

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/azerbaijan-repression-unleashed-against-18-08-2014,46812.html>

Europe/Ex-USSR - Azerbaijan

Repression

Repression unleashed against information freedom defenders

18 August 2014

Campaign targets include major media support NGOs

The Azerbaijani government has been waging an unprecedented drive since July against human rights advocates, independent journalists, and their supporters.

On 14 May, Azerbaijan assumed the chairmanship of the Council of Europe's ministerial committee. Recent events make clear that the country is the most repressive of the council's 47 members.

A number of media-support organizations and their leaders are targets of the campaign. The accounts of about one dozen NGOs were [frozen](#) on 5 August. Among them were the Azerbaijan section of [IREX](#), the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety, and the [Media Rights Institute](#). All three work to promote freedom of information in the country. IRFS director Emin Huseynov and Rashid Hajili, the director of MRI, also had their personal accounts frozen.

On 6 August, Huseynov was notified that he was prohibited from leaving the country. Contact with him has been broken off since 8 August, when the IRFS offices were searched. Searchers seized legal documents about the NGO's work, including human rights defense, as well as its computers and other electronic equipment. These items were not listed in the search warrant. The same day, Huseynov's mother's house was searched, and her tablet computer seized.

Three days later, the organization's offices were sealed. Court officers acting without showing any official document ordered all employees to leave the premises.

"The government of Azerbaijan seems intent on dealing a fatal blow to the country's last independent voices," Johann Bihl, head of the RWB Eastern Europe and Central Asia desk. *"We urge the international community to respond as quickly as possible to these unacceptable practices by a state that now holds the presidency of the Council of Europe's council of ministers. These acts of persecution must be halted before independent media are completely wiped out."*

The repression is also hitting information freedom advocates' families. Murad Adilov, an activist in the Popular Front opposition party, was [arrested](#) during a police raid on 12 August on his parents' house in Khelfeli, a village in the Sibarabad region.

During a violent search of the Adilov home, the police said they had found 600 grammes of a drug under a pillow. Murad Adilov was charged with concealing drugs. He was tortured to force a confession and was then taken to the organized crime department of the Interior Ministry in Baku. Two days after his arrest, he had still not been allowed to see his lawyer. On 13 August, he was sentenced to three months in jail.

His brother, **Natik Adilov**, a correspondent for *Azadlig*, an independent newspaper, and a presenter for the opposition television broadcast *Azerbaican Saati*, said that Murad's political activism could have prompted official anger, but that his own journalistic activities appear likely to have caused his brother's arrest. **Ganimat Zahid**, editor in chief of *Azadlig*, agrees with this interpretation of events. *Azadlig* has been systematically [harassed](#) for years by the government, to the point of choking off its financial viability.

Since late July, repression of civil society has grown especially intense. On 2 August, human rights advocate Rasul Djafarov was [placed in pre-trial detention](#) for three months in a clearly trumped-up case. Three days earlier, a renowned human rights activist, Leyla Yunus, was also arrested. She was then [joined in prison](#) on 5 August by her husband, Arif Yunus. The couple were charged in the same case as [Rauf Mirkadyrov](#), who has been in pre-trial detention since 18 April.

On 8 August, human rights advocate Intigam Aliev was [arrested](#), also on clearly false charges.

Azerbaijan is ranked 160th of 180 countries in [Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).

(photo : International Media Support)
