won numerous awards.

The exhibition of 70 images, including the three winning images and 10 runners-up, will now be published in a book, and an exhibition will tour Europe, beginning at London's OXO Tower Gallery on 27 February, and then travel to France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Turkey.

The competition reflects TEAS' ongoing commitment to photography as an art form, and follows its successful *Azerbaijan Through the Lens* competition and exhibition two years ago, which again toured Europe and was exhibited in such venues as the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, Galerie Joseph in Paris and La Galleria Pall Mall in London.