

Continued Political Trial and Judicial Harassment in Azerbaijan September 2025

September 2025 continued with the deepening collapse of judicial independence and rule of law in Azerbaijan, as the courts continued to function as instruments of political repression rather than arbiters of justice.

The month was marked by the escalation of charges in the so-called “NGO case,” the upholding of harsh treason and political sentences, and a series of procedural violations that revealed the judiciary’s alignment with executive power.

Politically sensitive trials—from the Abzas Media and Toplum TV cases to the prosecution of leading activists like Bashir Suleymanli and Anar Mammadli where lawyers reported the systemic irregularities, including denial of fair trial guarantees, punitive prison transfers, the silencing of defense lawyers, and physical violence against journalists.

The authorities intensified their pressure through collective punishments, such as travel bans on family members, while political prisoners resorted to hunger strikes to secure minimal rights like medical care.

Detailed Overview

Thus, the month began with news from September 3rd with charges against activists in the ‘NGO case’, including Bashir Suleymanli, being further escalated with new, serious counts of money laundering and official forgery, while at least 14 individuals in the case remain as accused.

That same day, the Baku Court of Appeal upheld the 15-year treason sentence for peace activist Bahruz Samadov and upheld the punitive transfer of trade union activist Elvin Mustafayev to a high-security prison, a move widely viewed as retaliation for his torture allegations. Also on the 3rd, the Sabunchu District Court dismissed a complaint by Abzas Media Editor in Chief Sevinj Vagifgizi on seriously abusive detention conditions in Baku Pre-trial Detention Center, repeating the dangerous precedent of impunity.

The pattern of domestic courts playing the role of rubber-stamp in confirming requests by executive authorities and holding formal trials in politically sensitive cases continued when, on September 8th, Baku Court on Grave Crimes dismissed serious procedural irregularities in the case of human rights defender Rufat Safarov. The following day, September 9th, the Baku Court of Appeal upheld the lengthy prison sentences for all seven journalists in the *Abzas Media* case whereas the final appeal hearing was marred by violence when female journalists were subjected to physical force by Penitentiary Service staff for displaying protest slogans. On September 9th, it was also reported that activist Ahmad Mammadli’s health had sharply deteriorated due to severe eye damage allegedly caused by police torture during his May 2025 arrest, with his committee demanding house arrest.

On September 16th, the court rejected further abuse complaints filed by Abzas Media journalists, Elnara Gasimova and Nargiz Absalamova and the *Toplum TV* trial resumed, featuring defendants alleging that evidence was planted by police and that judges were acting on political orders.

This pattern continued on September 22nd, with the *Toplum TV* trial continuing alongside the case of Anar Mammadli. Mammadli denounced the ‘absurdity’ of the financial charges and emphasized the lack of evidence, while the court upheld co-defendant Anar Abdulla’s custody, regarding his arrest in the courtroom in August following a controversial administrative arrest.

The political trials continued on September 24th, with the trial of political analyst Azer Gasimli marred by the presiding judge’s irregularities, including interrupting the defense and refusing to allow critical defense motions. Throughout the entire month, the Khatai District Court held multiple hearings that resulted in the mass extension of pre-trial detention for ten journalists and staff in the *Meydan TV* case for an additional three months.

On September 25th, the female *Abzas Media* journalists were abruptly transferred 270 km to a distant penitentiary complex near Lankaran, a move widely regarded as punishment for exposing ill-treatment within the prison system. The next day, September 26th, journalist Aytaj Tapdiq reported being subjected to physical violence and humiliation by a convoy officer during a hearing on her marriage request, with the judge refusing to acknowledge the abuse. On September 28th, the collective punishment against *Abzas Media*’s imprisoned journalists was extended to families when Ulvi Hasanli’s wife was barred from leaving the country to attend a human rights award ceremony on his behalf. The month closed with the highly significant news on September 29th that journalist Farid Ismayilov had testified to receiving death threats in custody that prison officials failed to investigate, and journalist Polad Aslanov ended a 23-day hunger strike after authorities finally conceded to his demands for a full medical examination and the lifting of restrictions on family contact—a minor step forward underscoring the extreme measures required to secure basic rights. The health crisis among political prisoners, including Tofiq Yagublu and Anar Mammadli, highlighted the recurring pattern of denial of adequate medical care in detention facilities.

Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Centre
Monthly Human Rights Developments
In Azerbaijan
September 2025

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1. Charges Intensify in ‘NGO Case’ Against Civil Society Activists

On September 3, reports on media 2025, indicated that charges against numerous civil society activists both detained and under police supervision, in the ongoing criminal case against local and international NGOs in relation to USAID and foreign funding issue on the basis of criminal case opened in 2014. Accordingly, Bashir Suleymanli, Head of the Institute for Civil Rights, arrested in March, now faces expanded charges including new counts of money laundering under Article 193-1.2.2 (legalization of property obtained through crime, repeatedly) and Article 193-1.2.3 (legalization of property obtained through crime by using one's official position) of the Criminal Code of Azerbaijan (CC hereinafter).¹ Together with existing charges, including Article 193-1.3.2 (money laundering of significant amounts), 308.1 (abuse of official powers), formerly 308.2 (abuse of official powers with grave consequences) and Article 313 (official forgery), he now faces the overall potential sentence remaining up to 12 years in prison all of which he denies, maintaining that the case is politically motivated retaliation for his human rights work.

The ‘NGO case’ refers to the re-opening of a criminal case in March 2025, originally launched 11 years prior, that targets NGO members. The case involves the reported arrest and filing of fabricated charges against at least 14 people, of whom 5 remain in detention.

- Executive director of the Election Monitoring Alliance, Mammad Alpay (Mammadzade),
- Head of the Institute for Civil Rights, Bashir Suleymanli
- Civic activist Asaf Ahmadov
- Social worker Zamin Zaki
- NGO leader Ahmad Mammadzada

While many other activists have been designated as accused, they were not detained during the investigation. Among them are **Hafiz Hasanov**, head of the *Law and Development Public Union*; **Mehriban Rahimli**, formerly an advisor on Azerbaijan at the *German Marshall Fund*; and **Galib Bayramov**, chair of the *Center for Economic Research* and others.

2. Trials Resumed in Politically Sensitive Cases Throughout September

2.1 Appeal Court Upholds Sentences in *Abzas Media* Case Amid Allegations of Unfair Trial

The Baku Court of Appeal held two hearings in the *Abzas Media* case on 3 and 9 September, where it upheld the lengthy prison sentences for all seven journalists and staff. During the hearings, the imprisoned journalists and their lawyers exposed severe irregularities, alleging that no credible evidence was presented to support the charges and that key defence motions, including a request to summon witnesses, were consistently denied throughout the trial. The defendants condemned

¹ Obyektiv Media, ‘Charges Intensified Against Civil Society Activists in NGO Case’, (September 2025), <https://www.obyektiv.media/post/charges-intensified-against-civil-society-activists-in-ngo-case>

the lack of due process and accused the court of acting as a tool of political retribution.² The final hearing on September 9 ended with female journalists being subjected to physical violence by Penitentiary Service staff after they held up protesting posters in political nature further consolidating the view that the case is a politically motivated attempt to silence independent anti-corruption reporting.³

The court's decision was swiftly condemned by a number of international organizations, demanding the journalists' immediate release.⁴ 7 individuals associated with *Abzas Media* were arrested in late 2023 and early 2024 and are currently serving lengthy prison terms ranging from 7 years and half to 9 years. The case is believed to stem from the outlet's investigations into high-level government corruption, and has been condemned by both local and international human rights groups, most recently, by the U.S. Department of State.⁵

2.2 Courts Systematically Reject Complaints on Abusive Detention Conditions by *Abzas Media* Journalists

In two separate hearings in September, the courts systematically rejected complaints filed by three imprisoned *Abzas Media* journalists concerning the abusive conditions at the Baku Pre-Trial Detention Center. On September 3, the Sabunchu District Court dismissed the complaint by Editor in Chief **Sevinj Vagifgizi**, who testified to being subjected to insect-infested cells, overcrowding, restricted water access, and official retaliation—including a demand that she cease journalistic writing in exchange for basic necessities.⁶ This pattern was repeated on September 16, when the Sabunchu District Court similarly dismissed the complaints of journalists **Elnara Gasimova** and **Nargiz Absalamova** who testified to facing gross overcrowding, malfunctioning ventilation, and the use of threats and psychological pressure by prison staff, who allegedly use the possibility of impacting their court cases to discourage complaints.⁷ The judicial refusal to investigate these repeated and detailed allegations, along with the denial of motions like sitting next to their lawyers, displayed the judicial failure to uphold due process and its perceived complicity in using harsh detention conditions as an instrument of political pressure against journalists.

² Abzas Media, 'Azerbaijani appeal court upholds sentences in "Abzas Media" case', (September 2025), abzas.net/en/2025/9/azerbaijani-appeal-court-uphol6a8727a4-f/;

Abzas Media, '"Abzas Media case": "My bank card with 13 cents in it was also blocked, they are desperate for my 13 cents"', (September 2025), <https://abzas.org/az/2025/9/abzas-media-isi-icind-13879683ef-1/>, [available in Azerbaijani only]

³ Abzas Media, 'Decision Has Not Changed in Abzas Media Case; Ilham Aliyev, Declare Your Income', (September 2025), <https://abzas.org/az/2025/9/abzas-media-isind-qrar-dy946b478a-3/>, [available in Azerbaijani only]

⁴ Abzas Media, 'Reporters Without Borders condemn the rejection of appeal in the Abzas Media case', (September 2025), <https://abzas.org/az/2025/9/srhdsiz-reportyorlar-abza023c7f2b-0/>; [available in Azerbaijani only]

Committee to Protect Journalists, 'Azerbaijan upholds lengthy sentences for 7 journalists from Abzas Media and RFE/RL', (September 2025), <https://cpj.org/2025/09/azerbaijan-upholds-lengthy-sentences-for-7-journalists-from-abzas-media-and-rfe-rl/>;

Abzas Media, 'PACE Rapporteur: The verdicts in the "Abzas Media case" are part of the ongoing pressure on independent media in Azerbaijan', (September 2025), <https://abzas.org/az/2025/9/aspa-mruzisiz-abzas-media5c979dd2-b/>, [available in Azerbaijani only]

⁵ U.S. Department of State, '2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Azerbaijan', (August 2025), <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/azerbaijan/>

⁶ Abzas Media, 'Sevinj Vagifgizi in court: "You are making illegal decisions not only about me, but also about 4,300 other prisoners"', (September 2025), <https://abzas.org/az/2025/9/sevinc-vagifqz-mhkmd-s741beb1-6/>, [available in Azerbaijani only]

⁷ Abzas Media, 'Court Rejects Appeal Motions by Abzas Media Journalists', (September 2025), <https://abzas.org/az/2025/9/mhkm-abzas-media-jurnalis904afd7e-b/>, [available in Azerbaijani only]

2.3 Appeal Court Upholds 15-Year Sentence for Peace Activist Bahruz Samadov

On September 3, the Baku Court of Appeal rejected the appeal filed by peace activist and doctoral student **Bahruz Samadov**.⁸ Arrested in August 2024, Samadov was sentenced to 15 years in prison by Baku Court on Grave Crimes on 23 June 2025 charged under Article 274 (treason) of the CC.⁹ His case, which has seen repeated rejections of defense motions throughout the process and number of hunger strikes alongside suicide attempts is widely recognized by human rights organizations as a politically motivated attempt to silence his critical peace activism.¹⁰

2.4 Court Upholds Transfer of Labor Activist Elvin Mustafayev to High-Security Prison

On September 3, 2025, the Baku Court of Appeal rejected an appeal regarding the transfer of **Elvin Mustafayev**, a member of the "Workers' Table Trade Unions Confederation," to a high-security prison for a six-month period.¹¹ Mustafayev's father and lawyer argued that the transfer, which was justified by prison officials with claims of disciplinary violations and engaging in oppositionist activities, was baseless and served as a retaliatory measure. The transfer followed Mustafayev's prolonged confinement in a punishment cell after he began a hunger strike in May 2025 to protest the imprisonment of political activist Tofiq Yagublu, and during which he alleged being subjected to torture.¹² Mustafayev, arrested in August 2023 and sentenced to 3 years in prison in January 2025 on drug-related charges he denies, has been recognized by human rights defenders as a political prisoner, with his imprisonment widely viewed as politically motivated due to his activism.¹³

2.5 Trials Resumed in the Case of Human Rights Defender Rufat Safarov

On September 8 and 29, the trial of human rights defender **Rufat Safarov**, Executive Director of the 'Defense Line' human rights organization, continued at the Baku Court on Grave Crimes. During the sessions, Safarov strongly rebutted the charges of fraud (\$60,000) and hooliganism, arguing that the case materials lack substantive evidence. He highlighted several procedural irregularities, including the failure to present camera footage of the alleged December 3 incident, and inconsistencies regarding the complainant's attempts to formalize the land deal.¹⁴ Safarov also drew attention to the court's inability to enforce its own ruling to allow him to sit alongside his

⁸ Abzas Media, 'Appeal Court Upholds the Decision on Bahruz Samadov', (September 2025), <https://abzas.org/az/2025/9/apellyasiya-mhkmsi-bhruz-saea9ad87-e/>, [available in Azerbaijani only]

⁹ OC Media, 'Azerbaijani researcher Bahruz Samadov sentenced to 15 years on charges of treason', (June 2025) <https://oc-media.org/azerbaijani-researcher-bahruz-samadov-sentenced-to-15-years-on-charges-of-treason/>

¹⁰ Amnesty International, 'Azerbaijan: Release Bahruz Samadov and other government critics targeted during election campaign', (September 2024), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/09/azerbaijan-release-bahruz-samadov-and-other-government-critics-targeted-during-election-campaign/>;

Amnesty International, 'Azerbaijan: Academics Arrested on Fabricated Charges: Iqbal Abilov and Bahruz Samadov', (September 2024), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur55/8554/2024/en/>

¹¹ Abzas Media, 'Court Upholds Decision Regarding Transfer of Elvin Mustafayev to High-Security Regime Prison', (September 2025), <https://abzas.org/az/2025/9/mhkm-elvin-mustafayevin-cid472a0c59-c/>, [available in Azerbaijani only]

¹² Toplum TV, 'Elvin Mustafayev allegedly faced torture with special cruelty', (June 2025), <https://toplummedia.tv/mehkeme/pelvin-mustafayevin-xuumsusi-amansizliqla-zorakiliga-meruz-qaldigi-devilirp>, [available in Azerbaijani only]

¹³ Human Rights Watch (HRW), 'We Try to Stay Invisible', (October 2024),

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/10/08/we-try-stay-invisible/azerbaijans-escalating-crackdown-critics-and-civil-society>;

¹⁴ Radio Liberty, 'Human rights activist to prosecutor: 'You will be fired at best, don't play with people's fate'', (September 2025), <https://www.azadliq.org/a/rufet-seferov-prokuror/33524844.htm>, [available in Azerbaijani only]

defense counsel, noting that Prison Service employees repeatedly disregarded the order by keeping him in the glass dock.¹⁵

Arrested on 3 December 2024 and charged under Articles 178.3.2 (fraud with a significant amount), 221.1 (hooliganism), and 127.2.3 (inflicting serious harm to health) of the CC, Safarov has rejected the accusations as rights groups regard the case as politically motivated.¹⁶ Safarov maintains that the charges are a form of political retaliation for his human rights work and the international recognition he received, framing his prosecution as an abuse of the legal system against a perceived critic of the state's policies.

2.6 Toplum TV Trials: Defense Contests Charges and Reports In-Custody Threats

The trial against '*Toplum TV*' journalists and activists continued in September with three separate hearings on September 15th, 22nd, and 29th, featuring detailed rebuttals of the state's charges. Defendants consistently asserted that their prosecution was politically motivated and that their independent media work was a non-profit, volunteer-based effort.¹⁷ Testimonies focused on dismantling the legal foundation of the case, with co-founder and media expert **Alasgar Mammadli** arguing that the online platform was not legally required to undergo state registration under applicable media law.¹⁸ Furthermore, the defense alleged that police had planted evidence to fabricate the charges, citing irregularities and the prosecution's use of mischaracterized expert service contracts as proof of illegal funding. The proceedings on 29 September were also marked by serious concerns regarding the detention conditions of the defendants. Journalist **Farid Ismayilov** testified to significant threats to his life while in custody at the Baku Pre-Trial Detention Center.¹⁹

Initiated in March 2024 and resulting in the arrest of 11 journalists and activists, the case is widely regarded as politically motivated to silence independent journalism within a broader crackdown on media and civil society in Azerbaijan since November 2023.²⁰

2.7 Politician Azer Gasimli's Trial Marred by Judicial Irregularities

On September 24, 2025, the trial of **Azer Gasimli**, a prominent politician and the Director of the Institute of Political Management, continued at the Baku Court on Grave Crimes. The defense team alleged that the hearing was compromised by the presiding judge, Telman Huseynov, who reportedly interrupted lawyers' questions and even answered on behalf of the 'victim' during cross-examination.²¹ During the hearing, defence demonstrated significant contradictions in the

¹⁵ Radio Liberty, 'Rufat Safarov: 'I tore up the prosecutor's office card and sent one part to Garalov and the other to Usubov'', (September 2025), <https://www.azadliq.org/amp/rufet-seferov-mehkeme/33544301.html>, [available in Azerbaijani only]

¹⁶ Voice of America, 'Rights groups, Western governments urge Azerbaijan to release human rights defender', (December 2024), <https://www.voanews.com/a/global-community-calls-on-azerbaijan-to-release-human-rights-defender/7888986.html>

¹⁷ Toplum TV, '"Toplum TV case": We do not have a court or a public prosecutor who upholds the rule of law', (September 2025), <https://toplummedia.tv/mehkeme/pldquotoplum-tv-isirdquo-qarsimizda-qanunun-alilivini-esas-tutan-mehkeme-heyeti-ve-doumlvlet-ittihamccedilisi-yoxdurp>

¹⁸ Toplum TV, '"Toplum TV case": The investigation falsified evidence', (September 2025), <https://toplummedia.tv/mehkeme/pquottoplum-tv-isiquot-istintaq-suumlbutlari-saxtalasdiribp>, [available in Azerbaijani only]

¹⁹ Abzas Media, '"Toplum TV case": "If Femida saw the courts in Azerbaijan, she would shed tears"', (September 2025), <https://abzas.org/az/2025/9/toplum-tv-isi-femida-azrbf0a78087-7/>, [available in Azerbaijani only]

²⁰ Committee to Protect Journalists, 'Azerbaijani police raid Toplum TV, detain journalists over alleged currency smuggling', (January 2025), <https://cpj.org/2024/03/azerbaijani-police-raid-toplum-tv-detain-journalists-over-alleged-currency-smuggling/>

²¹ Caucasian Knot, 'Interrogation in court in Gasimly's case revealed the political nature of his persecution', (September 2025), <https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/68496>

adversary's testimony regarding his location at key times, which the individual could not reconcile. The judge further impeded the defense by refusing to allow the lawyer to finish reading a motion that sought to exclude the contradictory testimony from evidence. Gasimli was arrested on December 8, 2024, under Article 182.2.3 (extortion with use of force) of the CC, allegedly for demanding money through threats of violence. The case is widely seen as an attempt to silence a critical voice, with Gasimli maintaining that the charges are fabricated to punish him for his political criticism.²²

2.8 Detention Periods Extended for *Meydan TV* Journalists on Aggravated Charges

Throughout September 2025, the Khatai District Court held multiple hearings that resulted in the extension of pre-trial detention for numerous journalists and staff associated with *Meydan TV*.²³ Those whose detention was extended for an additional 3 months, now running until January 2026, include **Aytaj Tapdiq** (Ahmadova), **Aynur Elgunash** (Ganbarova), **Aysel Umudova**, **Natig Javadli**, **Ramin Jabrayilzada** (Deko), **Khayala Aghayeva**, **Fatima Movlamli**, **Ulviyya Guliyeva** (Ali), **Shamshad Aghayev**, and **Nurlan Gahramanli** (Libre). This blanket extension follows the arrest of another person, photographer Ahmad Mukhtar in the case and aggravation of charges in August 2025, which saw the initial accusation of smuggling broadened to include heavy financial crimes such as money laundering, illegal entrepreneurship, and tax evasion. The *Meydan TV* case concerns 12 journalists and a media trainer - of whom journalists deny any ties to the outlet - arrested since December 2024 and throughout 2025, with all accused denying the charges, insisting that the case is politically motivated and designed to silence independent journalism.²⁴

2.9 Anar Mammadli Denounces Fraud and Political Motivation in Trials

The trial against **Anar Mammadli**, head of the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center (EMDS), and activist **Anar Abdullayev** continued on September 22 and 30, 2025, at the Baku Court on Grave Crimes. During hearings, Mammadli used his testimony to denounce the charges by highlighting the prosecution's reliance on flimsy grounds, such as merely possessing cash, to justify the charge of a criminal organization.²⁵ Mammadli maintained that the lack of any credible evidence proves his arrest is a political order directly resulting from his work exposing election fraud and defending human rights. On 22 September hearing, the court denied a motion to transfer co-defendant Anar Abdulla to house arrest, thereby upholding his detention—a measure escalated in August when he was arrested in the courtroom and placed in custody despite denying underlying administrative charges. Anar Mammadli, arrested since April 2024 and Anar Abdullayev, tried in the case since April 2025, are accused under Article 206.4 (smuggling by an organised group on a large scale) and other 6 articles of the CC and face up to 12 years in jail if

²² OC Media, 'Former deputy chair of the REAL Party detained in Azerbaijan', (December 2024), <https://oc-media.org/azar-gasimli-was-sentenced-to-four-months-of-pre-trial-detention-after-being-detained-on-charges-of-extortion/>

²³ Radio Liberty, 'Detention Period Extended for Aytaj Tapdig as well', (September 2025), <https://www.azadliq.org/amp/meydan-tv-hebs-muddeti-uzadilib/33532091.html>, [available in Azerbaijani only]

²⁴ Reporters Without Borders, 'RSF calls for release of Meydan TV journalists', (December 2024), <https://rsf.org/en/post-cop29-crackdown-azerbaijan-rsf-calls-release-meydan-tv-journalists>

²⁵ Institute for Human Rights, 'Anar Mammadli called his trial a "political show"', (September 2025), <https://www.instituteforhumanrights.org/post/anar-mammadli-called-his-trial-a-political-show>

Azeri Watchdog, 'Anar Mammadli Continues His Defense Statement: "Fabricated charges are the criminalization of rights"', (September 2025), <https://gozetc.az/2025/09/33603>

found guilty. Both domestic and international observers see the case as politically motivated to punish legitimate civil society work.²⁶

2.10 Economist Fazil Gasimov's Appeal Rejected as Hunger Strike Continues

On September 29, 2025, the Baku Court of Appeal upheld the 9 year sentence against doctoral student and economist Fazil Gasimov, rejecting his appeal in a case widely viewed as politically motivated.²⁷ The ruling follows a pattern of procedural irregularities in the case, including the court repeatedly rejecting all defense motions, such as requests for witness testimony and a change to house arrest. During those earlier proceedings, the court also illegally denied Gasimov's request to dismiss his counsel and seek a state-appointed lawyer, despite the defense attorney's affirmation that this denial violated the law. Gasimov's situation is further exacerbated by the fact that he has been conducting a hunger strike for over a month to protest his imprisonment and the biased judicial process. Arrested in July 2023, Baku Court on Grave Crimes, on 13 March 2025, sentenced the doctoral student to 9 years in prison on Article 204.3.1 (counterfeit currency production by organized group) accused of passing fake dollars to economist Gubad Ibadoglu, who was also charged but later released to house arrest.²⁸

2.11 Journalist Aytaj Tapdiq Reports Violence During Marriage Request Hearing

Journalist **Aytaj Tapdiq**, detained in the politically motivated '*Meydan TV* case' which includes severe economic charges, reported being subjected to physical violence by a convoy officer during a hearing on September 26, 2025, concerning her request to marry her fiancé. She stated that an officer forcibly grabbed and twisted her arm as she was being returned to the detention point after calling out to colleagues in the corridor.²⁹ She immediately raised the complaint with the presiding judge, who reportedly stated he did not witness the incident. The violence was followed by a reported act of humiliation where the journalist was deliberately pushed into a crowded room with male prisoners.

3. Political Prisoners Report Mistreatment in Detention Facilities

3.1 Farid ismayilov reports death threats in detention

Journalist **Farid Ismayilov**, detained in the politically motivated '*Toplum TV*' case, reported significant threats to his life while in custody at the Baku Pre-Trial Detention Facility during September. On 29 September, during a hearing at Baku Court on Grave Crimes, Ismayilov testified

²⁶ EU Neighbors East, 'Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum urgently call for unconditional release of Azerbaijani human rights defender Anar Mammadli', (May 2024), <https://euneighbourseast.eu/news/latest-news/eastern-partnership-civil-society-forum-urgently-call-for-unconditional-release-of-azerbaijani-human-rights-defender-anar-mammadli/>;

Amnesty International, 'Urgent Action; Release Arrested Journalists', (May 2024), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/EUR5579462024ENGLISH.pdf>;

Campaign to End Repression in Azerbaijan, 'Human rights groups urge International Association of Judges to act on Azerbaijan', (September 2025), <https://free-anar.site/human-rights-groups-urge-international-association-of-judges-to-act-on-azerbaijan/>

²⁷ Radio Liberty, 'Court Decides in the Case of Fazil Gasimov', (September 2025), <https://www.azadliq.org/a/fazil-qasimov-hakim-etiraz/33508594.html>, [available in Azerbaijani only]

²⁸ Radio Liberty, 'Azerbaijani PhD student at Istanbul University sentenced to 9 years in prison', (May 2025), <https://www.azadliq.org/a/fazil-qasimov-9-il-hebs/33346913.html>, [available in Azerbaijani only]

²⁹ Meydan TV, 'There has been violence against Aytaj Tapdig in Court', (September 2025), <https://www.meydan.tv/az/article/m%C9%99hk%C9%99m%C9%99d%C9%99-aytac-tapdiga-qarsi-zorakiliq-olub/>, [available in Azerbaijani only]

that on multiple occasions, another inmate attempted to harm him with thrown objects and hot water, and verbally threatened to kill him.³⁰ He stated these incidents occurred in the presence of Penitentiary Service employees, but crucially, despite his immediate appeals, the events were not officially documented or resolved. Ismayilov expressed concern that the deliberate inaction by authorities suggested a calculated provocation and that his safety was being intentionally jeopardized, highlighting a severe breach of official duty to protect detainees.

3.2 *Abzas Media*'s Journalists Face Retaliation for Exposing the Abusive Conditions

On September 25, 2025, imprisoned *Abzas Media* Editor in Chief **Sevinj Vagifgizi** and journalists **Nargiz Absalamova** and **Elnara Gasimova** were abruptly and without prior notification transferred from the Baku Pre-Trial Detention Center to a penitentiary complex in the distant village of Gurumba, near Lankaran, 270 km south of capital Baku.³¹ Family members reported that the sudden transfer, which occurred with only one hour's notice, included an incident where the Deputy Head of the facility, Javid Gulaliyev, allegedly used physical force against Absalamova. The journalists believe their transfer, which creates a severe obstacle for family visits due to the multi-hour travel time, is direct retaliation for their continued professional work. The journalists' move follows a month where the imprisoned staff of *Abzas Media* exposed corruption, ill-treatment, and poor detention conditions in at least five different media reports from within the prison system alone, further substantiating the view that the government uses punitive transfers to silence critical voices.³²

Furthermore, on September 28th, **Rubaba Guliyeva**, the wife of *Abzas Media*'s imprisoned Director **Ulvi Hasanli**, was barred from leaving the country by the Ministry of Internal Affairs as she attempted to fly to Strasbourg to attend the Václav Havel Human Rights Prize ceremony, for which her husband was a finalist.³³ The imposition of a travel ban on a family member, with no stated legal grounds, solidifies the view that the government is using punitive transfers and civil restrictions to silence critical voices and collectively punish those affiliated with *Abzas Media*.

3.3 **Emin Ibrahimov** Held in High-Security Regime Prison Against the Law

Political prisoner and former diplomat **Emin Ibrahimov**, sentenced to seven years in prison, remains incarcerated in the high-security Umbaki Penitentiary Complex, despite legal provisions requiring his transfer to a less severe confinement regime. According to a statement by Deputy

³⁰ Caucasian Knot, 'A Toplum TV journalist reported threats in pretrial detention', (September 2025), <https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/68799>

³¹ Abzas Media, 'Abzas Media female journalists moved to facility 3 hours from Baku, complain of mistreatment and theft', (September 2025), <https://abzas.org/en/2025/9/abzas-media-female-journalists2b7a6556-a/>

³² Abzas Media, 'Shuvelan Torture Prison: "For them, the life of a prisoner is like the life of a fly"- Ulvi Hasanli', (September 2025), <https://abzas.org/en/2025/9/shuvelan-torture-prison-for37195b7f-4/>;

Abzas Media, 'Ulvi Hasanli: "Prison staff steal from inmates and go unpunished"', (September 2025), <https://abzas.org/en/2025/9/ulvi-hsnli-cmiyyt-icind32a0aa1c-c/>;

Abzas Media, 'Elnara Gasimova writes: "Dead souls" in solitary confinement: There are many prisoners who are used for free without being registered as farm workers', (September 2025), <https://abzas.org/az/2025/9/elmar-qasimova-yazr-tcrldxd02e03bc-7/>, [available in Azerbaijani only];

Abzas Media, 'Nargiz Absalamova writes: Getting medical care in the Baku Pre-Trial Detention Center: "Sometimes the doctor gives the needle to the prisoner so that 'your roommate can inject it"', (September 2025), <https://abzas.org/az/2025/9/nrgiz-absalamova-yazr-bak249eb328-9/>, [available in Azerbaijani only];

Abzas Media, 'Money circulating in the "box" of courts, prisoners' misappropriated food supplies', (September 2025), <https://abzas.org/az/2025/9/mhkmrlrin-boksunda-donn1b5e8f6e-3/>

³³ Abzas Media, 'Azerbaijan imposes travel ban on wife of imprisoned journalist', (September 2025), <https://abzas.org/en/2025/9/azerbaijan-imposes-travel-ban81f1b284-3/>

Chairman of oppositional Popular Front Party of Azerbaijan, Seymur Hazi, on September 10, the continued high-security confinement is illegal, as it has persisted for nearly three months after the appeal court upheld the initial verdict.³⁴ Hazi alleged that keeping Ibrahimov in closed confinement constitutes a form of ‘official torture’, directly contradicting the Constitution, the Code on Execution of Punishments, and European Penitentiary Rules. Ibrahimov, who resigned from the diplomatic service in 2020 after publicly citing the country's suppression of human rights and election fraud, and had faced prior administrative detention for his criticism. He was arrested in July 2024 and later sentenced on 11 April 2025 to 7 years, is charged under Article 126.2.4 (inflicting bodily harm with hooliganism intent) of the CC and is widely recognized as a political prisoner.³⁵

3.4 Several Political Prisoners Report Deteriorating Health Conditions and Lack of Adequate Medical Care

September saw alarming reports regarding the rapidly declining health of multiple political prisoners, underscoring the severe consequences of inadequate care in detention. The Defense Committee for the rights of activist and journalist **Ahmad Mammadli** reported a sharp deterioration in his condition, citing a post-LASIK corneal condition, chorioretinal dystrophy, and genetic asthma.³⁶ The Committee attributes severe eye damage to alleged police torture during his May 2025 arrest and noted that the illegal postponement of a September 3rd court hearing unnecessarily prolonged his detention under conditions unsuitable for his continuous treatment needs.

Similarly, reports emerged regarding imprisoned opposition politician **Tofiq Yagublu**, held in the Medical Facility of the Penitentiary Service, with his daughter warning that his untreated health issues could become irreversible if medical intervention is not provided immediately.³⁷

Furthermore, the parents of activist **Anar Mammadli**, held in Baku Pre-Trial Detention Center, stated that he is experiencing significant difficulty walking due to severe swelling in his knee.³⁸ It is also stated that Mammadli has been denied proper medical checks since his arrest in April 2024, despite the complaint and requests.

Additionally, imprisoned journalist **Polad Aslanov** ended his 23 days hunger strike after penitentiary officials promised a full medical examination and the lifting of restrictions on family contact.³⁹ He began the strike after prison officials allegedly denied him access to an existing liver condition diagnosis and revoked his kitchen privileges in an act of retaliation and throughout the protest, the journalist was allegedly denied medical isolation and care, and faced further pressure

³⁴ Absaz Media, ‘Former Diplomat Emin Ibrahimov still held in high-security regime prison’, (September 2025), <https://abzas.org/az/2025/9/kecmis-diplomat-emin-ibrahimovf6a825ae-a/>, [available only in Azerbaijani]

³⁵ Free Anar, ‘Emin Ibrahimov’, accessed 1 April 2025, <https://free-anar.site/az/political-prisoners/emin-ibrahimov/>
³⁶ Abzas Media, ‘Ahmad Mammadli’s health is deteriorated, transfer to house arrest is requested’, (September 2025), <https://abzas.org/az/2025/9/hmd-mmmldinin-shhti-agr5ef47136-6/>, [available in Azerbaijani only]

³⁷ Toplum TV, ‘Nigar Hazi: If Tofiq Yagublu is not treated in time, his health problems will become irreversible’, (September 2025), <https://toplummedia.tv/manset/pnigar-hezi-tofiq-yagublu-vaxtinda-muumlallice-olunmazsa-sehhetindeki-problem-geridoumlnmez-hala-ccedilevrilecekp>, [available in Azerbaijani only]

³⁸ Toplum TV, ‘Parents: “Anar Mammadli is having difficulty taking steps, his knee is swollen”’, (September 2025), <https://toplummedia.tv/olke/pvalideynleri-ldquoanar-memmedli-addim-atmaga-ccediletinlik-ccedilekir-dizinde-siskinlik-varrdquonbspp>, [available in Azerbaijani only]

³⁹ Abzas Media, ‘Polad Aslanov ends 23 days hunger strike’, (September 2025), <https://abzas.org/az/2025/9/polad-aslanov-23-gun-davam-ed421a812d-1/>, [available in Azerbaijani only]

from prison staff who encouraged other inmates to force him to cease the strike. These instances reconfirmed the pattern of dismissal of health-condition-related complaints of political prisoners by both penitentiary and judicial authorities, alongside a recurring pattern of lack of access to adequate medical care for political prisoners in detention facilities.