



April 21, 2015

Judge Dean Spielmann  
President, European Court of Human Rights  
Council of Europe  
67075 Strasbourg Cedex  
France

*Via fax: + 33 (0)3 88 41 27 30*

CC: Judge I. Berro  
President, Section I

Dear President Spielmann,

We, the undersigned representatives of media freedom organizations, are writing to express our concern at the ongoing [crackdown](#) on human rights and press freedom in Azerbaijan. Freedom of expression violations are on the rise in the South Caucasus state, as documented by [media freedom organizations](#) and noted by Council of Europe institutions, including the [Committee of Ministers](#).

Azerbaijan is scheduled to host the first-ever [European Games](#) in June, and it will enjoy the prestige that comes with hosting such an event, as it did three years ago during the [Eurovision Song Contest](#), which was held in Baku. Back then, Azerbaijan still had an active civil society and a number of independent media that could report on such topics as corruption, human rights abuses, and social issues. Now, most of the country's [prominent journalists](#) and human rights defenders are [harassed, silenced, in prison](#), or in [forced exile](#). Two journalists have been [murdered](#) with impunity over the past decade.

In this environment, it is all the more crucial that the European Court of Human Rights—seen by the beleaguered press corps and human rights defenders as their last line of defense—prioritize its review of cases pending against Azerbaijan. As of December 31, 2014, [1,404](#) cases against the country were pending at the European Court of Human Rights, according to the court's own

statistics. Many of them have not been ruled on despite the fact that they fall within Category II of the court's priority criteria.

Below is a list of some of the cases brought by Azerbaijani journalists. We have [enclosed](#) with this letter a brief summary of each case.

- **Application nos. 60659/08 and 53585/09:** [Khalil v. Azerbaijan](#): A reporter from the newspaper *Azadliq* was allegedly beaten by two officials from the Azerbaijani Ministry of National Security.
- **Application no. 59135/09:** [Huseynov v. Azerbaijan](#): The director of the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety was beaten at a police station. He sought [refuge at the Swiss Embassy in Baku](#).
- **Application no. 59075/09:** [Mehdiyev v. Azerbaijan](#): A journalist was arrested and said he was tortured in the offices of a local branch of the Ministry of National Security.
- **Application no. 35812/11:** [Badalov and Aliyev v. Azerbaijan](#): Two reporters were assaulted while attempting to photograph a government official's home.
- **Application no. 3650/12:** [Haziye v. Azerbaijan](#): A columnist was arrested during an oppositional rally in May 2010, sentenced to jail, and allegedly abused.
- **Application no. pending:** [Ismayilova v. Azerbaijan](#): Assailants broke into a journalist's home, placed cameras in her bedroom, and published explicit footage on the Internet. The journalist applicant is currently in detention on [trumped-up criminal charges](#), about which the Secretary General of the Council of Europe has expressed concern.
- **Application no. 72611/14:** [Tagiyeva v. Azerbaijan](#): Freelance journalist [Rafiq Tagi](#) died days after being stabbed multiple times. The circumstances of his death in a Baku hospital, along with conflicting official reports about the cause of his death, raised suspicions that he could have been targeted while in recovery.
- **Application no. 38323/14:** [Abbasov v. Azerbaijan](#): Independent journalist Idrak Abbasov said he was beaten by security officers of Azerbaijan's state oil company, SOCAR, while he was covering the demolition of houses in a Baku suburb by the company.

The failure to prioritize these cases could raise questions about the effectiveness of the system for the protection of human rights within the member states of the Council of Europe. As respect for human rights by Azerbaijani authorities wanes, the few remaining independent media outlets, journalists, and human rights defenders in Azerbaijan depend on the court to dispense justice and uphold their rights.

As Azerbaijan prepares to host yet another prestigious international event in Baku, for which the global community and, specifically, journalists, will descend, the court's prioritized review of these cases will signal that the international community is aware of the urgency and significance of these issues.

Limitations on press freedom in Azerbaijan, whether imposed through violence or through the abusive application of criminal and other laws, have major implications for the domestic legal system, the rule of law, and the respect for human rights and democracy.

We therefore call on you to ensure that these critical cases are reviewed expeditiously, as they are emblematic of the state of media freedom in Azerbaijan.

Yours sincerely,

Thomas Hughes, Executive Director, ARTICLE 19

Joel Simon, Executive Director, Committee to Protect Journalists

Danuta Przywara, President of the Board, Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights

Melody Patry, Senior Advocacy Officer, Index on Censorship

Gulnara Akhundova, Program Manager, International Media Support

Karim Lahidji, International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

Petra Havlikova, Coordinator of Women's Rights are Human Rights program, NESEHNUTÍ

Ivana Skalova, Head of the East European Program, Center for Human Rights and Democracy, People in Need

Emma Hughes, Director of Strategy, Platform

Gerald Staberock, World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)

Lukasz Biernacki, Managing Director, You Aid Foundation

Incl.: Azerbaijani journalists' cases pending before the ECHR; case summaries provided by the London-based [Media Legal Defence Initiative and individual legal representatives](#)