

## **Information bulletin**

of the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center

on abuses the COVID-19 response actions during quarantine regime in Azerbaijan

April 17, 2020

### **Background:**

The Operative Headquarters under the Cabinet of Ministers was established on February 27 which confirmed the first case of infection in Azerbaijan a day later. Later, a lock-down regime is declared in Azerbaijan. Shops, cafes, restaurants, malls, most of the service industry is closed down, leaving the home is only allowed for a limited period with a special permit since the April 5<sup>th</sup>. As of April 17, 1283 people have been infected with the virus whereas 460 people recovered, and 15 people died. Though the official lock-down is to end on 20<sup>th</sup> of April, relevant governmental bodies have vowed to suggest the extension.

EMDS has previously reported<sup>1</sup> that the rules of the quarantine regime are abused against the political opponents. Accordingly, approximately 10 activist and opposition members were unfairly detained or fined with political motivation. This document covers the new cases of political opportunism in times of the Covid19 outbreak until 16<sup>th</sup> of April with previously unreported cases.

On March 17<sup>th</sup>, the Parliament adopted changes to the law on “Information, Informatization and Protection of Information” and Code on Administrative Offences. Preventing the spread of the manipulative news and misinformation on social media as part of COVID-19 response was brought as a justification for the amendments.

Immediately after the amendments, some people who were criticising the government’s COVID-19 response measures on social media are summoned to police stations, were given verbal warnings and some were forced to post a statement of refutation on their social media accounts.

### **Administrative arrests:**

EMDS reports that, so far, approximately 127 people have been warned for their social media posts and 28 people have faced administrative fine and arrests.

After the decision of the Cabinet of Ministers to limit the freedom of movement of citizens, police officers conducted raids in streets where they either fined or arrested the people outdoors who did not have the relevant permit. Just in the first 15 days of the April, more than 20 thousand people have been fined for breaching the rules of the quarantine regime and more than 80 people faced administrative arrests.

EMDS also reports the cases where the rules of the lock-down regime have been abused against opposition activists with political motivation. Throughout the declared lock-down regime, the

---

<sup>1</sup> On April 10, EMDS reported the abuse of Covid19 outbreak lock-down regime rules against the political opponents in Azerbaijan. If you have not received the first information bulletin, please let us know at [emc.az2001@gmail.com](mailto:emc.az2001@gmail.com)

following people have been accused of breaking the lock-down regime's rules and were sentenced to administrative arrests:

- On March 22, member of the Muslim Solidarity Movement Samir Babayev was sentenced to 30 days of administrative arrest for breaching the rules of the quarantine regime after he was detained for disseminating informative booklets on Covid19 in the central Baku.
- On 9 April, video-blogger Natig Isbatov was detained while he was reporting the protest of people in front of the employment agency in the Absheron district. He was accused of breaching the rules of the quarantine regime and also disobeying the legal demand of the police officer and was sentenced to 30 days of administrative arrest.
- On 10 April, activist Nariman Abdulla, was detained by police and later, on 11<sup>th</sup> of April he was accused of breaching the rules of the quarantine regime. One day before detention, he posted on his Facebook account where he harshly criticised the social policy of the government and the Minister of the Labor and Social Protection to combat the Covid19.
- Fikrat Jafarli, a candidate in the last parliamentary elections, was detained on April 10<sup>th</sup> and later was fined 200 AZN for violating the rules of the quarantine regime despite having the permit to leave the home. Lawyer Namizad Safarov was also fined 200 AZN for the same offence.
- On April 13, the member of the 'Popular Front Party of Azerbaijan' (PFPA hereinafter) Baba Suleyman was detained and later he was sentenced to 30 days of administrative arrest for violating the rules of the quarantine regime despite he had SMS-permit to go outdoors.
- On April 16, Niyamaddin Ahmadov, member of the PFPA, was detained and sentenced to 30 days of administrative arrest for both violating the rules of the lock-down regime and disobeying the legal demand of the police officer.

### **Politically motivated arrests and attacks:**

On April 5<sup>th</sup>, the members of the 'Azerbaijan Democracy and Welfare Movement' Ulfat Hagverdiyev and Rovshan Murad were detained and brought to police stations where they were issued oral warnings. Ulfat Hagverdiyev was also fined 100 AZN. Another member of the ADR Mahabbat Murad was threatened over a phone call. The ADR states that the mobile phones of the detained members were seized by police officers who deleted their posts on social media accounts criticising the government. The Movement calls these steps by the government as political pressure in its statement.

'PFPA member, Nijat Abdullazade, was detained on 10<sup>th</sup> April and was sentenced to 30 days of administrative arrest for disobeying legal demand of the police. Another PFPA member Vugar Abilli, was summoned to police on 16<sup>th</sup> of April and was also accused of disobeying the legal command of the police and sentenced to 20 days of administrative arrest.

On April 10<sup>th</sup>, member of the Muslim Solidarity Movement, Hikmat Agayev was fined 100 AZN by the police for violating the rules of the quarantine regime. Moreover, he was later arrested and sentenced to 25 days of administrative arrest on 13 April for disobeying the legal demand of the police.

Moreover, on April 13, the internet and mobile connections of Ali Karimli, the leader of the PFPA was cut off minutes before the announcement of his participation in a live interview with US-based journalist Sevinc Osmangizi. Both the journalist and Ali Karimli deem the disruption intentional and aimed at the ability of opposition leader to reach out to the people in the times

of the Covid19 outbreak where he would likely criticise government's response actions. The disruption occurred again on April 14<sup>th</sup> and continued until the 15<sup>th</sup>.

### **Social care package and shortcomings:**

Currently, the biggest discontent over the country is because of the not comprehensive social care measures by the government for the unemployed people and citizens stopped working during the lock-down regime. According to officials, among other support actions, more than 120 thousand unemployed people are allegedly paid social allowances.

Economic experts regard the 395 million AZN, allocated by the government for social care packages, as not comprehensive, leaving the majority behind and state that the amount of the designed social allowance is not enough for adequate living standards.

The [website](#) for unemployed people to get registered to be able to benefit the social allowances of the government remains as cause of the discontent. The website continues to freeze, runs slowly and sometimes does not recognize the official documents or does not work at all. Huge queues are formed in front of the local employment offices and pauses are witnessed in service.

Social outrage is to be strengthened amid the COVID-19 outbreak, if the government does not put forward more comprehensive and inclusive packages with more uninterrupted service methods.