

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/azerbaijan-ilham-aliyev-in-paris-open-letter-27-10-2014,47166.html>

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Europe/Ex-USSR - Azerbaijan

Unprecedented crackdown

## Ilham Aliyev in Paris - open letter to François Hollande

25 October 2014

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Dear President Hollande,

Reporters Without Borders, an organization that defends freedom of information, would like to draw your attention to the desperate state of independent media and journalists in Azerbaijan, whose president, Ilham Aliyev, you will receive on 27 October.

**The authorities are cracking down in an unprecedented manner on both professional and non-professional journalists in Azerbaijan, which is ranked 160th out of 180 countries in our [latest press freedom index](#).**

Thanks to a biased regulatory agency, self-censorship and manipulation of the advertising market, the government has [complete control of the broadcast media](#). The net is also closing on the handful of independent newspapers that struggle to survive. One of them, *Zerkalo*, was [forced to stop producing a print edition](#) in May. *Azadlig* is being throttled by astronomical damages awards and is now [close to collapse](#).

With [no fewer than 13 journalist and bloggers unjustly detained](#), **Azerbaijan is now the European continent's biggest prison for news providers**. The state of health of some of them, such as *Khural* editor in chief [Avaz Zeynalli](#), is worrying. Sham trials that respect neither legal procedures nor defence rights are common. Outspoken journalists, citizen-journalists and bloggers are subjected to all sorts of intimidation including threats, [physical attacks](#), blackmail and smear campaigns.

These threats have forced many independent journalists to flee Azerbaijan but the regime's persecution now extends beyond its borders. Rauf Mirkadyrov, a well-known reporter and columnist based in Turkey, was extradited back to Azerbaijan on 18 April and was [immediately jailed](#) on a trumped-up charge of spying for Armenia.

This past summer, **the regime also began [cracking down on NGOs that support news media and defend freedom of information](#)** – NGOs such as Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety, Media Rights Institute and IREX. It has frozen bank accounts, raided their offices and forced their representatives into exile or silence. Most have had no choice but to suspend operations.

The regime's drive to eliminate all media pluralism undermines the rule of law and the fight against corruption, without which it is hard to regard Azerbaijan as a reliable partner. Regardless of the economic and strategic advantages of a relationship between France and Azerbaijan, a frank dialogue between partners must not ignore freedom of information, a freedom guaranteed by Azerbaijan's constitution and international treaties.

We therefore ask you to clearly raise this issue with your Azerbaijani counterpart during his visit to Paris and to request the release of the jailed journalists and bloggers. We respectfully also urge you to point out to President Aliyev that his government's violations of freedom of information are incompatible with closer relations between Paris and Baku, as they are incompatible with Azerbaijan's presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

We thank you in advance for the attention you give to our requests.

Sincerely,

Christophe Deloire

Reporters Without Borders secretary-general

*(Photo: AFP / Stéphane de Sakutin)*

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