

FREEDOM FOR ANAR MAMMADLI

END REPRESSION IN AZERBAIJAN #COP29

X: [@Free Anar](#)
info@free-anar.site

Facebook: [Anar Mammadli Campaign](#)
www.free-anar.site

Climate of Repression in Azerbaijan: European Political Community Summit an Opportunity to Demand Rights

6 November 2024 — The undersigned human rights organisations call on the participants of the forthcoming European Political Community Summit to address the climate of unprecedented repression in Azerbaijan and to demand the release of Anar Mammadli and other human rights defenders, civil society activists, environmental activists and journalists whose arrests are politically motivated.

Less than a week before the opening of the 29th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Baku, Azerbaijan, President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan is expected to attend the Summit of the European Political Community in Budapest, Hungary, on 7 November.

The year 2024 is marked by a notable intensification of repression in Azerbaijan, occurring in the aftermath of the presidential election on 7 February 2024 and the parliamentary elections on 1 September 2024, leading to [unprecedented levels of repression in the country](#). At the time of writing, almost no independent civil society actors remain free in the country, and the leadership of independent media outlets has been arrested, while the authorities have increased pressure on the legal profession and academics.

On 29 April 2024 winner of the 2014 Vaclav Havel Award of the Council of Europe, human rights defender [Anar Mammadli](#), was arrested (again). He was sentenced to pre-trial detention on fabricated charges. His detention is emblematic of the increase of repression in 2024: Anar Mammadli is the leader of the only independent election monitoring organisation in the country and is a co-founder of the Climate Justice Initiative, a coalition of independent environmental and human rights organisations that aimed at joining forces in view of COP29. His arrest intervened after his organisation's published its preliminary findings on the conduct of the presidential elections and right after the establishment of the Climate Justice Initiative was announced. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on environmental defenders [recognised Anar Mammadli's detention as unlawful and has called for his immediate release](#).

Like other prisoners of conscience, [Anar Mammadli's health has seriously deteriorated](#) over the past six months. We fear that if Anar Mammadli's health concerns remain unaddressed while in detention, they may have irreparable effects on his physical and mental health.

As [underlined by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders](#), the country is witnessing an “alarming wave of arrests and criminal cases against human rights defenders and journalists”, of whom,

in addition to Anar Mammadli, the following individuals are particularly emblematic of the unprecedented repression:

- [Famil Khalilov](#) is a civic activist with a considerable following on social media. He is held in conditions that fail to address his needs as a person with a disability. These concerns are further compounded considering the “deplorable state of affairs” of places of detention, as recently [highlighted by the Committee for the Prevention of Torture](#);
- [Bahruz Samadov](#) is a researcher and activist specialising in authoritarianism. His written work offers a critical analysis of Azerbaijan’s regional and foreign policy. The prosecution of Bahruz Samadov, associated to targeting other scholars, reveals a new trend, in the will to silence young academics and writers who through their research criticise Azerbaijan’s regional and foreign policy;
- [Gubad Ibadoghlu](#) is a distinguished academic and anti-corruption expert who has taught and conducted research on public finance management and good governance in Azerbaijan and abroad, most recently at the London School of Economics. Since 2014, he has been residing in exile. In July 2023, he returned to Azerbaijan to visit his family but was promptly and violently arrested. Following a nine-month period of pre-trial detention, he was placed in house arrest. He remains in this situation until today, as he awaits trial. If convicted, he could face up to 17 years imprisonment;
- The trade union activist, [Afiaddin Mammadov](#), has been held in pre-trial detention since August 2023 and is currently facing criminal charges that could result in a 11-year prison sentence;
- At the same time, Azerbaijani authorities cracked down on independent media, raiding and shutting down the media outlets **Abzas Media**, **Toplum TV**, and **Kanal 13**. Journalists who were arrested during the raids are held in pre-trial detention on various criminal charges, including the Abzas Media Director, human rights defender and journalist, [Ulvi Hasanli](#); woman human rights defender and journalist, Editor-in-Chief of Abzas Media [Sevinj Vagifgizi](#); Head of Institute for Democratic Initiatives, human rights defender [Akif Gurbanov](#); the founder of Toplum TV [Alaskar Mammadli](#); [Aziz Orujev](#), Director of Kanal 13; journalist **Shamo Eminov** of Kanal 13; women human rights defenders and journalists [Elnara Gasimova](#), [Nargiz Absalamova](#); and independent multimedia journalist [Ali Zeynalov](#);
- Political activists [Tofiq Yagublu](#) and [Ruslan Izzatli](#), human rights defender and investigative journalist [Hafiz Babali](#) are also among individuals who remain in detention.

Moreover, the **Mammadli Group of cases** continues to be examined by the Committee of Ministers. The cases in question pertain to prominent human rights defenders, civil society leaders and a journalist who were all subjected to arrests and detentions between 2013 and 2016. The European Court of Human Rights found that these actions constituted a misuse of criminal law, which was intended to punish and silence them for their human rights and journalistic activities. As recently [observed by a group of distinguished legal and human rights NGOs](#), the Court also “established that these cases reflected a troubling pattern of arbitrary arrests and detentions of government critics, civil society activists and human rights defenders through retaliatory prosecutions and misuse of criminal law in defiance of the rule of law, and the actions of the State gave rise to a risk of further repetitive applications ([Aliyev v Azerbaijan](#), § 223)”.

Against the backdrop of the unprecedented levels of repression, the European Union issued several statements over the crackdown, [referring](#) to “an unsettling rise of arrests of independent journalists, human rights defenders, and political activists on politically motivated charges”.

In a context of repression aimed at the total silencing of independent civil society, targeting in particular human rights defenders and lawyers, journalists and media workers, independent academics and researchers, as well as political activists and environmental activists, we call on the participants of the next Summit of the European Political Community to:

- **Demand that all participating States comply with their human rights obligations as members of the Council of Europe**, including and especially Azerbaijan, in particular to respect the principles of the European Court of Human Rights by implementing its judgments;
- In the margins of the Summit and in bilateral meetings with Azerbaijani representatives, **call for the release of Anar Mammadli and other human rights defenders, civil society and environmental activists, and journalists whose arrests are politically motivated**;
- **Call for a complete review of legislation targeting human rights defenders and civil society and criminalising their activities**, in line with the findings of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe.

In a [joint statement](#), international and regional human rights experts called upon Azerbaijani authorities “to end any form of harassment against critics; to immediately and unconditionally release those in arbitrary detention; and to guarantee an enabling environment for human rights-related activities more broadly”. The European Political Community Summit offers an opportunity to **demand from Azerbaijani authorities to comply with the country’s human rights obligations**.

Sincerely yours,

Signatories:

Anar Mammadli Campaign to end repression in Azerbaijan

Center for Civil Liberties, Ukraine

European Exchange, Germany

European Platform for Democratic Elections (EPDE)

Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Poland

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR)

Italian Federation for Human Rights

Netherlands Helsinki Committee

Norwegian Helsinki Committee

Human Rights Centre, Georgia

Human Rights Centre ZMINA, Ukraine

Resource Center for Human Rights, Moldova

World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders