

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/azerbaijan-rsf-welcomes-the-german-parliament-11-06-2015,48002.html>

Europe/Ex-USSR - Azerbaijan

Baku Games

RSF welcomes the German parliament's resolution on Azerbaijan

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Reporters Without Borders (RSF) welcomes the German parliament's intention to pass a resolution criticizing the human rights situation in Azerbaijan.

Timed to coincide with the opening of the first-ever European Games in Azerbaijan's capital Baku on Friday, the draft adopted by the parliamentary groups of the parties in the government, CDU/CSU and SPD, denounces the systematic violation of human rights in the sport event's host country. Since last summer the Azerbaijani government has silenced almost all independent journalists and oppositional media [in the country](#). A reporter for German TV network ARD did not obtain an accreditation for Azerbaijan to report from the country prior to the games even though he tried for more than a month.

"The fact that the German parliament denounces the human rights situation in Azerbaijan and urges the country to respect freedom of the press is an important signal for the opening of the European Games", said Christian Mihr, executive director of Reporters Without Borders Germany. "Azerbaijan's government should use the opportunity of this event to act in the Olympic spirit and respect human rights such as freedom of the press. Releasing all imprisoned journalists in the country would be a good start."

The resolution states that the human rights situation in Azerbaijan has massively declined since [the presidential elections in 2013](#). Freedom of expression, press freedom, freedom of religion and freedom of association have systematically been violated. Furthermore the parliamentarians call on the German government to continue pushing for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners in Azerbaijan and to urge the government in Baku to guarantee freedom of the press for both local and foreign journalists and internet activists.

Reporters Without Borders notes with regret that any concrete reference to the European Games was deleted from the text in the course of [parliamentary negotiations](#). While the resolution was originally titled: „Taking advantage of the European Games in Azerbaijan to adhere to [human rights](#)“, a watered-down version will now be submitted to the parliamentarians' vote.

RSF also takes note with regret that no concrete cases of detained journalists and human rights defenders are mentioned in the resolution. At least [eight journalists and four online activists](#) are currently imprisoned in the country because of their media work. Among these is the investigative journalist **Khadija Ismayilova**, in pre-trial detention since December, journalist **Seymour Khaziyev** who was condemned in January to five years in prison for "hooliganism", correspondent **Rauf Mirkadyrov** who has been held since being deported from Turkey in April of 2014. Many other media workers have left the country to flee [harassment and imminent arrest](#).

ARD TV reporter did not obtain an accreditation

One recent example of the systematic suppression of critical reports is the case of **Florian Bauer**, a reporter for German TV network ARD who specializes in sports policy. Since 28 April the journalist has tried to get an accreditation and a visa for Azerbaijan to report from there ahead of the European Games. After a first failed attempt to get accredited for the finals of the Tour d'Azerbaïdjan

biking race in early May he submitted a formal accreditation request to the Baku 2015 local organizing committee on 5 May.

Over the following weeks he also asked Azerbaijan's embassy to Germany as well as the Azerbaijani ministries of sports and of foreign affairs to support his application. However he has not obtained an accreditation and a visa until today and therefore had to abandon his plan to report from Azerbaijan in the run-up to the Games. When asked about the case by Reporters Without Borders, Azerbaijan's embassy to Germany said the accreditation involved a lengthy process and Bauer's application was still being processed.

Azerbaijan has a history of denying certain journalists entry. Some are on a "black list" issued by the foreign ministry and listing foreign [journalists, scientists and politicians](#). Prior to the European Games, the foreign ministry threatened to withdraw the accreditation of journalists who were found to "work against the territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty of the Republic of Azerbaijan" or "[disseminate distorted or false information](#)".

Azerbaijan is ranked 162nd out of 180 countries in the [2015 world press freedom index](#).

The original statement in German is available on [the website of Reporters Without Borders Germany](#)
