

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/azerbaidjan-opposition-blogger-arrested-in-03-10-2012,43483.html>

Europe/Ex-USSR - Azerbaijan

Arbitrary detention

Opposition blogger arrested in growing crackdown ahead of next year's election

3 October 2012

Reporters Without Borders roundly condemns the well-known blogger and opposition activist **Zaur Gurbanli's** arbitrary detention for the past four days and calls for his immediate release.

"There is little doubt that Gurbanli's arrest is linked to his blogging and political activities," Reporters Without Borders said. "Harassment of the media and civil society [was reinforced](#) when the international media left after the Eurovision song contest and the government seems less willing than ever to relax it again with just a year to go to the October 2013 presidential election.

"We urge the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, which is currently in session, to heed this latest indication of the Azerbaijani government's state of mind and to pass a resolution calling firmly for the release of its political prisoners."

One of the leaders of the [NIDA movement](#) of young opposition activists, Gurbanli was arrested near his Baku home on the morning of 29 September by about ten plain-clothes men who identified themselves as members of the interior ministry's organized crime department and forced him to get into a car.

Thereafter, he was held incommunicado for 48 hours in an unknown location, without being allowed access to a lawyer or his family and without any official explanation for his arrest.

It was only on 1 October that the interior ministry's press office announced that he had been placed in administrative detention for 15 days pending trial on a charge of refusing to cooperate with a police investigation into drug trafficking.

Local activists fear that new charges will be brought against him when the investigation is completed. Gurbanli's lawyer, Ashabali Mustafayev, told [Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty](#) that he was trying to ensure that his detention was not extended beyond the current 15-day period.

After arresting him, the police took him with them when they searched the headquarters of the "Positive Change" youth movement and seized about 8,000 [copies](#) of a leaflet that NIDA published with a view to next year's election. It shows President Ilham Aliev's profile over the words: "I will leave in 2012 if you join NIDA."

Also a member of the "[Sing for Democracy](#)" campaign launched [during the Eurovision song contest](#), Gurbanli has written many articles critical of the government and, in one recent blog entry, wrote that it was "ridiculous" and "shameful" that a school anthology of Azerbaijani literature had included a poem by Leyla Alieva, the president's daughter.

His arrest came a week after corruption allegations were made against ruling party parliamentarian Gular Ahmadova.

Bloggers and online activists have often been the target of government harassment in recent years. [The release of the two well-known bloggers, Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade](#), in 2010 was followed by [a new crackdown on netizens](#) after opposition demonstrations in the spring of 2011, in the wake of the Arab Spring.

Azerbaijan is ranked 162nd out of 179 countries in the [latest Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).
