

**Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Centre**  
**Monthly Human Rights Developments**  
**In Azerbaijan**  
**August 2025**

---

**1. New Arrests and charges**

- 1.1. New arrest in the Meydan TV Case as the Charges Intensifies*
- 1.2. Three More Civil Society Activists Charged in “NGO Case”*

**2. Hearings Continued in Politically Sensitive Cases in August**

- 2.1 Abzas Media Employees Subjected to Mistreatment During Appeals Court Trial*
- 2.2 Peace Activist Bahruz Samadov's Appeal Hearing Continues with All Motions Rejected*
- 2.3 Activist Anar Abdullayev was Arrested in The Court Room Following Administrative Detention*
- 2.4 War Veteran and Government Critic Haji Valiyev's Detention Period Extended*
- 2.5 Toplum TV Trial Exposes Weaknesses in State's Tax Evasion Claim*
- 2.6 Activist Ahmad Mammadli's Case Moves to Trial After All Motions Rejected*
- 2.7 All Defence Motions Rejected in Economist Fazil Gasimov's Case*
- 2.8 Trade Union Activist Alleges Torture and Lack of Investigation*

**3. Political Prisoners Report Mistreatment in the Detention Facilities**

- 3.1 Bakhtiyar Hajiyeu's Family Reports Severe Mistreatment and Health Concerns*
- 3.2 Abzas Media Journalist Mahammad Kekalov Denied Access to Lawyer*
- 3.3 Tofiq Yagublu's Lawyer Protests Illegal Search Upon Prison Visit*
- 3.4 Family of Nazim Baydamirli Reports Fears for His Life Amid Deteriorating Health*
- 3.5 Trade Union Chairman Afiaddin Mammadov Complains of Intolerable Prison Conditions*

# August 2025

## 1. New Arrests and charges

### 1.1. New Arrest in the Meydan TV Case as the Charges Intensifies

On 27 August 2025, Photojournalist Ahmad Mukhtar was arrested, becoming the 12th person arrested in connection with the *Meydan TV* case and received 40 days of pre-trial detention by Khatai District Court on 28 August 2025.<sup>1</sup>

The following day, Baku City Police Department escalated charges against all defendants, introducing new charges under Articles 206.4 (smuggling by organized group in prior collusion), 192.2.2 and 192.2.3 (Illegal entrepreneurship by organized group involving significant amount), 193-1.3.1 and 193-1.3.2 (legalization of property obtained through crime by organized group involving significant amount), 320.1 and 320.2 (knowingly using forged official documents) and 213.2.1 (tax evasion by organized group) of the Criminal Code (CC hereinafter).

The *Meydan TV* case concerns 11 journalists and a media trainer - of whom journalists deny any ties to the outlet - arrested since December 2024 and throughout 2025, with all accused denying the charges, insisting that the case is politically motivated and designed to silence independent journalism.<sup>2</sup>

### 1.2. Three More Civil Society Activists Charged in “NGO Case”

According to media reports, on 14-15 August 2025, three additional civil society affiliated individuals have been charged as accused in the ongoing criminal case resumed by the Investigation Department of the Azerbaijan’s Prosecutor General’s Office against local and international NGOs in relation to USAID and foreign funding issue on the basis of criminal case opened in 2014.<sup>3</sup>

According to reports, they were formally charged earlier the week and placed under non-custodial preventive measures (police supervision).

The so-called “NGO case” began in March 2025, when the executive director of the Election Monitoring Alliance, Mammad Alpay (Mammadzade), and the head of the Institute for Civil

---

<sup>1</sup> Meydan TV, ‘Photojournalist Ahmad Mukhtar arrested in connection with Meydan TV case’, (August 2025), <https://www.meydan.tv/az/article/fotojurnalist-ehm%c9%99d-muxtar-meydan-tv-isi-uzr%c9%99-h%c9%99bs-olunub/>, [available only in Azerbaijani]

<sup>2</sup> Reporters Without Borders, ‘RSF calls for release of Meydan TV journalists’, (December 2024), <https://rsf.org/en/post-cop29-crackdown-azerbaijan-rsf-calls-release-meydan-tv-journalists>

<sup>3</sup> Radioazadliq, “3 more activists become defendants in ‘NGO case’”, August 15, <https://www.azadliq.org/a/qht-isi-feallar/33504306.html>

Rights, Bashir Suleymanli, were arrested. In April, civic activist Asaf Ahmadov, social worker Zamin Zaki, and Ahmad Mammadzade were also detained.

While many other activists have been designated as accused, they were not detained during the investigation. Among them are **Hafiz Hasanov**, head of the *Law and Development Public Union*; **Mehriban Rahimli**, formerly an advisor on Azerbaijan at the *German Marshall Fund*; and **Galib Bayramov**, chair of the *Center for Economic Research*.

Meanwhile, international search warrants have been issued against **Subhan Hasanli**, head of the *Social Rights Center*, and civic activist **Aytaj Agazade**, both currently outside Azerbaijan.

The charges include:

- Article 193-1.3.2 – money laundering of significant amounts;
- Article 308.2 – abuse of official powers causing grave consequences;
- Article 313 – official forgery.

If convicted, the defendants face up to 12 years in prison.

Sources told *Radio Liberty* that more than 100 people have been questioned in the investigation, including staff of international donor organizations with a presence in Azerbaijan, as well as several heads of pro-government NGOs.

## 2. Hearings Continued in Politically Sensitive Cases in August

### 2.1. Abzas Media Employees Subjected to Mistreatment During Appeals Court Trial

On August 12, the Baku Court of Appeal held a preparatory hearing in the ‘*Abzas Media* case’, during which imprisoned female journalists were subjected to mistreatment and violence.<sup>4</sup>

Reportedly, Sevinj Vagifgizi, Nargiz Absalamova, and Elnara Gasimova were placed behind a glass partition with non-functional microphones, preventing them from adequately hearing the proceedings. Upon their protest, they were forcibly removed from the courtroom by Penitentiary Service staff who reportedly pushed and shoved them.

The defendants, who were sentenced to lengthy prison terms in June on what are widely considered politically motivated charges, have stated they will refuse to attend future hearings if such conditions persist.

In the same hearing, all defence motions, including to transfer defendants to a facility closer to Baku and for the female journalists to be seated with their male colleagues or lawyers were rejected, repeating a pattern of consistent rejections in the case towards requests by defendants.

7 individuals associated with *Abzas Media* were arrested in late 2023 and early 2024 and are currently serving lengthy prison terms ranging from 7 years and half to 9 years. The case is believed to stem from the outlet's investigations into high-level government corruption, has been condemned by both local and international human rights groups, most recently, by the U.S. Department of State.<sup>5</sup>

### 2.2. Peace Activist Bahruz Samadov's Appeal Hearing Continues with All Motions Rejected

On August 13, the Baku Court of Appeal held a closed-door hearing for the appeal of peace activist Bahruz Samadov. Despite more than 20 defence motions being filed, all were rejected by the court, highlighting the repetitive approach by domestic courts in politically sensitive cases.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Abzas Media, ‘Violence against female journalists at Baku Appeal Court in “Abzas Media Case”’, (August 2025), <https://abzas.org/en/2025/8/violence-against-female-journalists-199bab8-0/>

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of State, ‘2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Azerbaijan’, (August 2025), <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/azerbaijan/>

<sup>6</sup> Abzas Media, ‘More than 20 motions were rejected in the appeal trial for Bahruz Samadov’, (August 2025), <https://abzas.org/az/2025/8/bhruz-samadovun-apellyasiya-me3988f75-5/>, [available only in Azerbaijani]

Samadov, a doctoral student who maintains his innocence, attended the session but did not speak. He had reportedly questioned why he remained in prison despite the signing of a peace statement by Azerbaijan and Armenia earlier in August in Washington.<sup>7</sup>

Arrested in August 2024 and later sentenced to 15 years on treason charges in June, 2025, a verdict that prompted a suicide attempt, his case is widely regarded by human rights organizations as politically motivated.<sup>8</sup>

### **2.3. Activist Anar Abdullayev was Arrested in The Court Room Following Administrative Detention**

On August 4, activist Anar Abdullayev was arrested in the courtroom of Baku Court of Grave Crimes during a hearing in the case against him and Anar Mammadli, head of the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center.<sup>9</sup>

The court granted the request by the prosecutor to change Abdullayev's pre-trial measure of police supervision, effective since April 2025, to detention due to breaching the supervision rules. This development followed his 30-day administrative detention in July on minor hooliganism charges where Abdullayev maintained that he was arrested in the bus stop and denied all allegations.<sup>10</sup>

The inconsistencies between justifications for his arrest and the following request by the prosecution raised doubts on political motivation behind the arrest while pro-government media outlets launched a smear campaign against him labelling Abdullayev as a courier of money into the country.<sup>11</sup>

Both Mammadli and Abdullayev are accused under Article 206.4 (smuggling by an organised group on a large scale) and other articles of the CC and face up to 12 years in jail if found guilty. Both domestic and international observers see the case as politically motivated to punish legitimate civil society work.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Toplum TV, 'Bahruz Samadov; the peace agreement is signed, so why am I still in prison?', (August 2025), <https://toplummedia.tv/mehkeme/pbehruz-semedov-ldquosuumllh-muumlqavilesi-baglanir-niye-meni-azad-azadliga-buraxmirlarldquo>, [available only in Azerbaijani]

<sup>8</sup> Amnesty International, 'Azerbaijan: Release Bahruz Samadov and other government critics targeted during election campaign', (September 2024), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/09/azerbaijan-release-bahruz-samadov-and-other-government-critics-targeted-during-election-campaign/>; Amnesty International, 'Azerbaijan: Academics Arrested on Fabricated Charges: Igbal Abilov and Bahruz Samadov', (September 2024), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur55/8554/2024/en/>

<sup>9</sup> Abzas Media, 'Civic activist Anar Abdullayev was arrested in the courtroom', (August 2025), <https://abzas.org/az/2025/8/ictimai-fal-anar-abdulla-mhke348ca85-b/>, [available in Azerbaijani]

<sup>10</sup> Abzas Media, 'Azerbaijani civic activist sentenced to 30 days in administrative detention', (July 2025), <https://abzas.net/en/2025/7/azerbaijani-civic-activist-sen10e605da-a/>, [available in Azerbaijani]

<sup>11</sup> See: Smearing Campaign  
[Lent.az](https://lent.az), 'Foreign Grant Network is activated again; money illegally smuggled to Azerbaijan in exposed', (July 2025), <https://lent.az/xeber/siyaset/xarici-grant-sebekesi-yeniden-aktivlesdi-azerbaycana-gizli-getirilen-pullar-bele-ifsas-edildi-40642687>, [available only in Azerbaijani]

<sup>12</sup> EU Neighbors East, 'Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum urgently call for unconditional release of Azerbaijani human rights defender Anar Mammadli', (May 2024), <https://euneighbourseast.eu/news/latest-news/eastern-partnership-civil-society-forum-urgently-call-for-unconditional-release-of-azerbaijani-human-rights-defender-anar-mammadli/>; Amnesty International, 'Urgent Action: Release Arrested Journalists', (May 2024), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/EUR5579462024ENGLISH.pdf>;

## 2.4. War Veteran and Government Critic Haji Valiyev's Detention Period Extended

On 18 August, Khatai District Court granted a motion by prosecutor to extend the pre-trial detention of public activist and former chairman of the ‘Young Veterans’ Public Union, **Haji Valiyev** for another 20 days.<sup>13</sup>

Haji Valiyev, who is known for highlighting the issues of war victims' families and veterans, was detained on March 31, 2025, and charged under 221.3 (hooliganism with use of weapons) and 186.1 (intentional damage to property causing significant loss) of the CC, following the incident with police.<sup>14</sup> He insists on innocence and states that his arrest is due to his public activism.

Later in August, Valiyev's lawyer reported that their requests to the Ombudsman's Office remained ineffective since the Ombudsman simply redirected the appeals leading to in-fact absence of any investigation in medical conditions he is suffering from.<sup>15</sup> Speaking to another convicted journalist in Baku Detention Center, Valiyev reiterated his medical conditions and lack of access to adequate medical care.<sup>16</sup>

## 2.5. Toplum TV Trial Exposes Weaknesses in State's Tax Evasion Claim

On August 4, a hearing in the ‘*Toplum TV case*’ in the Baku Court on Grave Crimes focused on the State Tax Service's civil claim of 79,000 manats (appr. \$46.5K) in tax debt. The Tax Service representative, testifying as a victim, struggled to answer defence questions, citing vague ‘expert opinions’ and avoiding direct answers on how the specific amount was calculated for each of the defendants.<sup>17</sup>

The defence highlighted the unsubstantiated nature of the claim and noted that some of the accused were students at the time the debt was allegedly incurred. A motion to terminate the Tax Service's victim status was denied.

---

<sup>13</sup> Abzas Media, ‘Pre-trial period of Haji Valiyev extended for another 20 days’, (August 2025), <https://abzas.org/az/2025/8/hac-vliye-v-barsind-hbs-qcbf77896-2/>, [available in Azerbaijani]

<sup>14</sup> Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety, ‘Lawyer: “The court knows well what suffering Haji Valiyev has endured”’, (May 2025), <https://www.irfs.org/az/news-feed/lawyer-the-court-knows-well-what-suffering-haji-valiyev-has-endured/>

<sup>15</sup> Abzas Media, ‘Haji Valiyev's lawyer: Appeals to the Ombudsman proved to be fruitless’, (August 2025), <https://abzas.org/az/2025/8/vkil-hac-vliye-v-inisi-uzr90319bcd-9/>, [available in Azerbaijani]

<sup>16</sup> Meydan TV, ‘Haji Valiyev gives interview to Ulviyya Ali in prison; there is no value for the Government’, (August 2025), <https://www.meydan.tv/az/article/haci-v%C9%99liye-v-ulviyy%C9%99eliy%C9%99-musahib%C9%99-verib-q%C9%99l%C9%99b%C9%99nin-memarlari-s%C9%99hidl%C9%99r-qazil%C9%99r-veteranlar-v%C9%99-xalqdir-amma-hokum%C9%99tonlari-haqqi/>, [available in Azerbaijani]

<sup>17</sup> Toplum TV, ‘Let Hikmat Hakiyev come and testify, he knows the exact amount’, (August 2025), <https://toplummedia.tv/mehkeme/pldquotoplum-tv-isi-hikmet-haciyev-gelsin-ifade-versin-deqiq-meblegi-o-bilirp>, [available in Azerbaijani]

Initiated in March 2024 and resulting in the arrest of 11 journalists and activists, the case is widely regarded as politically motivated to silence independent journalism within a broader crackdown on media and civil society in Azerbaijan since November 2023.<sup>18</sup>

## 2.6. Activist Ahmad Mammadli's Case Moves to Trial After All Motions Rejected

On August 21, a preparatory hearing was held in the criminal case of activist Ahmad Mammadli. During the session, the court denied his lawyer's motions to terminate the case or replace his pre-trial detention with house arrest.<sup>19</sup>

Mammadli, who was arrested in May 2025, is charged under Articles 126.2.4 (intentional infliction of serious bodily harm) and 221.3 (hooliganism involving the use of a weapon or weapon-like object) and denies the charges of stabbing an individual during a taxi dispute and claims he was framed.<sup>20</sup> His family believes his arrest was in retaliation for filming the trial of political prisoner Tofiq Yagublu. The court's decision moves the case to a full trial, with the next hearing scheduled for September 3.

## 2.7. All Defence Motions Rejected in Economist Fazil Gasimov's Case

On August 19, a hearing at the Baku Court of Appeal concerning imprisoned economist **Fazil Gasimov** was marked by a series of denied motions.<sup>21</sup> Gasimov, who has been in prison since August 2023, presented several requests, including the summoning of a key witness and a change to house arrest, all of which were rejected by the judge.

The court also refused to allow him a private conversation with his lawyer, Nemat Karimli. In response to the persistent denials, Gasimov accused the court of bias and requested a state-appointed lawyer. The judge denied this motion as well, despite the lawyer stating that this was against the law and leaving the court room in protest.

On 13 March 2025, Baku Court on Grave Crimes sentenced the doctoral student to 9 years in prison on Article 204.3.1 (counterfeit currency production by organized group) accused of passing fake dollars to economist Gubad Ibadoglu, who was also charged but later released to house arrest.<sup>22</sup>

## 2.8. Trade Union Activist Alleges Torture and Lack of Investigation

---

<sup>18</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists, 'Azerbaijani police raid Toplum TV, detain journalists over alleged currency smuggling', (January 2025), <https://cpi.org/2024/03/azerbaijani-police-raid-toplum-tv-detain-journalists-over-alleged-currency-smuggling/>

<sup>19</sup> Abzas Media, 'Preparatory hearing was held in the case of Ahmad Mammadli', (August 2025), <https://abzas.org/az/2025/8/hmd-mmmmlinin-isi-uzr-mh52c0e93c-a/>, [available in Azerbaijani]

<sup>20</sup> Radio Liberty, 'Ahmad Mammadli detained', (May 2025), <https://www.azadliq.org/a/ehmed-memmedli-saxlanib/33407019.html>, [available in Azerbaijani]

<sup>21</sup> Toplum TV, 'Lawyer leaves the hearing in the middle in the case of Fazil Gasimov', (August 2025), <https://toplummedia.tv/mehkeme/pvekil-fazil-qasimovun-mehkemesini-yarimccediliq-terk-edibp>, [available only in Azerbaijani]

<sup>22</sup> Radio Liberty, 'Azerbaijani PhD student at Istanbul University sentenced to 9 years in prison', (May 2025), <https://www.azadliq.org/a/fazil-qasimov-9-il-hebs/33346913.html>, [available in Azerbaijani]

During a court hearing on August 20, trade union activist and member of ‘Workers’ Table Trade Unions Confederation’, Elvin Mustafayev, who has been imprisoned since August 2023, reported that he had been subjected to severe torture while in custody at Penal Facility No. 6. Mustafayev stated that as a result, he had blood and pus leaking from his ear for days and continues to suffer from hearing problems.

His lawyer, Zibeyda Sadigova, informed the court that a complaint was filed with the Prosecutor's Office to investigate the torture allegations, but there had been no response. A request to the court to inquire with the Prosecutor's Office was denied by the panel of judges. Mustafayev's hearing, concerning a separate complaint about being moved to a high-security prison, was postponed until September 3.

The activist was reportedly placed in a punishment cell for over a month and a half after he started a hunger strike to protest the imprisonment of politician Tofiq Yagublu. Mustafayev was arrested in August 2023 and sentenced to 3 years in prison on January 31, 2023 on drug-related charges he denies, is recognized by human rights defenders as a political prisoner, with his imprisonment widely viewed as politically motivated due to his activism.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Human Rights Watch (HRW), ‘We Try to Stay Invisible’, (October 2024), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/10/08/we-try-stay-invisible/azerbajjans-escalating-crackdown-critics-and-civil-society>;



## 3. Political Prisoners Report Mistreatment in Detention Facilities

### 3.1. Bakhtiyar Hajiyeu's Family Reports Severe Mistreatment and Health Concerns

On August 8, the family of public activist Bakhtiyar Hajiyeu reported grave concerns about his condition and treatment in Prison No. 6.<sup>24</sup>

According to his family, he is seriously mistreated, subjected to psychological and physical pressure, and is denied video calls with family, a privilege afforded to other inmates.

The family also stated that Hajiyeu is in poor health and requires medical attention, which has been denied to him. He has reportedly called his situation ‘unbearable’, requested a transfer, and warned he might attempt suicide if his conditions do not improve.

Hajiyeu, who was arrested in December 2022 and later sentenced to 10 years in January 2025 on what he calls politically motivated charges, has been recognized as a political prisoner by human rights groups.<sup>25</sup>

### 3.2. Abzas Media Journalist Mahammad Kekalov Denied Access to Lawyer

On August 12, journalist Mahammad Kekalov, who was sentenced to 7 years and 6 months in the ‘*Abzas Media*’ case, was reportedly denied a phone call with his lawyer. According to his family, prison staff at the Umbaki Penitentiary Complex forcibly took the phone from him when he attempted to make the call, stating he could only do so with the prison head's permission.<sup>26</sup>

The restriction on phone calls with lawyers was in place during the investigative phase of the case, but it remains unclear why it continues to be enforced after the verdict was delivered.

Arrested in November 2023 and later sentenced to 7 years and half in June 2025, Kekalov, along with several other journalists, maintains his innocence and rejects the charges of smuggling and financial crimes as politically motivated retaliation for their anti-corruption investigations.

### 3.3. Tofiq Yagublu's Lawyer Protests Illegal Search Upon Prison Visits

---

<sup>24</sup> Abzas Media, ‘Bakhtiyar Hajiyeu’s family; he is treated like a prisoner of war’, (August 2025), <https://abzas.org/az/2025/8/bakhtiyar-hajiyev-ailsi-onb6808242-2/>, [available only in Azerbaijani]

<sup>25</sup> Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, ‘Azerbaijan: Bakhtiyar Hajiyeu’s prosecution is politically motivated’, (December 2022), <https://eap-csf.eu/articles/statement-azerbaijan-arrest-bakhtiyar-hajiyev/>

<sup>26</sup> Toplum TV, ‘Family; Kekalov is denied phone call with his lawyer’, (August 2025), <https://toplummedia.tv/mehkeme/pailesi-mehammed-kekalova-vekili-ile-danismaga-imkan-verilmeyibp>, [available only in Azerbaijani]

On August 15, the lawyer for imprisoned political activist **Tofiq Yagublu** protested what he called an illegal search and refused to meet with his client after staff of the Medical Facility of the Penitentiary Service tried to confiscate his documents.<sup>27</sup>

The lawyer stated that his actions were in protest of the arbitrary and unlawful nature of the search, which prevents effective legal counsel.

Tofiq Yagublu was detained on December 14, 2023, and charged under Articles 178.3.2 (fraud with significant amount) and 320.1, 320.2 (knowingly using forged official documents) of the CC.

Authorities claim he and an associate extorted €25,000 and 10,000 AZN (overall €30000 apprx.) by promising to secure German citizenship, allegedly evidenced through WhatsApp messages Yagublu insists were fabricated. Human rights groups have condemned his imprisonment.<sup>28</sup>

### **3.4. Family of Nazim Baydamirli Reports Fears for His Life Due To His Deteriorating Health**

On August 5, the family of imprisoned economist and former MP Nazim Baydamirli reported that his health has sharply deteriorated and they fear for his life.<sup>29</sup>

According to his wife, who visited him in prison, he is weak, constantly sweating, and has lost the ability to speak. She stated that he is suffering from pneumonia and urgently needs to be transferred to a hospital for professional medical treatment, including IVs and oxygen, which the prison cannot provide.

Baydamirli, who was sentenced to 8 years in September 2024 on what he calls politically motivated extortion charges, claims he was framed in retaliation for his advocacy in support of ecological protests.<sup>30</sup>

### **3.5. Trade Union Chairman Afiaddin Mammadov Complains of Intolerable Prison Conditions**

On August 21, it was reported that Afiaddin Mammadov, the imprisoned chairman of the ‘Workers’ Table Trade Unions Confederation’, is being held in difficult and intolerable conditions in Prison No. 2.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Radio Free Europe, ‘Lawyer report illegal search upon visiting imprisoned politician Tofiq Yagublu’, (August 2025), <https://www.azadliq.org/a/nemet-kerimli-tofiq-yagublu-gorush-qanunsuz-yoxlama/33504208.html>, [available only in Azerbaijani]

<sup>28</sup> HRW, ‘Prominent Opposition Figure Arrested’, (December 2023), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/12/19/azerbaijan-prominent-opposition-figure-arrested>; Amnesty International, ‘Azerbaijan Authorities Must Immediately Release Tofiq Yagublu and Urgently Provide Medical Care as His Health Deteriorates’, (April 2025), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/04/azerbaijan-authorities-must-immediately-release-tofiq-yagublu-and-urgently-provide-medical-care-as-his-health-deteriorates/>; Meydan TV, ‘United States called for the immediate release of Tofiq Yagublu and Bakhtiyar Hajiyev’, (January 2025), <https://www.meydan.tv/en/article/the-united-states-called-for-the-immediate-release-of-tofiq-yagublu-and-bakhtiyar-hajiyev/>

<sup>29</sup> Abzas Media, ‘The Family of Nazim Baydamirli fears for his life’, (August 2025), <https://abzas.org/az/2025/8/ailsi-nazim-bydamirinin-sh2e43d0d5-2/>, [available only in Azerbaijani]

<sup>30</sup> Eurasia.net, ‘Azerbaijan: Ex-MP gets an eight-year sentence for voicing support for former constituents’, (October 2024), <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-ex-mp-gets-an-eight-year-sentence-for-voicing-support-for-former-constituents>

<sup>31</sup> Abzas Media, ‘Afiaddin Mammadov protests unbearable conditions’, (August 2025), <https://abzas.org/az/2025/8/afiddin-mammadovun-hbsxanadab6f07721-f/>, [available only in Azerbaijani]

His family reported that Mammadov's psychological state is worsening and that phone calls with him are repeatedly cut off by prison staff whenever he tries to describe his situation. Arrested in September 2023 for alleged stabbing and sentenced to 8 years in prison in January 2025, Mammadov denies the charges, stating the incident was staged and that he was targeted for his labor rights advocacy and criticism of the authorities.<sup>32</sup>

The Confederation and rights groups condemned the conviction as politically motivated and part of a broader campaign against labor activists, noting that three other union members are also in custody on fabricated charges.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Free Anar Mammadov', 'Afiaddin Mammadov', accessed 1 April 2025, <https://free-anar.site/political-prisoners/afiaddin-mammadov/>; Human Rights Watch (HRW), 'We Try to Stay Invisible', (October 2024), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/10/08/we-try-stay-invisible/azerbaijans-escalating-crackdown-critics-and-civil-society>

<sup>33</sup> Free Anar Mammadov', 'Afiaddin Mammadov', accessed 1 April 2025, <https://free-anar.site/political-prisoners/afiaddin-mammadov/>; Human Rights Watch (HRW), 'We Try to Stay Invisible', (October 2024), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/10/08/we-try-stay-invisible/azerbaijans-escalating-crackdown-critics-and-civil-society>

## Crackdown Without End: Political Trials and Detention Abuses Continues in Azerbaijan

August 2025 once again confirmed that crackdown intensified since November 2023 (*Abzas Media case*) in Azerbaijan is not episodic but entrenched — driven by clear political ends and aimed at dismantling entire civil society and the independent media environment in Azerbaijan. With this political aim, in August, the authorities carried out new arrests, issued fresh charges, continued sham trials without genuine fair trial standards and deepened abuses against political prisoners, using the legal system as a tool of political retribution.

August 2025 began with new arrest of activist charged in April 2025 in Anar Mammadli case. On 4 August, during a hearing at the Baku Court of Grave Crimes, activist **Anar Abdullayev** was arrested in the courtroom. Until then he had been under police supervision, but prosecutors sought to change his measure to detention, alleging violations of supervision rules however according to Abdulla, police authorities did not inform him about the rules of police supervision. This followed his earlier 30-day administrative arrest on minor hooliganism charges in July, which he denied and described as politically motivated. The court accepted the prosecutor's request, sending him into custody alongside Anar Mammadli, chairman of the EMDS in a case widely seen as politically motivated against legitimate civic activity.

On 4 August, the *Toplum TV* trial continued in the Baku Court on Grave Crimes. The hearing focused on the State Tax Service's claim of nearly 80,000 manats in tax debt, but the testimony of the tax authority's representative revealed the weakness of the state's case, as he failed to explain how the alleged amounts had been calculated. Despite the defence exposing the lack of evidence and requesting the termination of the Tax Service's victim status, the court refused submitted motions by defendants.

The following days revealed a pattern that would run throughout August: the systematic rejection of defence motions and further reports of mistreatment.

On 5 August, the family of imprisoned economist and former MP **Nazim Baydamirli** announced that his health had deteriorated so severely in detention that they feared for his life. His wife reported that he was suffering from pneumonia, had become extremely weak, and urgently needed hospital treatment that the prison could not provide.

On 8 August, the family of prominent activist **Bakhtiyar Hajiyev** echoed similar concerns, reporting severe mistreatment, psychological pressure, and denial of medical care inside Prison No. 6. Hajiyev, sentenced in January to 10 years in prison on politically motivated charges, told relatives his situation was “unbearable” and warned he might attempt suicide if conditions did not improve.

On 12 August, the focus turned again to the *Abzas Media* case as the Baku Court of Appeal held a preparatory hearing. Female journalists **Sevinj Vagifgizi**, **Nargiz Absalamova**, and **Elnara Gasimova** were placed behind a glass partition with non-functional microphones, preventing them from following proceedings. When they protested, they were forcibly removed from the courtroom by Penitentiary Service staff. All motions submitted by the defence—including requests for

improved conditions in the courtroom and transfer to facilities closer to Baku—were summarily rejected.

On 12 August, civic activist **Mahammad Kekalov**, also from *Abzas Media* and sentenced to seven and a half years in June, was prevented from making a phone call to his lawyer, as prison staff confiscated the phone.

Later that week, on 13 August, peace activist **Bahrüz Samadov** faced another closed-door appeal hearing. Despite the submission of more than 20 motions by his lawyers, the court rejected them all, underscoring the entrenched approach of Azerbaijani courts in political cases. Samadov, sentenced to 15 years on treason charges in June, questioned why he remained in prison despite the signing of a peace statement by Azerbaijan and Armenia earlier that month.

On 15 August 2025, authorities charged three more civil society activists in the revived “NGO case,” adding to the wave of prosecutions that has targeted independent groups since March. Prosecutors accuse them of money laundering, abuse of power, and forgery—charges that could carry up to 12 years in prison. More than 100 people, including NGO leaders and donor staff, have already been questioned, showing how the case is being used to pressure and intimidate Azerbaijan’s civil society.

Mid-August brought further troubling developments. On 15 August, the lawyer of opposition politician **Tofiq Yagublu** was subjected to an illegal search when visiting his client in detention. In protest, the lawyer refused to proceed with the meeting, calling the action arbitrary and unlawful.

Three days later, on 18 August, Khatai District Court extended the pre-trial detention of activist and war veteran **Haji Valiyev** by 20 days. Valiyev, known for advocating for the rights of war victims and veterans, had already complained of deteriorating health and lack of access to medical care, but appeals to the Ombudsman’s Office remained unanswered.

On 19 August, economist **Fazil Gasimov** appeared before the Baku Court of Appeal, where he submitted several motions, including requests to call witnesses and replace his detention with house arrest. All were rejected. Frustrated by the repeated denials, his lawyer left the courtroom in protest, after the court even refused to allow him a private consultation with his client.

On 20 August, trade union activist **Elvin Mustafayev** testified in court that he had been subjected to torture in custody, resulting in serious ear damage and ongoing health issues. His lawyer filed complaints with the Prosecutor’s Office, but no investigation has been opened. Requests to the court to compel an inquiry were also denied.

As the month drew to a close, two new waves of repression unfolded.

On 21 August, activist **Ahmad Mammadli** had his preparatory hearing, where the court rejected all motions and sent his case to trial. His family insists that he was targeted after filming the politically sensitive trial of Tofiq Yagublu. That same day, trade union leader **Afiaddin Mammadov** was reported to be held in intolerable prison conditions, with his mental health worsening and phone calls cut short whenever he tried to describe his situation.

On 27 August, the crackdown reached another peak with the arrest of **photojournalist Ahmad Mukhtar** in the *Meydan TV* case. The next day, the Khatai District Court placed him in 40-day pre-trial detention. On 28 August, the Prosecutor's Office introduced **eight additional charges** against all twelve defendants in the case, including smuggling, money laundering, forgery, and tax evasion, escalating the risks they face to sentences of up to 12 years in prison.

August 2025 thus ended as it began: with new arrests, prolonged detentions, sham trials, and worsening detention and prison conditions. Families of prisoners such as **Nazim Baydamirli** and **Bakhtiyar Hajiye**v fear for their lives, while others like **Elvin Mustafayev** testify openly about torture without any prospect of accountability. Lawyers continue to face obstruction in representing clients, and defence motions are consistently rejected. Far from isolated incidents, these developments reveal a systemic pattern: the Azerbaijani authorities are using courts, prosecutors, and prisons in tandem as instruments of political retribution.