

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/azerbaijan-journalists-among-victims-of-05-04-2011,39953.html>

Europe & ex-USSR - Azerbaijan

Spring crackdown

## Journalists among victims of regime's violent response to pro-democracy protests

5 April 2011

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As [pro-democracy protests](#) gain pace in Azerbaijan, the regime is cracking down harder on journalists in a desperate attempt to assert its control over news and information. The authorities at first concentrated on imposing a [news blackout](#) by preventing journalists from covering demonstrations and criminalizing Facebook users. But in a new escalation, opposition journalists are now being [kidnapped and beaten](#).

In the latest case, three men in civilian dress intercepted **Ramin Deco**, a reporter for the opposition newspaper *Azadlig*, on Sunday morning in Rasulzade, the village where he lives, located 20 km outside Baku, and forced him to get into their car. They then drove him to Mashtaga, another village 25 km outside Baku, and subjected him to intense psychological pressure for eight hours.

Deco was repeatedly asked why he was so active on online social networks and why he wrote articles criticising President Ilham Aliyev. He was told that if he did not abandon these activities, he would suffer "serious consequences." Before releasing him in Baku at about 4 p.m., his abductors warned him to say nothing about what had just happened.

The reporter nonetheless talked about his abduction immediately to the media. Yesterday evening, two of Deco's assailants were waiting for him as he left his office and gave him a severe beating "as a reprisal."

Coming eight days after the abduction and beating of fellow *Azadlig* reporter [Seymour Khaziyev](#), yesterday's episode confirms that journalists are leading victims of the government's violent response to the mounting street protests.

Around 30 journalists working for various media were intercepted by riot police near Fountains Square in Baku on 2 April and were prevented from entering the square in order to photograph, film or interview those taking part in a demonstration there, which had been banned.

Around 10 of the reporters, including **Mehman Kerimli**, **Elchin Hasanov**, **Shahvalad Choban Oglu**, **Zamin Haji**, **Sakit Zahidov** and **Zafar Guliyev**, were manhandled and briefly detained. Several of them were beaten.

The attorney-general's office is meanwhile investigating **Elnur Majidli** – a journalist and activist who was one of the founders of the [Facebook page](#) convening the demonstration – on suspicion of "inciting national, ethnic or religious hatred" under article 283.1 of the criminal code. After receiving threats in Azerbaijan, Majidli has been living in France for the past few months. In his absence, the Serious Crimes Investigation Department summoned his father to notify him of the investigation.

Dubbing 2 April as a "Day of Rage," opposition groups had appealed for demonstrations in Baku to press for democratic change. Calls for protests in Azerbaijan began being made on the Internet [a month ago](#). Azerbaijan is so far the former Soviet republic to be most affected by pro-democracy

activism inspired by the unrest that has swept the Arab world. Ilham Aliyev took over as president in 2003 from his father, Heydar Aliyev, who had ruled since 1969.

*(Photo: AFP)*

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