

# Reporters Without Borders

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Europe/Ex-USSR - Azerbaijan

Unprecedented crackdown

## François Hollande urged to seek release of journalists while in Baku

24 April 2015

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Reporters Without Borders calls on France to condition its presence at the opening of the first European Olympic Games, to be held in Baku in June, on the release of all journalists detained in Azerbaijan.

After visiting Yerevan today for the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide, President François Hollande will meet with his Azerbaijani counterpart in Baku tomorrow. Reporters Without Borders urges him to use the opportunity to clearly request the release of imprisoned journalists and an end to harassment of the government's critics.

Azerbaijan is ranked 162nd out of 180 countries in the [2015 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#) after registering one of the biggest performance declines of any country. Virtually all of its independent journalists and outspoken bloggers have been silenced, thrown into prison or driven into exile.

*"After eliminating all media pluralism, the Azerbaijani authorities are systematically suppressing the few remaining sources of criticism,"* Reporters Without Borders programme director Lucie Morillon said.

*"In the run-up to the first European Olympic Games, the continent's leaders have a special duty to condemn the unprecedented crackdown being orchestrated by Baku. We call on François Hollande to make the release of imprisoned journalists a condition for the presence of a French delegation at the opening ceremony of these games."*

Two journalists were [released](#) in December but eight other journalists and four online activists [are still being held](#) on trumped-up charges because of their reporting. They include [Khadija Ismayilova](#), the country's most famous investigative journalist, who has been held since December 2014.

In all, Azerbaijan has around 100 political prisoners, including human rights defenders Rasul Jafarov and Intigam Aliyev, who [were given jail sentences](#) of six and a half years and seven and a half years respectively last week.

One by one, the last independent media outlets are being silenced as a result of various forms of pressure by President Ilham Aliyev's regime.

The Baku bureau of *Radio Azadliq – Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's* Azerbaijani service – was [forcibly closed](#) last December. The independent newspaper *Zerkalo* [stopped publishing](#) in May 2014 after being throttled economically. The last opposition daily, *Azadliq*, [is collapsing](#) under the impact of astronomical damages awards and political persecution. The government controls the entire broadcast sector.

The main NGOs that support the media and defend freedom of information have also [had to shut down](#). **Emin Huseynov**, the head of the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety, has been [holed up in the Swiss embassy](#) since August. He sought refuge there after his home and his NGO were raided.

The climate of intimidation is reinforced by [physical attacks](#) that usually go unpunished, [blackmail attempts](#) and inflammatory [verbal attacks](#) on government critics, who are decried as "traitors" or

"foreign agents."

*(Photo: AFP / Stéphane de Sakutin)*

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