

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/azerbaidjan-photographer-freed-but-now-facing-18-06-2012,42782.html>

Europe/Ex-USSR - Azerbaijan

Return of the big stick

Photographer freed but now facing possible five-year jail sentence

18 June 2012

A court in the Baku district of Sabayil released **Mehman Huseynov** provisionally on the evening of 13 June but ordered him tried on charges of hooliganism and resisting the authorities under article 221.2.2 of the criminal code. The charges carry a possible five-year jail term.

These are more serious than the charges originally cited. The court also placed Huseynov under judicial control pending trial.

13.06.2012 - Outspoken photojournalist arrested

Reporters Without Borders condemns the young photojournalist **Mehman Huseynov's** detention since yesterday evening on a charge of hooliganism and "insulting and using force" against a member of the special forces when an opposition demonstration was dispersed in Baku on 21 May, on the eve of the Eurovision Song Contest semi-finals.

A member of the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety (IRFS), Huseynov is well known for his coverage of police violence and his defence of freedom of information. He is also active on social networks and his YouTube account is closely followed.

"Huseynov's arrest bears all the hallmarks of an act of political revenge and intimidation," Reporters Without Borders said. "He must be freed at once. "The cynicism of the charges is intolerable as it was the police who prevented him from covering the demonstration. Now that the Eurovision Song Contest is over, the authorities are beginning to make civil society pay for the protests it staged. The international community's support is needed more than ever."

After being taken to the Sabayil district police station in Baku at around 6 p.m. yesterday, Huseynov was questioned for three hours and then placed in police custody. During the next 48 hours, a judge must rule on the charges and decide whether he will remain in pre-trial detention. A charge of hooliganism carries a possible one-year jail sentence under article 221.1 of the criminal code.

Force was used against both journalists and protesters and many activists were arrested when the police broke up the 21 May demonstration in Fountains Square in Baku. Huseynov was manhandled and his camera was broken, which prompted an argument with a police officer.

Huseynov is regarded as one of the leading sources of coverage of demonstrations and his work was particularly visible during the Eurovision Song Contest, when the international media made reference to Azerbaijan's massive human rights violations. He is the brother of the head of the IRFS, **Emin Huseynov**.

Since the end of the Eurovision Song Contest, the authorities have made it clear they intend to reassert their control. As well as arresting Huseynov and imposing a two-year jail sentence on fellow journalist Anar Bayramli, the authorities have also arrested opposition activists and a

human rights defender in the past few days.

Parliament meanwhile today adopted an amendment drastically restricting access to state-held information while President Ilham Aliev's leading adviser, Ali Hasanov, appealed on 31 May for "public hatred" towards media that criticize the government and said that "opposition members of this kind, journalists and newspapers, should not dare to set a step outside!"
