

FATIMA MOVLAMLI



FACTS

Personal data:

1. Fatima Movlamova (DOB: 03.11.2000) is an Azerbaijani independent journalist and reporter for Meydan TV and a contributor to several other independent online media outlets. She is widely recognized for her reporting on human rights violations, police brutality, and women's rights, as well as her active presence on social media documenting civic protests and politically sensitive developments. Fatima Movlamova was detained on 28 February 2025 in Baku as part of the criminal case publicly known as the "Meydan TV case." Since her arrest¹, she has been viewed by international press-freedom and human-rights organizations, including the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and Human Rights Watch (HRW), as part of a politically motivated campaign against independent journalists in Azerbaijan, and she is widely regarded as a political prisoner. Her arrest is part of a broader crackdown on civil society and independent media that escalated in the autumn of 2023.²

Date of detention:

2. Fatima Movlamova was detained on 28 February 2025 by the Baku Metropolitan General Police Department (BMGPD) in connection with the criminal case known publicly as the "Meydan TV case".

Legal accusations:

3. On 01 March 2025, Fatima Movlamova was charged under Article 206.3.2 of the Criminal Code (conspiracy to commit bulk cash smuggling) and remanded in custody by the Khatai District Court. Her case is being prosecuted under what has become known as the "Meydan TV case."

4. On 28 August 2025, the investigative authorities re-qualified the accusations and announced following additional charges:

- Conspiracy to commit illegal entrepreneurship in the form of an organized criminal group and an aggravated and significant amount (Article 192.3.2 of the Azerbaijani Criminal Code),
- Conspiracy to commit money laundering in the form of an organized criminal group and a substantial amount (Articles 193-1.3.1 and 193-1.3.2 of the Azerbaijani Criminal Code),
- Conspiracy to commit bulk cash smuggling in the form of an organized criminal group (Article 206.4 of the Azerbaijani Criminal Code),
- Conspiracy to commit tax evasion in the form of an organized criminal group (Article 213.2.1 of the Azerbaijani Criminal Code),
- Forgery and the use of forged documents (Articles 320.1 and 320.2 of the Azerbaijani Criminal Code).

Legal status of the remand prisoner:

5. Fatima Movlamova is in pre-trial detention and a remand prisoner. Despite numerous appeals to release her during the trial period, the Court kept her in custody. At the time of writing, her case is pending before the Baku Assize Court together with other defendants in the “Meydan TV case”.

Legal proceedings:

6. On 28 February 2025, Fatima Movlamova was detained in Baku in connection with the criminal case publicly known as the “Meydan TV case,” on allegations framed as currency smuggling under Article 206.3.2.
7. On 1 March 2025, the Khatai District Court ordered her pre-trial detention for one month and nine days.
8. Public reporting indicates that her detention was accompanied by search measures and seizures. It was reported that authorities raided her home, seized cash, and confiscated phones/devices, with her family disputing the ownership of the seized money.
9. On 7 March 2025, courts rejected appeals seeking to replace detention with a non-custodial measure in hearings concerning defendants in the Meydan TV case, including Fatima Movlamova.
10. On 24 June 2025, the Khatai District Court extended the pre-trial detention of Meydan TV case defendants, including Fatima Movlamova, by a further period reported as three months.
11. On 16 September 2025, the Khatai District Court further extended Fatima Movlamova’s pre-trial detention, reported as an additional three-month extension.
12. On 12 December 2025, the consolidated trial in the “Meydan TV case” began before the Baku Assize Court, with Fatima Movlamova listed among the defendants.

LEGAL ANALYSIS

Reasons why Fatima Movlamova should be regarded as a political prisoner:

13. Assessment of whether Fatima Movlamova should be regarded as a political prisoner is based on the Resolution 1900 (2012) ‘The Definition of Political Prisoner’ of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the criteria established in the Resolution (paragraph 3). The legal proceedings against and conviction of Fatima Movlamova satisfy two criteria established by the paragraph 3 of the Resolution for defining political prisoners ((a) and (e)):

(a) Her detention and imprisonment violate his fundamental rights under the European Convention on Human Rights, particularly freedom of expression and the right to freedom of association.

(e) The political motives (ulterior motives) were sole and predominant in pursuing and conducting unfair criminal proceedings against her, which caused preliminary detention and imprisonment.

14. The European Court of Human Rights’ jurisprudence on Article 18 of the ECHR, which prohibits restrictions on rights for improper purposes, reinforces this analysis. The following considerations based on quadripartite test should be emphasized in this totality assessment in the general contextual evaluation of a distinct state of affairs (*mutatis mutandis*, Ibrahimov and Mammadov v. Azerbaijan, 2020, §§ 113-131):

- 1) The prisoner’s public profile;
- 2) The sequence of the events;
- 3) The manner in which the investigations and trial were carried out;
- 4) The authorities’ conduct.

Fatima Movlamova’s public profile:

15. Fatima Movlamova is an independent Azerbaijani journalist recognized primarily for her work as a reporter for Meydan TV and her broader engagement with independent online media. Public sources describe her as known for reporting on human rights violations, police conduct, and social issues, including women’s rights and civic freedoms, areas that are widely treated as politically sensitive in Azerbaijan. Her public profile is therefore situated within the independent media environment that has been persistently targeted through criminalization narratives applied to journalists and media workers.

16. From the outset and the circumstances of the criminal case, including the broader official narrative surrounding the “Meydan TV case,” the prosecution appears consistent with a pattern of targeting independent journalism by reframing media work and professional networks as financial or foreign-funding criminality. In this context, Fatima Movlamova’s public profile provides reasonable grounds to believe she was targeted not for genuine criminal conduct, but because of her journalistic activity within an independent outlet and her visibility in reporting on rights-related abuses at a time of intensified pressure on independent media since 2023, continuing into 2024–2025.

Sequence of events and contextual factors:

17. Fatima Movlamova’s arrest is part of a larger, coordinated campaign against independent journalism in Azerbaijan, in which journalists and media workers have been detained on a strikingly repetitive set of financial accusations (notably currency smuggling and related offences). This uniformity, and the way charges and detention measures have been applied across different media cases, strongly suggests a state-driven strategy to criminalize independent journalism rather than a legitimate process aimed at individual wrongdoing. The relevant sequence of events should therefore be assessed synthetically, as a single wave of repression with a clear policy logic and continuity.

18. The proto-repression began in the last quarter of 2022. In December 2022, civic activist Bakhtiyar Hajiyev was arrested.³ In June 2023, protests against the gold mine in the village of Soyudlu, Gadabay, and their coverage by informally networked NGOs and critical media (including Toplum TV) accelerated the process of repression. After suppressing these protests, the government imposed a blockade on the village and blamed NGOs and the media for inciting the events.⁴

19. In July 2023, politician and economist Gubad Ibadoglu was detained.⁵ In August 2023, pro-government media organised a smear campaign against peace activists protesting military operations in Nagorno-Karabakh.⁶ In September 2023, four activists were administratively detained for one month. Around the same time, arrests were carried out against Labor Desk (İşçi Masası) activists, who sought to establish the country’s only alternative trade union organization.⁷

20. The main follow-up campaign began in November 2023. First, the pro-government media published smear articles targeting almost all NGOs and media outlets. Later, at the end of November 2023, the AbzasMedia arrests began.⁸ These arrests continued in early March 2024 with a police raid against the detainee's affiliated organization and the arrest of several individuals represented in those institutions.
21. In April 2024, Imran Aliyev, the head of the Meclis.info portal monitoring the parliament, was detained.⁹ In May 2024, Anar Mammadli, the head of Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies (EMDS), was arrested (he had also been arrested in the previous round of repression).¹⁰ These arrests demonstrate that a new wave of repression had already begun. The objective of this wave was to paralyze the activities of post-2014 informally networked NGOs and critical media. But it also expanded beyond NGOs and media into academia and peace advocacy: Igbal Abilov¹¹, a Talysh historian/ethnographer, was detained in July 2024 and later sentenced to 18 years' imprisonment in May 2025 on treason-related accusations and political scientist Bahruz Samadov¹² was detained in August 2024 on treason charges similarly and later sentenced to a 15 years' prison term. Both of their arrests are widely condemned as politically motivated.
22. Repression further continued against independent media through the Meydan TV case:¹³ Human Rights Watch reported that the authorities' investigation was directed at the outlet and that its staff were placed in pre-trial detention beginning in December 2024, with later arrests (including Fatima Movlamova's arrest) incorporated into the same proceedings, culminating in a consolidated trial that opened in December 2025. Finally, repression widened to formal opposition politics in late 2025, when Ali Karimli¹⁴, the long-standing leader of the Popular Front Party, was detained (29 November 2025) and remanded into pre-trial custody, amid a broader escalation against the party documented by human rights monitors.
23. This process was preceded by restrictive legislation: the Law on Media (2021)¹⁵ and the Law on Political Parties (2022)¹⁶. Both laws were criticized by the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe for being restrictive. Nevertheless, they remain valid and enforceable. A similar process took place during the repression of 2013–2014: restrictive laws were first adopted, and arrests followed.

24. The investigative authorities acted in bad faith in Nurlan Gahramanli's case and, from the outset, relied on investigative techniques that structurally weaken procedural safeguards. As reflected in the indictment, the Meydan TV case was triggered and operationalized through (i) broadly framed operational-search inputs and (ii) a police-controlled operational episode on 6 December 2024 at Heydar Aliyev International Airport, which the prosecution then used as a platform to detain and charge a widening circle of media workers, including persons arrested later such as Nurlan Gahramanli.

Manner in which the investigation and detention measures were carried out:

25. The investigative authorities acted in bad faith in Fatima Movlamova's case and systematically circumvented procedural safeguards. As reflected in the indictment, the case against her rests on two core pillars: (i) vaguely framed operational-search information/data used to justify the initiation of the proceedings and her arrest, and (ii) search-and-seizure measures carried out in close temporal proximity to her detention, including a search of her home and the seizure of journalistic equipment and personal devices.

26. According to the indictment, law-enforcement bodies relied on unspecified operational information/data allegedly indicating that persons linked (in the authorities' framing) to Meydan TV were involved in transporting undeclared foreign currency into Azerbaijan and coordinating its handling. Fatima Movlamova is subsumed into this narrative solely by association with the outlet, rather than through any individualized factual allegation.

27. The indictment does not disclose the provenance of the operational material in a manner that allows meaningful scrutiny. It fails to identify whether the information originated from surveillance, witnesses, informants, or other sources, and it provides no reliability indicators or explanation of how the information was obtained and verified. This lack of transparency deprives the defense of an effective opportunity to challenge the origin, lawfulness, and credibility of the material that precipitated her arrest and detention (*mutatis mutandis*, *Ibrahimov and Mammadov v Azerbaijan* (2020) §§ 119–120).

28. The indictment identifies the initiating material evidentiary episode as a police-controlled operation on 6 December 2024 at Heydar Aliyev International Airport, where 38,000 EUR was allegedly discovered in the luggage of another defendant (Ramin Jabrayilzade/Deko) immediately after border entry. That seizure is not attributed to Fatima Movlamova's possession, control, or conduct.

29. Public reporting confirms that, notwithstanding the absence of any individualized seizure or transaction linked to her, a group of journalists associated with Meydan TV, including Fatima Movlamova, were subsequently detained and prosecuted under Article 206.3.2. In substantive terms, this structure raises serious concerns that the prosecution extends liability outward from a single initiating seizure event into an associative group narrative, without demonstrating conduct attributable to each defendant sufficient to establish the elements of bulk-cash smuggling.
30. Public reporting concerning the investigative measures applied to Fatima Movlamova further reinforces concerns about procedural safeguards. It has been reported that her apartment was searched and that cash and electronic devices were seized, with her family disputing the ownership and relevance of the seized money. Such seizure-heavy measures, particularly when directed at journalists, have an inherent chilling effect, as they capture professional communications and potentially source-related material, while placing evidentiary control almost exclusively in the hands of the police. In analogous contexts, the European Court of Human Rights has emphasized that deficiencies surrounding police-dominated search-and-seizure operations raise legitimate concerns about evidentiary integrity and the risk of evidence being used to support a pre-determined accusation (*Sakit Zahidov v Azerbaijan* (2015) § 53; *Layijov v Azerbaijan* (2014) § 69).
31. The subsequent procedural trajectory reinforces the inference of a detention-driven approach. Following her arrest in February 2025, Fatima Movlamova's pre-trial detention was ordered and later repeatedly extended, while courts rejected requests to replace detention with less intrusive measures. In August 2025, the authorities escalated the accusations into a broad package of additional financial and document-related offences applied across the defendant group. This sequencing, initial currency-smuggling allegations followed by charge expansion, reflects a recurring prosecutorial pattern in Azerbaijan whereby journalistic activity is reframed as participation in a purported fabricated financial crimes scheme.
32. Taken together, (i) reliance on non-transparent operational-search premises, (ii) a case architecture built around an initiating seizure attributed to another person, (iii) intrusive searches and seizures of journalistic equipment and disputed cash, and (iv) repeated extensions of pre-trial detention, there are serious grounds to question the good faith of the investigation and the sufficiency and individualization of reasonable suspicion as applied to Fatima Movlamova within the framework of the "Meydan TV case."

Authorities' conduct:

33. The relevant authorities, at first, denied Fatima Movlamova procedural safeguards. The domestic courts failed to assess criminal procedural legislation properly. Moreover, the pro-governmental media constantly published defamatory coverage about the detainee. Investigative authorities leaked personal files obtained through investigative measures to the pro-governmental media in a selective way. That led to misuse of the personal data obtained unlawfully from the detainees in this case and for the construction of defamatory content.

Additional considerations:

34. Finally, international human rights observers, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have denounced the charges against Fatima Movlamova and others from Meydan TV as politically motivated (see cited footnotes above).

CONCLUSION

35. The personal factors (Fatima Movlamova's public profile, absence of convincing evidence, and constant violation of procedural rights) and contextual factors (defamatory media campaign and new wave of political repression) cumulatively indicate reasonable grounds to believe that Fatima Movlamova should be considered a political prisoner in light of Resolution 1900 (2012) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

RECOMMENDATION

36. Based on this conclusion, Fatima Movlamova should be released unconditionally and should be compensated *restitutio in integrum*.

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