

Statement

Of the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center

On cases of political pressure and persecutions

targeting activists and civil society representatives in 8 months of 2022

Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center express its regret regarding the recently growing cases of political pressure and persecutions targeting government critics, civil society representatives, human rights defenders and journalists and state that law-enforcement bodies failed to carry out objective investigations in such cases.

EMDS notes that, in just the 8 months of 2022, at least in 20 cases, socio-political activists, civil society representatives, bloggers, human rights defenders and journalists faced various politically motivated persecutions executed by law-enforcement bodies including detention, arbitrary arrests and intimidation. (See the Annex for detailed information)

Blogger and human rights defender Bakhtiyar Hajiyev alone has been detained 3 times (8 March, 21 April and 22 August) in 2022) and subjected to inhumane and degrading behaviour and physical and psychological violence. Last time on 22 August, he was detained by people in plain clothes and forcefully taken to the Main Organized Crime Department under the Ministry of Internal Affairs where the chairperson demanded he deletes online posts critical of the Ministry and the Minister and threatened in case of continuing criticism.

On 17 February, other human rights defenders, the co-founders of 'Defense Line' organization – Rufat Safarov and Zaur Akbar were detained and forcefully taken to the police station while investigating the reported case of police violence and faced insults and physical violence inside the station as they later reported.

On March 28, activist and founder of Meclis.info parliamentary watchdog – Imran Aliyev was kidnapped by people in plain clothes and was taken to the Main Organized Crime Department. Aliyev's whereabouts remained unknown for 20 hours while he was interrogated in the Department regarding his activities in civil society.

Political activist and member of the oppositional Musavat Party – Aziz Mamiyev was detained on 20 July during the demonstration in front of the Cabinet of Minister's building protesting the closure of land borders of Azerbaijan. He later reported beat-ups, insults and other kinds of degrading behaviour both while being detained and later in the police station. Another activist Gulmira Rahimova shared the photo of the police officer who applied violence to Aziz Mamiyev on her Facebook account on August 11. Subsequently, the criminal case was launched against Rahimova on grounds of articles of the Criminal Code on slander in connection with accusing someone of a grave crime.

The demonstration held on May 14 denouncing the abovementioned politically motivated attacks on political activists and civil society representatives under the slogan of 'We Do Not Want Criminal State' was dispersed by police where at least 30 people were detained and taken to police stations to be later released.

EMDS also condemns the indifferent and unprofessional approach of the investigative authorities in several abovementioned cases and highlights that the absence of objective investigations into facts of human rights violations, omissions in the prevention of attacks

targeting journalists, activists and civil society representatives reflect the uncompromising political stance of the government toward its critics.

EMDS once again notes that the basic freedoms of Azerbaijani citizens such as freedom of peaceful assembly, right to a fair trial and freedom from torture, and inhumane and degrading behaviour must be protected per the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the international human rights documents Azerbaijan is a party to, including, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Considering the abovementioned cases of politically motivated pressure and persecutions, EMDS makes the following calls;

- Azerbaijani government must end cases of politically motivated pressure and persecutions aiming to silence the dissent voices and should refrain from preventing prosecuting and judicial authorities from launching comprehensive and effective investigations.
- Azerbaijani government must comply with the recommendations put forward by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe regarding the implementation of the judgements of the European Court of Human Rights and make necessary reforms with a view to better protect and uphold human rights including freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, freedom from torture, inhumane and degrading behaviour and right to a fair trial.
- European Union should take the abovementioned cases of politically motivated human rights violations into consideration and perform a more sensitive approach towards the protection of human rights in Azerbaijan within the framework of monitoring the implementation of bilateral documents such as the Action Plan signed in May 2022 and upcoming comprehensive strategic cooperation deal with Azerbaijan
- Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe should pay attention to the abovementioned cases of politically motivated human rights violations within the framework of the preparation of the report named ‘threats to life and safety of journalists and human rights defenders in Azerbaijan’ whereas Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe should increase scrutiny over the execution performance of Azerbaijan of the European Court’s judgements

EMDS Board

Baku, Azerbaijan

1 September 2022

Annex No.1:

Cases of politically motivated pressure and persecutions and omissions by investigative authorities in 8 months of 2022

No	Date	Identity and profile of victims	Information
1	12 January 2022	Tofiq Yagublu	Authorities refuse to launch criminal case into the torture complaint
2	18 February 2022	Rufat Safarov	Human rights defenders subjected to wrongdoings by police will apply to the prosecuting authorities
3	21 February 2022	Opposition activists	Members of Popular Front Party of Azerbaijan faced pressure in Sumgait
4	22 February 2022	Punhan Karimli	Activist readmitted from Germany arrested in Azerbaijan
5	7 March 2022	Opposition activists	Police dispersed the meeting of PFPA members and took them to police station
6	8 March 2022	Bakhtiyar Hajiyev	Human rights defender Bakhtiyar Hajiyev is detained
7	9 March 2022	Nargiz Absalamova	Journalist's complaint of police violence will not be investigated
8	16 March 2022	Shahin Rzayev	PFPA member faced police violence while detained in Ganja
9	29 March 2022	Samir Ashurov	Another activist readmitted from Germany was arrested in Azerbaijan
10	30 March 2022	Imran Aliyev	Imran Aliyev was held in Main Organized Crime Department for 20 hours
11	5 April 2022	Aziz Mamiyev	Aziz Mamiyev held one-person picket in front of the Ministry of Internal Affairs

12	21 April 2022	Bakhtiyar Hajiyev	Bakhtiyar Hajiyev reports kidnap and shocking account of events including inhumane treatment
13	22 April 2022	Rufat Safarov	Human rights defenders faced police violence during monitoring the court trial
14	20 May 2022	Muslim activists	Muslim activists were detained in front of the court building
15	21 May 2022	Rashad Ramazanov	Ex-political prisoner Rashad Ramazanov is detained and again accused of drug charges
16	24 May 2022	Aytan Mammadova	Journalist threatened with knife in her building is unsatisfied with the investigation
17	20 July2022	Aziz Mamiyev	Aziz Mamiyev reports insult and beat-ups while detained and in police station
18	26 July 2022	Alikram Khurshidov	The Court refuses appeal request of the opposition activist
19	22 August 2022	Bakhtiyar Hajiyev	Bakhtiyar Hajiyev report kidnap and intimidation
20	24 August 2022	Gulmira Rahimova	Police is accusing the member of the opposition party of slander