

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/azerbaijan-nine-year-jail-term-warning-to-13-03-2013,44202.html>

Europe/Ex-USSR - Azerbaijan

Trumped-up charges

Nine-year jail term – warning to media ahead of election

13 March 2013

Reporters Without Borders firmly condemns the nine-year jail sentence that a serious crimes court in Baku passed yesterday on [Avaz Zeynalli](#), the editor of the newspaper *Khural*, on a series of trumped-up charges.

“Defence rights were flouted throughout the proceedings that ended with yesterday’s conviction,” Reporters Without Borders said.

“The ailing Zeynalli had to wait a year and a half in prison [before being sentenced](#), the prosecution case was based on fabricated charges and the verdict had all the hallmarks of a political reprisal and warning to other media ahead of next October’s presidential election. ”

Reporters Without Borders added: “If the judicial systems wants to prove its independence, it should overturn this conviction on appeal.”

Zeynalli has been held since October 2011, when he [was arrested](#) shortly after publishing an article that was very critical of President Ilham Aliiev. Despite serious health problems, all of his requests for release on bail were rejected and, while in jail, he has been subjected to harassment and denial of rights.

His newspaper has meanwhile fared no better. A series of lawsuits led to all of its equipment being seized.

Harassment of journalists, bloggers and human rights defenders keeps on increasing in Azerbaijan, which was ranked 156th out of 179 countries in the 2013 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index. More and more repressive laws – restricting the activities of NGOs, controlling the Internet and criminalizing unauthorized demonstrations – are being adopted in the run-up to the presidential election.

Three opposition bloggers were arrested on 7 March ahead of a demonstration in Baku. And now the opposition newspaper *Azadlig* is threatened with closure as a result of [astronomic damages awards](#).

Picture: Turan
