

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/azerbaijan-journalists-pay-the-price-as-azeri-21-02-2012,41916.html>

Middle East/North Africa - Iran

Halfway there

Court reduces sentence of correspondent for Iranian media

2 August 2012

The Baku Appeal Court today reduced a two-year prison sentence imposed on **Anar Bayramli**, the Azerbaijan correspondent for several Iranian news organizations (see below), by half and he will now be released next February.

"This half-hearted verdict gives little comfort," Reporters Without Borders said. "It is a testament to the predicament of the jury in a case that has become a bargaining chip in the diplomatic tension between Baku and Tehran.

"International and public pressure must be maintained until the journalist is released and given the benefit of a genuinely fair trial."

Bayramli works for a number of Iranian media outlets that are highly critical of the Baku government and indulge in propaganda on behalf of the Islamic Republic. He was arrested in February last year and found guilty of possessing heroin the following June.

11.06.2012 - Correspondent for Iranian media sentenced to two years in prison

Anar Bayramli, a government critic and correspondent for two Iranian new media, *Fars News* and *Sahar TV*, was sentenced today to two years in prison on a charge of drug possession after a trial that was marked by contradictory evidence and was held at a time of great tension between Azerbaijan and neighbouring Iran.

Bayramli has been held since February (see below). *Sahar TV* driver Ramil Dadashov, who was arrested at the same time as Bayramli, was released without charge on 16 May. It was never clear why he was held.

21.02.2012 - Journalists pay the price as Azeri-Iranian war of words heats up

Reporters Without Borders seeks an explanation for the arrest of **Anar Bayramli**, a correspondent for Iranian media, and Ramil Dadashov, a driver for Iranian television.

"The Azeri authorities do themselves no favours by turning to the methods used by Iran," the press freedom organization said.

"They clearly have a duty to defend national security, but it is intolerable that their paranoia should lead them to resort to a wide variety of pretexts to muzzle foreign and critical media organizations, even if they indulge in propaganda.

"Bayramli and Dadashov must be granted bail immediately and receive a fair trial. Alas, resorting to drugs charges is not heading in the right direction."

Bayramli, a 31-year-old Azeri citizen, works for several official Iranian news organizations, including the news agency *Fars* and *Sahar TV*. He was detained at his home in the capital, Baku, on 17 February. His brother Eldar said the arresting officers had no warrant.

According to the latest information, his lawyer Anar Gasimli had still not been allowed to see his client or obtain official notification of the charges against him. Bayramli was taken to Kurdakhani prison.

Police in the Binagadi district of Baku said the journalist was in possession of nearly 4 grams of heroin and he resisted arrest. However, his brother said he never used drugs and followed the officers calmly, without resistance.

The journalist was reported to have been summoned to the police station several times in the past three weeks where he was questioned about his political affiliation.

Dadashov, a driver for Iranian television, was arrested on the same day in the Baku suburb of Sumgayit. Little is known about the reasons for his detention.

Tension between Azerbaijan and Iran has risen sharply in recent months. The two neighbours are at odds over territorial disputes and regional rivalries relating to key oil pipeline routes.

Tehran accuses Baku of exploiting the large Azeri minority in northern Iran, while Azeri authorities have stepped up their crackdown on the religious community, whom they accuse of colluding with the Islamic Republic.

Dozens of officials from Islamist parties, as well as ordinary believers, have been arrested in Azerbaijan in recent weeks in the latest in a series of round-ups that began last summer. Baku has accused Iran of being behind a wave of cyber attacks on official Azeri websites last month.

The media, some of which have contributed to maintaining this paranoia, have paid a heavy price for this confrontation.

Several Iranian journalists are in detention for having dealings with foreigners and anti-government publicity, such as [Said Matinpur](#), a correspondent for the Azeri-language newspaper *Yarpagh*.

On the Azerbaijan side, **Ramin Bayramov**, editor of the news website [islam-azeri.az](#), was arrested in July last year for possessing arms and drugs and remains in prison in Baku.

Sahar TV is a satellite television station that has been broadcasting Iranian government propaganda abroad since 1997. It is part of Islamic Republic Of Iran Broadcasting, which broadcasts radio and television programs in foreign languages.

Possession of drugs is often used as a fabricated charge by the Azeri justice system, as in the case of the journalist **Eynulla Fatullayev**, [released in May last year on a presidential pardon after spending four years in prison](#).
