

Journalists imprisoned for their work in Azerbaijan, April 2015

Nijat Aliyev, *Azadxeber*

MEDIUM: Internet

CHARGE: Retaliatory, Anti-State

IMPRISONED: May 20, 2012

Baku police arrested Aliyev, editor-in-chief of the independent news website *Azadxeber*, near a subway station in downtown Baku, and charged him with possession of illegal drugs. A local court ordered Aliyev to be held in pretrial detention; since then, authorities extended his imprisonment several times.

Colleagues disputed the charges and said they were in retaliation for his journalism. Aliyev's deputy, Parvin Zeynalov, told local journalists that the outlet's critical reporting on the government's religion policies, including perceived anti-Islamic activities, could have prompted the editor's arrest.

CPJ has documented a pattern in which Azerbaijani authorities file questionable drug charges against journalists whose coverage has been at odds with official views.

Aliyev's lawyer, Anar Gasimli, told the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety that investigators tortured the journalist in custody and pressured him to admit he had drugs in his possession. According to the institute, Gasimli said police also threatened to plant narcotics in the editor's apartment and file "more serious" charges against him.

In January 2013, authorities slapped Aliyev with additional charges of illegal import and sale of religious literature, making calls to overturn the constitutional regime, and incitement to ethnic and religious hatred, the institute reported. In March 2013, investigators finished the investigation against the editor.

On December 9, 2013, the Baku Court for Grave Crimes sentenced him to 10 years in jail, according to the independent regional news website *Kavkazsky Uzel*. In June 2014, Azerbaijan's Court of Appeals denied Aliyev's appeal, the report said. He was being held in Azerbaijan's Prison No. 2.

Hilal Mamedov, *Talyshi Sado*

MEDIUM: Print

CHARGE: Retaliatory, Anti-state

IMPRISONED: June 21, 2012

Baku police detained Mamedov, editor of the minority newspaper *Talyshi Sado* (Voice of the Talysh), on June 21, 2012, alleging they had found drugs, about five grams of heroin, in his pocket, the Azeri-language service of the U.S. government-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reported. Following his arrest, Baku police declared they had found an additional 30 grams of heroin in Mamedov's home, which they searched the same day, news reports said. A day later, a district court in Baku ordered Mamedov imprisoned for three months before trial on drug possession charges, the reports said. Mamedov's family claimed police had planted the drugs, and his colleagues said they believed the editor had been targeted in retaliation for his reporting, the reports said.

Talyshi Sado covered issues affecting the Talysh ethnic minority group in Azerbaijan. Mamedov's articles have been published in *Talyshi Sado* and on regional and Russia-based news websites, according to Emin Huseynov, director of the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety. Huseynov told CPJ that Mamedov had investigated the 2009 death in prison of Novruzali Mamedov, *Talyshi Sado*'s former chief editor.

In July 2012, authorities lodged more charges against Mamedov, including treason and incitement to ethnic and religious hatred, news reports said. Azerbaijan's interior ministry said in a statement that Mamedov had undermined the country's security in his articles for *Talyshi Sado*, in interviews with the Iranian broadcaster Sahar TV, and in unnamed books that he was alleged to have translated and distributed. The statement denounced domestic and international protests against Mamedov's imprisonment and said the journalist had used his office to spy for Iran.

In September 2013, Mamedov was convicted on charges of drug possession, treason, and incitement to ethnic and religious hatred, and was sentenced to five years in jail, regional press reported. His trial was marred by procedural violations, and authorities failed to back up their charges with credible evidence, news reports said.

Local human rights defenders said they believe the conviction was in retaliation for Mamedov's criticism of the authorities' failure to investigate the death in custody of Novruzali Mamedov. News reports said Novruzali Mamedov had been denied adequate medical treatment for several illnesses. After his death, human rights and press freedom groups including CPJ repeatedly called in vain for an independent investigation into his death.

According to the independent regional news website *Kavkazsky Uzel*, the court ruled that Hilal Mamedov was to serve his sentence in a strict penal colony. Mamedov was being held at Prison No. 17, outside Baku, according to an August 2014 [report](#) on political prisoners in Azerbaijan by a group of lawyers, human rights defenders, and non-governmental organizations. In June 2014, Azerbaijan's Supreme Court denied Mamedov's appeal, the report said. His lawyers told local journalists that they were planning to file another appeal to the European Court of Human Rights.

Araz Guliyev, *Xeber 44*

MEDIUM: Internet

CHARGE: Retaliatory

IMPRISONED: September 8, 2012

Guliyev, chief editor of news website *Xeber 44*, was **arrested** on hooliganism charges in September 2012 while reporting on a protest in the southeastern city of Masally, news reports said. Local residents were protesting dancers at a festival who they perceived to be not properly clothed, the reports said. Police arrested the demonstrators, who were calling on the festival organizers to respect religious traditions.

During Guliyev's pretrial detention, authorities expanded his charges to include "illegal possession, storage, and transportation of firearms," "participation in activities that disrupt public order," "inciting ethnic and religious hatred," "resisting authority," and "offensive action against the flag and emblem of Azerbaijan."

Guliyev's brother, Azer, **told** the independent regional news website *Kavkazsky Uzel* that his brother's imprisonment could be related to his coverage of local protests against an official ban on headscarves and veils in public schools. *Xeber 44* covers news about religious life in Azerbaijan and international events in the Islamic world. The journalist's lawyer told *Kavkazsky Uzel* that investigators claimed to have found a grenade while searching Guliyev's home, but his lawyer said the investigators had planted it.

In April 2013, the Lankaran Court on Grave Crimes convicted Guliyev of all charges and sentenced him to eight years in jail.

Guliyev's lawyer, Fariz Namazli, told the **Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety** that the charges against the journalist were not substantiated in court and that the testimony of witnesses conflicted. The lawyer also said that Guliyev had been beaten by authorities after his arrest and that he was not immediately granted access to a lawyer.

News reports said that Guliyev filed an appeal, which was denied by regional courts. In July 2014, the Supreme Court of Azerbaijan upheld the journalist's sentence.

Guliyev was being held at Prison No. 14, outside Baku, according to *Kavkazsky Uzel* and an August 2014 **report** on political prisoners in Azerbaijan by a group of lawyers, human rights defenders, and non-governmental organizations.

Tofiq Yaqublu, *Yeni Musavat*

MEDIUM: Print

CHARGE: Retaliatory

IMPRISONED: January 24, 2013

Police arrested Yaqublu, a columnist for the leading opposition daily *Yeni Musavat*, when he arrived at the town of Ismayilli to interview local residents about the causes of riots in the town, according to [news reports](#).

On February 4, 2013, the Nasimi District Court in Baku ordered Yaqublu jailed for two months pending trial on charges of organizing mass disorder and violently resisting the police. Ilgar Mammadov, an opposition politician who was arrested with Yaqublu, was imprisoned on similar charges, according to [news reports](#). Authorities extended Yaqublu's pretrial detention several times during the year.

The independent regional news website *Kavkazsky Uzel* reported that the charges against the journalist were in connection with the riots in Ismayilli on January 23, 2013. Thousands of local residents demonstrated to demand a local governor's resignation after regional authorities refused to shut down a motel that allegedly housed a brothel, the U.S. Congress-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty [reported](#). News reports said the motel, which protesters later burned to the ground, allegedly belonged to the family of a high-ranking government official. Authorities sent police to quell the demonstrations; more than 100 residents were detained, the radio station's Azeri service said.

Rauf Arifoglu, *Yeni Musavat*'s chief editor, [told Kavkazsky Uzel](#) that his newspaper had sent Yaqublu to Ismayilli to report on the riots and that the journalist had his press card with him at the time of his arrest. Emin Huseynov, head of the Baku-based Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety, confirmed that Yaqublu was in the town to report on the unrest, telling CPJ that staff members from the institute saw the journalist working there.

On March 17, 2014, a regional court in Ismayilli convicted Yaqublu on charges of mass disorder and sentenced him to five years in jail, according to news reports. His appeal was denied in September, reports said. He was being held at Prison No. 13 in late 2014, [Kavkazsky Uzel reported](#).

Parviz Hashimli, *Moderator*, *Bizim Yol*

MEDIUM: Internet, Print

CHARGE: Retaliatory

IMPRISONED: September 17, 2013

Agents with the National Security Agency, or MNB, arrested Hashimli, the editor of the independent news website *Moderator* and a reporter for the independent newspaper *Bizim Yol*, outside the offices of the *Moderator* in Baku. The same day, agents also raided his home, without presenting a court order and in the absence of a lawyer, and claimed to have found a pistol and several hand grenades, according to [news reports](#).

Agents also raided the newsrooms of the *Moderator* and *Bizim Yol* and confiscated their equipment, the independent news website *Kavkazsky Uzel* [reported](#). Both outlets are known for coverage of corruption and human rights abuses as well as for critical reporting on the government of President Ilham Aliyev.

On September 19, 2013, the Sabail District Court in Baku ordered Hashimli imprisoned for two months pending an investigation into accusations of smuggling and the illegal possession of weapons, according to news reports. Hashimli denied the allegations.

Emin Huseynov, director of the Baku-based press freedom group Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety, told CPJ that he believed the charges against Hashimli were fabricated and that his arrest was meant to be a threat to the local press in the run-up to the October 2013 election. Aliyev was subsequently declared the winner of a third term in the voting.

Citing Hashimli's lawyer, Huseynov told CPJ that agents had orchestrated the detention of the journalist. He said that a man named Tavvakyul Gurbanov had called Hashimli to meet him outside the *Moderator* offices in connection with what he said was a personal matter. When Hashimli went outside and sat in Gurbanov's car, agents surrounded the vehicle and searched it. The agents claimed to have found six guns as well as ammunition. News reports [said](#) that Gurbanov said he had brought the weapons on Hashimli's request, which the journalist denied. Hashimli also denied ever having met Gurbanov before.

Gurbanov was also detained and faced similar charges, news reports said.

In November 2013, Hashimli's pretrial detention was extended for three months, according to [news reports](#). He was held at the MNB detention facility, reports said.

On May 15, 2014, the Baku Court of Grave Crimes sentenced Hashimli to eight years in prison, the Azerbaijani service of the U.S. government-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty [reported](#). His appeal was denied.

Hashimli was being held at Prison No. 1, outside Baku, according to an August 2014 [report](#) on political prisoners in Azerbaijan by a group of lawyers, human rights defenders, and non-governmental organizations.

Rauf Mirkadyrov, Zerkalo

MEDIUM: Print

CHARGE: Anti-state

IMPRISONED: April 19, 2014

Azerbaijan's national security service, the MNB, detained Mirkadyrov when he arrived in Baku from Ankara, according to **regional** and **international** press reports. Mirkadyrov, who worked as the Turkey correspondent for the independent Azerbaijani daily newspaper *Zerkalo* for three years, had been deported from Turkey the day before at the request of Azerbaijani authorities, the reports said.

Mirkadyrov was arrested and charged with espionage, according to news reports. Mirkadyrov was ordered into pre-trial detention for three months, the independent regional news website *Kavkazsky Uzel* **reported**.

In July, authorities extended his detention for four months, until November 21, *Kavkazsky Uzel* **said**. When the term was about to expire, the Nasimi District Court ordered Mirkadyrov to be kept in pretrial detention for another five months, regional press **reported**.

The espionage charges stemmed from Mirkadyrov's trips to Armenia and Georgia, as well as his time in Turkey, during which he was accused of meeting with Armenian security services and handing them information of a political and military nature, including state secrets, the independent news website *Contact* **reported**, citing the Azerbaijani prosecutor-general's office.

Mirkadyrov denied all the accusations and said they were politically motivated and in retaliation for his work. If convicted, he faces up to life in prison, *Kavkazsky Uzel* **reported**.

While reporting for *Zerkalo* in Turkey, Mirkadyrov often criticized both Turkish and Azerbaijani authorities for human rights abuses, news reports **said**.

Kavkazsky Uzel **reported**, citing Mirkadyrov's wife, that Turkish police detained the family in Ankara on April 18 and accused them of being in the country on expired travel documents. She said their documents were valid through the end of the year. Mirkadyrov was deported the next day.

Mirkadyrov was also involved in nongovernmental projects on improving dialogue between Armenia and Azerbaijan, according to **news reports**. The two countries have not had diplomatic relations since the early 1990s, due to a dispute over the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

Mirkadyrov is being held at the MNB detention facility, *Kavkazsky Uzel* **reported**.

Seymur Hazi, *Azadliq*

MEDIUM: Print, Internet

CHARGE: Retaliatory

IMPRISONED: August 29, 2014

Police in the eastern Absheron district arrested Hazi, who also uses the name Haziyev, a reporter for the opposition newspaper *Azadliq*, on August 29 after accusing him of hooliganism and alleging that he had attacked a man at a bus stop, the independent regional news website *Kavkazsky Uzel* reported. The day after his arrest, the Absheron District Court ordered the journalist to be imprisoned for two months pending trial, the report said. He was charged with hooliganism.

At the trial in Absheron District Court on November 11, the journalist's lawyer requested that the judge be disqualified because authorities continued to hold Hazi even though his pretrial detention had expired, *Kavkazsky Uzel* reported. The judge denied the request.

Authorities said that while waiting for a bus on his way to work, Hazi attacked and beat a Baku resident named Magerram Hasanov, according to the *Kavkazsky Uzel* report.

Hazi said in court that he had scuffled with Hasanov, but in self-defense *Kavkazsky Uzel* reported. He said Hasanov insulted and attacked him. Elton Guliyev, the journalist's lawyer, told *Kavkazsky Uzel* that he believed authorities had orchestrated the altercation because the police arrived just moments after it started. Guliyev said he believed that Hazi had been imprisoned in retaliation for his journalism.

Hazi's trial was ongoing in late 2014.

Hazi often criticized the Azerbaijani government's domestic and foreign policies in his reports for *Azadliq*, according to *Kavkazsky Uzel*. As a host for *Azadliq*'s online TV program "Azerbaijan Saati" (Azerbaijani Hour), he was critical of government corruption and human rights abuses in the country.

Guliyev told *Kavkazsky Uzel* that authorities did not explain why they had jailed Hazi instead of implementing other, less harsh sanctions against him. He is being held at Baku Investigative Prison No. 1 outside Baku, which is widely known as the Kurdakhani pre-trial detention facility.

Authorities arrested Hasanov, the other participant in the altercation, a few days later, but put him under house arrest. When the journalist requested similar treatment, the court refused, news reports said. Hasanov has since been jailed again, local media reported.

Khadija Ismayilova, Radio Azadlyg

MEDIUM: Internet

CHARGE: Retaliatory

IMPRISONED: December 5, 2014

Ismayilova, an award-winning investigative reporter and a program host on Radio Azadlyg, the Azeri service of the U.S. government-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, was arrested after she was summoned to the prosecutor's office in the capital, Baku, on December 5, 2014.

Authorities charged Ismayilova with inciting a local man to commit suicide and ordered her to be imprisoned for two months pending an investigation into the case, news reports said. While she was in jail, authorities [raided the radio station's Baku bureau](#), detained and interrogated its staff, confiscated reporting and financial equipment, and sealed the newsroom, reports said.

In January 2015, a Baku court extended Ismayilova's imprisonment for another two months; a few weeks later, the general prosecutor's office amended the charges against her to include separate counts of embezzlement, illegal business, tax evasion, and abuse of power, [regional](#) and [international](#) press reported. If convicted, she could face up to 12 years in prison, news reports [said](#).

Ismayilova is known for her exposés of high-level government corruption, including her investigation into ties between President Ilham Aliyev's family and some lucrative businesses. For years, Ismayilova also covered Azerbaijan's grave human rights record.

Since her arrest, Ismayilova and her lawyer have denied the allegations against her, which they said were in retaliation for her coverage. In [an article](#) published by the local press just two days before her arrest, Ramiz Mehdiyev, head of the presidential administration, accused Ismayilova of treason and espionage, according to [news reports](#).

[CPJ](#) and other [human rights](#) and [press freedom](#) groups have documented the harassment of Ismayilova in recent years, including [smear campaigns](#) in state-controlled media; [prosecution](#) on fabricated criminal charges of insult and [interrogation](#) into alleged leaking of state secrets; and arbitrary [travel bans](#) imposed after she traveled to Strasbourg to brief European politicians about Azerbaijan's human rights record.

Ismayilova is being held in the Kurdakhani pre-trial detention facility, according to a letter she wrote from behind bars that was [published](#) in February 2015 by *The Washington Post*.