



FREEDOM NOW



Norwegian
Helsinki Committee



Mr Alain Berset

Secretary General of the Council of Europe
Palais de l'Europe
Strasbourg

20 April 2026

Re.: The Forced Return of Afgan Sadigov to Azerbaijan: A Test of the Council of Europe's Credibility

Mr Secretary General,

We, the undersigned human rights organisations, write to bring to your urgent attention [the forced return of journalist Afgan Sadigov](#) to Azerbaijan and the broader pattern of transnational repression it reflects. This pattern is increasingly manifesting across the South Caucasus, as illustrated by the systemic and documented [deterioration of human rights and the civil society landscape](#) in Georgia. Crucially, in January 2025, the European Court of Human Rights issued a binding interim measure prohibiting Georgia of his extradition after he was arrested there in August 2024 on an Azerbaijani extradition request.

The case of Afgan Sadigov is especially emblematic, and underscores the long-standing concerns of [international human rights](#) organisations about the [transnational repression of Azerbaijani dissent](#).

On 5 April 2026, Afgan Sadigov, founder and editor of the regional news site Azel.tv, [was deported to Azerbaijan](#) within hours of his late-night arrest in Tbilisi on alleged administrative grounds: that [a social media post](#) constituted an assault on a police officer. Sadigov had faced repeated criminal and administrative persecution in Azerbaijan for his criticism of the authorities before relocating to Georgia in 2023. After his arrest in August 2024 on an Azerbaijani extradition request, and following the interim measure issued by the European Court of Human Rights in January 2025, he was released on bail in April 2025. In the months that followed, [he and his legal team](#) sought authorisation for him to leave Georgia and reunite with his family in a third country. His request was never granted, in a context where the timing of subsequent actions suggests [a coordinated sequence culminating](#) in his detention and deportation on 5 April 2026.

As of 10 April 2026, the European Court of Human Rights [has invited further observations in Sadigov's case](#), including on whether the applicant's transfer to Azerbaijan in disregard of an interim measure violated Article 34; the matter remains under consideration.

[Sadigov's expulsion through administrative proceedings](#), after the extradition route had been blocked by the Court, raises serious concerns of refoulement and, in substance, extraordinary rendition, [irrespective of the formal legal classification](#) Georgia has chosen to apply.

Sadigov's case reflects a pattern of collusion between Georgia and Azerbaijan in the suppression of dissent. Georgia's recently enacted legislation targeting foreign funding mirrors Azerbaijan's tactics for suppressing independent civil society. The visit of President Aliyev to Tbilisi on 6 April — [the day after Sadigov's forced return](#) — reinforces concerns about [deliberate bilateral coordination](#) aimed at restricting human rights and fundamental freedoms, in direct contradiction with both states' obligations as Council of Europe member states.

The credibility of the European human rights system depends not only on the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, but on their effective implementation and on the collective commitment of member states to uphold the Convention.

We therefore call on you to act urgently and to use the tools available to your office:

- **Invoke Article 52 of the European Convention on Human Rights** to request that Azerbaijan furnish an explanation of the manner in which its domestic law ensures the effective implementation of the Convention, in light of a decade of documented and systematic violations, including the transnational repression of its own citizens on the territory of fellow member states;
- **Commission an independent report** on Georgia's conduct in the Sadigov case to be presented to the Council of Europe, examining whether Georgia's expulsion of Afgan Sadigov — carried out in direct defiance of a binding interim measure of the European Court of Human Rights — is compatible with its obligations under the Convention;
- **Appoint a Special Representative on the South Caucasus** to ensure a sustained, coordinated political and diplomatic response to the cross-border suppression of dissent — a phenomenon that existing mechanisms have demonstrably failed to address.
- **Call on Council of Europe member States to make use of available diplomatic, political, and other appropriate measures** to support the protection of Afgan Sadigov, including by facilitating his right to family reunification, particularly in light of the fact that he has already been summoned twice by the authorities since his return to Baku.

As you know, the case of Afgan Sadigov [does not stand alone](#). It is the latest episode in a decade of documented, systematic repression by Azerbaijan — repression repeatedly condemned by human rights organisations and the European Court of Human Rights, including through multiple judgements finding a violation of Article 18 of the Convention, yet met with a measured and conciliatory response from the Organisation's leadership. This has carried implications: it has emboldened Azerbaijan to expand its repression beyond its own borders and lowered the threshold for what other member states consider acceptable. Georgia's conduct in the Sadigov case is a direct expression of that lowered threshold. The credibility of the European human rights system is now at stake.

We remain at your disposal and look forward to your response.

Yours faithfully,

The signatories:

Campaign to End Repression in Azerbaijan

European Human Rights Advocacy Centre (EHRAC)

European Platform for Democratic Elections (EPDE)

Freedom Now

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), within the

framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights
Defenders

Norwegian Helsinki Committee

Social Justice Center

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

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