

# EMIN IBRAHIMOV



## FACTS

### Personal data:

1. Emin Ibrahimov (DOB: 13 June 1981) is an Azerbaijani citizen, former diplomat and public commentator. He served in Azerbaijan's diplomatic service between 2007 and 2020, including postings at the Azerbaijani Embassy in the United States and the diplomatic mission in Uruguay. He studied international relations at Baku State University and Ankara University and later became known for his public criticism of the Azerbaijani authorities, including through social media, after resigning from diplomatic service in protest against the suppression of political freedoms and electoral abuses.
2. Before the present criminal case, Ibrahimov had already been subjected to administrative detention. In September 2023, he was sentenced to 30 days' administrative arrest after social media posts linked to the Azerbaijani military operation in Karabakh; the measure was connected to his online criticism and anti-war commentary. The trial judgment in the present case likewise records that the defense linked the prosecution to his public-political activity and social media statements.<sup>1</sup>
3. Ibrahimov was detained on 22 July 2024 in Baku in connection with an alleged stabbing incident. He denied the accusation from the outset and maintained that the case had been fabricated because of his critical public statements. On 11 April 2025, the Baku Assize Court convicted him of intentionally causing grievous bodily harm under hooligan motives and sentenced him to seven years' imprisonment, while excluding the separate hooliganism count.

4. The allegations against E. Ibrahimov lack credibility and are widely regarded as politically driven and part of a wider crackdown on civil society and independent media launched by the Azerbaijani authorities starting from 2022.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Date of detention:**

5. On 22.07.2024, Emin Ibrahimov was detained as a suspect by law enforcement authorities in Baku. The trial judgment records that his detention was counted from 22 July 2024, and that on 24.07.2024 the Nizami District Court imposed a 4-month pre-trial detention measure, calculated from 22 July 2024; that measure was later extended.

#### **Legal accusations:**

6. On 24 July 2024, following his detention two days earlier, the investigating authorities formally charged Emin Ibrahimov with the following accusations. The judgment shows that the case had initially been opened under Article 126.1 on 22 July 2024, but that the formal accusation was then framed under the more serious provisions of the Criminal Code.

- intentional infliction of grievous bodily harm under hooligan motives, under Article 126.2.4 of the Criminal Code;
- hooliganism committed with the use of a weapon or an object used as a weapon, under Article 221.3 of the Criminal Code

7. His case has been publicly discussed as politically motivated. Independent reporting stated from the outset that Ibrahimov denied the allegation, described the case as fabricated, and linked it to his criticism of the authorities.

#### **Legal status of prisoner:**

8. Emin Ibrahimov is a convicted prisoner. On 11 April 2025, the Baku Assize Court excluded the separate hooliganism count, found him guilty under Article 126.2.4 of the Criminal Code, and sentenced him to 7 years' imprisonment, with the custodial term calculated from 22 July 2024. His appeal and cassation complaints were unsuccessful, leaving that sentence in force.

9. The first-instance proceedings were completed on 11 April 2025, when the Baku Assize Court delivered its judgment. The court held that the prosecution had incorrectly combined two offences, excluded the separate accusation under Article 221.3, convicted Ibrahimov under Article 126.2.4 alone, and sentenced him to 7 years' imprisonment. The sentence was ordered to run from 22 July 2024, and the custodial measure was maintained pending the entry into force of the judgment.
10. Ibrahimov challenged the judgment, but his appeal was unsuccessful. A later cassation complaint was also rejected: on 25 February 2026, the Supreme Court left the lower courts' decisions in force, meaning that the 7-year sentence remained effective.
11. The courts' reasoning, as reflected in the first-instance judgment, rested mainly on a narrow body of prosecution evidence: the injured party's account, the statements of two patrol police officers who said they came upon the aftermath of the incident while on duty nearby, the scene-inspection and seizure records, and the forensic reports concerning the wound, the knife, and biological traces. The trial court treated this evidentiary package as sufficient and reliable, while dismissing the defense's requests for further evidentiary steps, including the questioning of additional experts and medical personnel, a reconstruction of the incident, and repeat expert examinations, on the basis that these requests were insufficiently substantiated.
12. Ibrahimov consistently denied the accusation and maintained that the case had been fabricated because of his public-political activity and social media statements. The judgment records that he refused to incriminate himself, described the prosecution as staged, and alleged that the file had been falsified. The materials also show that his lawyer formally noted that, at the 24th Police Station, he had allegedly been subjected to electric shocks in order to obtain the password to his phone. Yet the judgment shows no meaningful judicial inquiry into that allegation; instead, the court proceeded on the basis of the official prosecution record and accepted the case against him without independently testing the defense claim that the prosecution itself was abusive and politically motivated.

## LEGAL ANALYSIS

### **Reasons why Emin Ibrahimov should be regarded as a political prisoner:**

13. Assessment of whether E. Ibrahimov 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).<sup>3</sup> The legal proceedings against and conviction of E. Ibrahimov satisfy two criteria established by the paragraph. 3 of the Resolution for defining political prisoners ((a) and (e)):

- (a) Emin's 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, as well as the right to a fair trial and to liberty and security.
- (e) The political motives (ulterior motives) were sole and predominant in pursuing and conducting unfair criminal proceedings against him, 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.

#### **Emin Ibrahimov's public profile:**

15. The circumstances indicate that Emin Ibrahimov is not an ordinary criminal defendant but a former Azerbaijani diplomat and visible government critic whose public engagement was expressed through diplomatic dissent, social media commentary, and broader civic criticism of the authorities. He served in Azerbaijan's diplomatic service from 2007 to 2020, including at the Azerbaijani Embassy in the United States and the diplomatic mission in Uruguay, and resigned in March 2020 in protest at what he described as the suppression of rights and electoral fraud. Public reporting further identifies him as a former diplomat and activist known for sharp criticism of the authorities online. The trial judgment itself also records that the defense submitted material from his social media account showing that he used it to express views on public, political, economic and historical issues, and that he consistently maintained that the present case was linked to his public-political activity and his statements on social media.

16. From the outset, Ibrahimov's prosecution has appeared in a broader context of retaliation against outspoken critics, especially those who publicly challenged the authorities' line on war, democracy, and relations with Russia. In September 2023, he was given 30 days' administrative detention after online posts that were publicly linked to his criticism of the military operation in Karabakh; Human Rights Watch<sup>4</sup> later listed him among activists punished for online criticism of that operation, and OC Media<sup>5</sup> reported that he had argued on Facebook that the operation was being carried out in Russia's interests. After his July 2024 arrest, he again insisted that the criminal case was fabricated because of his critical views, and independent reporting, as well as the European Parliament<sup>6</sup> and Human Rights Watch, subsequently treated his case as part of the wider repression of government critics in Azerbaijan. Taken together, these elements support the conclusion that Ibrahimov's case was not an isolated prosecution following a private dispute, but one concerning a person with a clear oppositional public profile whose criticism of the authorities had already made him a target of coercive state measures.

## The sequence of events:

17. Emin Ibrahimov's arrest is part of a larger, coordinated pattern of repression in Azerbaijan, in which opposition-aligned individuals and government critics have been detained on a strikingly repetitive set of allegations, most commonly serious narcotics-related accusations framed as large quantity and/or intent to sell, as well as finance/tax related crimes and crimes against the state and national security. This uniformity, and the way charges and detention measures have been applied across multiple similar cases, strongly suggests a state-driven strategy to criminalize dissenting political affiliation and criticism 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. Already in 2022, a discernible pattern of repression was emerging through a series of arrests that disproportionately affected persons deported/returned from abroad (notably Germany), individuals perceived as affiliated with the PFPA/AXCP, Musavat and certain minority figures. This early hunt functioned as a clear precursor to, and warning sign of, the wider crackdown that would later expand across independent media, NGOs, and other segments of civil society.
19. In December 2022, civic activist Bakhtiyar Hajiyev was arrested.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>
20. In July 2023, politician and economist Gubad Ibadoglu was detained.<sup>9</sup> In August 2023, pro-government media organized a smear campaign against peace activists protesting military operations in Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup>
21. 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.<sup>12</sup> 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.

22. In April 2024, Imran Aliyev, the head of the Meclis.info portal monitoring the parliament, was detained.<sup>13</sup> 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).<sup>14</sup> 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: Iqbal Abilov<sup>15</sup>, 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 Samadov<sup>16</sup> 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.
23. Repression further continued against independent media through the Meydan TV case<sup>17</sup>: Human Rights Watch reported that the investigation targeted the outlet and that its newsroom staff were held in pre-trial detention from December 2024, with subsequent arrests feeding into a consolidated trial that began in December 2025. Finally, repression widened to formal opposition politics in late 2025, when Ali Karimli<sup>18</sup>, 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.
24. This process was preceded by restrictive legislation: the Law on Media (2021)<sup>19</sup> and the Law on Political Parties (2022)<sup>20</sup>. 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.
25. In this regard, the persons arrested in this process, including the detainee, are victims of the political repression of 2023–2025. The main objective of this campaign of political arrests is to dismantle the informal, networked NGOs and critical media that revived and assumed a new format in the post-2014 era. Political arrests in this context serve an instrumental purpose.

**The manner in which the investigations and trial were carried out:**

26. The investigative authorities acted in bad faith in Emin Ibrahimov's case and, in substance, treated the prosecution narrative as one to be confirmed rather than tested. Unlike a case built on independent eyewitness or neutral technical evidence, the file shows a narrow and police-centred evidentiary structure: the case was opened immediately on the basis of the same incident report, police apprehension, scene inspection, and forensic package later relied on by the trial court, while Ibrahimov's position from the outset was that the accusation had been fabricated because of his public-political activity and social media statements.

27. According to the case materials accepted by the court, the investigation was triggered on 22 July 2024 after patrol police encountered a street altercation, detained Ibrahimov, and a formal criminal case was opened the same day. The subsequent evidentiary record was then assembled by the same police structures: the injured party's statement, the patrol officers' reports, the scene-inspection protocol, the seizure of the knife and clothing, and the ensuing expert examinations. This sequence is significant because it left the defense in a structurally weak position from the beginning: the state controlled the scene, the collection of material evidence, the identification of witnesses, and the narrative framing of the incident before any meaningful adversarial scrutiny was possible.
28. The prosecution's case remained procedurally vulnerable throughout. The two patrol officers did not witness the actual stabbing; their own evidence was that they arrived after the critical moment, saw the men fighting, found a knife on the ground, and acted on what the injured party told them. The injured party himself acknowledged that there were many bystanders, passing vehicles, and nearby workers, yet no genuinely independent eyewitness evidence appears to have been secured. The file further shows that the authorities ultimately reported that no usable surveillance footage was available and that they were unable to identify any civilian witnesses, despite the incident having occurred in a busy public place. Even on the physical evidence, the knife blade and swabs were linked to the injured party's blood, but the biological material on the handle was mixed and unsuitable for comparative DNA analysis. In other words, the state's case was treated as sufficient even though the most incriminating elements were not independently corroborated in a way that removed reasonable evidentiary doubt.
29. The handling of Ibrahimov's ill-treatment allegations reinforces that conclusion. The judgment records that, during the pre-trial phase, defense counsel formally noted Ibrahimov's complaint that he had been subjected to electric shocks at the 24th police station in order to obtain the password to his telephone, and a later forensic examination documented abrasions on both forearms consistent with blunt-force impact and not convincingly attributable to a simple fall or self-infliction. Ibrahimov also stated to the forensic expert that police had tightly handcuffed him, threatened him, beaten him, and applied electric current. Yet the follow-up was entirely internal and formalistic: the materials cited by the court show that statements were taken from police personnel, a separate criminal case was refused, and the courts ultimately neutralized the allegation by relying on the file itself, including the later phone examination showing that investigators had not in fact unlocked the device. That was not a genuine inquiry into whether coercion had occurred; it was a file-based reason to dismiss the complaint without testing the conduct of the officers involved.

30. The trial court then compounded these defects by treating the defense case as unworthy of serious engagement. The judgment expressly records that defense motions to examine additional experts and medical personnel, conduct an experimental reconstruction of the incident, and order repeat expert examinations were refused; the court characterized them as insufficiently substantiated, and even suggested that the defense was filing merely formal motions rather than assisting in the establishment of the objective truth. This shows that the court aligned with the prosecution's evidentiary framework, not one approaching the contested facts with the caution expected in a politically sensitive case involving allegations of fabrication and police abuse. The continuation of detention followed the same logic: custody was repeatedly maintained and extended, while alternative restraint was rejected and the courts proceeded as though incarceration was the natural procedural baseline.

#### **The authorities' conduct:**

31. The conduct of the authorities, taken as a whole, points to a prosecution pursued in a punitive and politically freighted manner rather than a neutral search for the truth. The police and prosecution failed to secure the most basic safeguards of an effective adversarial process: they did not produce independent eyewitness testimony, did not preserve or obtain potentially important video evidence in time, did not carry out a genuinely independent investigation into credible allegations of ill-treatment, and relied instead on official reports, police witnesses, and a court process that dismissed the defense's requests as essentially formal. In parallel, the accusation was publicly reinforced from the outset through official messaging: the Interior Ministry spokesperson confirmed Ibrahimov's detention on the allegation that he had stabbed another person, and government-aligned outlets repeated that version before any judicial determination of guilt. Against that background, it is significant that independent and international observers later described the case as fabricated, spurious, or bogus, which is consistent with the broader pattern in Azerbaijan of using ordinary criminal accusations to silence outspoken critics.

#### **Additional considerations:**

32. Finally, international human rights observers such as Human Rights Watch<sup>21</sup> have denounced the charges against E. Ibrahimov as politically motivated.

#### **CONCLUSION**

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

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

34. Based on this conclusion, Emin Ibrahimov should be released unconditionally and immediately. Furthermore, he should be compensated *restitutio in integrum*.

<sup>1</sup>‘Reportyor, keçmiş diplomat həbs ediliblər’ (Azadlıq Radiosu, 21 September 2023)

<https://www.azadliq.org/a/emin-ibrahimov/32602777.html> accessed 23 March 2026.

<sup>2</sup>European Parliament, ‘Resolution on the crackdown on independent media in Azerbaijan, notably the case of Abzas Media’ (2024) P9\_TA(2024)0074 [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-10-2024-0074\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-10-2024-0074_EN.html) accessed 29 May 2025.

<sup>3</sup>Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), ‘Resolution 1900 (2012): The definition of political prisoner’ (3 October 2012) <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=19150> accessed 29 May 2025.

<sup>4</sup>Human Rights Watch, ‘World Report 2024: Azerbaijan’ (Human Rights Watch, 11 January 2024)

<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/azerbaijan> accessed 23 March 2026.

<sup>5</sup>Ismi Aghayev, ‘Azerbaijan arrests anti-war figures’ (OC Media, 21 September 2023) <https://oc-media.org/azerbaijan-arrests-anti-war-figures/> accessed 23 March 2026.

<sup>6</sup>European Parliament resolution of 24 October 2024 on the situation in Azerbaijan, violation of human rights and international law and relations with Armenia [2025] OJ C 486/1, P10\_TA(2024)0029.

<sup>7</sup>Eurasianet, Prominent activist detained following U.S. sanctions on Azerbaijani official

<https://eurasianet.org/prominent-activist-detained-following-us-sanctions-on-azerbaijani-official> accessed 28 August 2025

<sup>8</sup>Reporters Without Borders, Police prevent coverage of protests about environmental scandal in Azerbaijan

<https://rsf.org/en/police-prevent-coverage-protests-about-environmental-scandal-azerbaijan> accessed

28 August 2025

<sup>9</sup>Human Rights Watch, Azerbaijan: Free Academic Facing Bogus Charges

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/07/23/azerbaijan-free-academic-facing-bogus-charges> accessed 28 August 2025

<sup>10</sup>Musavat, “No-Warçılarının dosyesi: onlar harada və necə yetişiblər” [https://musavat.com/news/no-war-cilarin-dosyesi-onlar-harada-ve-necə-yetisibler\\_1001622.html](https://musavat.com/news/no-war-cilarin-dosyesi-onlar-harada-ve-necə-yetisibler_1001622.html) accessed 28 August 2025

<sup>11</sup>Eurasianet, Azerbaijan authorities smash unionization efforts for gig workers

<https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-authorities-smash-unionization-efforts-for-gig-workers> accessed 28 August 2025

<sup>12</sup>Amnesty International, Azerbaijan: Seven journalists sentenced in latest shocking crackdown on free speech

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/06/azerbaijan-seven-journalists-sentenced-in-latest-shocking-crackdown-on-free-speech/> accessed 28 August 2025

<sup>13</sup>Council of Europe, Safety Of Journalists — FOM Alert <https://fom.coe.int/en/alerte/detail/107640886>

accessed 28 August 2025

<sup>14</sup>Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Azerbaijan: authorities should release imprisoned human rights defenders, journalists and civil society activists

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/azerbaijan-authorities-should-release-imprisoned-human-rights-defenders-journalists-and-civil-society-activists> accessed 28 August 2025

<sup>15</sup> Scholars at Risk, 'Release academic Igbal Abilov, wrongfully imprisoned for one year' (22 July 2025) <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/2025/07/release-academic-igbal-abilov-wrongfully-imprisoned-for-one-year/> accessed 7 January 2026

<sup>16</sup> Human Rights Watch, 'Azerbaijan: Escalating Crackdown on Critics' (30 August 2024) <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/08/30/azerbaijan-escalating-crackdown-critics> accessed 7 January 2026.

<sup>17</sup> Arzu Geybulla, 'Another Courageous Journalist Jailed in Azerbaijan' (Human Rights Watch, 16 May 2025) <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/05/16/another-courageous-journalist-jailed-azerbaijan> accessed 7 January 2026.

<sup>18</sup> Amnesty International, 'Azerbaijan: Arrest of opposition leader is further evidence of consolidation of authoritarian practices' (1 December 2025) <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/12/azerbaijan-arrest-of-opposition-leader-is-further-evidence-of-consolidation-of-authoritarian-practices/> accessed 7 January 2026.

<sup>19</sup> Venice Commission. 'Opinion on On The Law On Media in Azerbaijan.' Council of Europe, Opinion No. 1078/2022, 2022, available at [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2022\)009-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2022)009-e)

<sup>20</sup> Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR. Joint Opinion On The Law On Political Parties, 2023 available at <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/4/543922.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Human Rights Watch, 'Azerbaijan' (World Report 2023) (2023) <<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/azerbaijan>> accessed 25 January 2026.

