

GUBAD IBADOGLU



FACTS

Personal data:

1. Gubad Ibadoghlu (DOB: 12.09.1971) is an Azerbaijani political economist, anti-corruption expert, civil-society activist and opposition politician. At the time of his arrest, he was Chair of the Azerbaijan Democracy and Prosperity Movement, which the authorities had repeatedly refused to register as a political party, and a Senior Visiting Fellow at the London School of Economics.¹
2. On 23 July 2023, Ibadoghlu and his wife were intercepted and reportedly assaulted by plain-clothes officers in Baku. The detention record formally calculated the restriction of his liberty from 01:10 on 24 July 2023. He was initially accused of participating in an organised group engaged in acquiring and distributing counterfeit currency under Article 204.3.1 of the Criminal Code, after the authorities claimed to have found 200 counterfeit 100-dollar notes in an apartment registered in his name. On 24 July 2023, the Narimanov District Court ordered his pre-trial detention for three months and twenty-six days. A further charge concerning the preparation, storage or dissemination of religious extremist materials under Article 167-3.1 was subsequently added.²
3. Ibadoghlu denied the accusations and maintained that the money had been planted. The allegations have been widely regarded as fabricated and politically motivated, arising from his opposition activity, anti-corruption work and criticism of the authorities' management of public finances and oil and gas revenues. The European Parliament described his detention as arbitrary, concluded that the charges resulted from his civic activism and demanded his immediate and unconditional release.

Date of detention:

4. On 23 July 2023, Gubad Ibadoghlu was apprehended by plain-clothes police officers in Baku; the official detention record states that his liberty was formally restricted from 01:10 on 24 July 2023. Later that day, the Baku Narimanov District Court ordered his pre-trial detention for three months and 26 days. His detention was extended on 16 November 2023 and again on 15 February 2024, each time for three months. On 22 April 2024, after 274 days in custody and amid a serious deterioration in his health, the court replaced pre-trial detention with house arrest.³ The proceedings were subsequently suspended indefinitely, without the charges being withdrawn.⁴ Currently, Ibadoghlu remains under house arrest and subject to travel and other restrictions. He has neither been brought to trial nor convicted.

Legal accusations:

5. On 24 July 2023, Gubad Ibadoghlu was formally charged under Article 204.3.1 of the Criminal Code with the preparation, acquisition or sale of counterfeit money or foreign currency, allegedly committed by an organised group. The accusation concerned USD 40,000 in counterfeit banknotes allegedly discovered during a search of premises formerly used by the Economic Research Centre. Ibadoghlu denied any connection to the money, while his defence maintained that the banknotes had been planted and that the search was unlawful.
6. On 25 August 2023, the authorities brought an additional charge under Article 167-3.1 of the Criminal Code, concerning the preparation, storage or distribution of religious-extremist materials. This accusation was reportedly based on electronic documents associated with Fethullah Gülen allegedly found on devices seized from the premises. The defence maintained that neither the devices nor the materials belonged to Ibadoghlu and that they had not been recorded in the original search protocol.
7. Although Ibadoghlu's prosecution is not formally linked to a broader group of criminal cases, its circumstances correspond to the established pattern of using ordinary criminal or national-security charges against prominent opposition politicians, independent academics and civil-society figures. Ibadoghlu rejected both charges as fabricated and politically motivated, and international human-rights bodies have repeatedly called for their withdrawal.

Legal status of the political prisoner:

8. Ibadoghlu has not been tried or convicted. Following his arrest on 23 July 2023, the Baku Narimanov District Court ordered his pre-trial detention for three months and 26 days on 24 July 2023. His detention was subsequently extended on 16 November 2023 and 15 February 2024.

9. On 22 April 2024, after 274 days in custody and amid a serious deterioration in his health, the court replaced pre-trial detention with house arrest. The criminal proceedings were subsequently suspended indefinitely, but the charges and restrictions were not lifted. Ibadoghlu remains under house arrest, subject to restrictions on his movement and travel, without having been brought to trial.

Legal proceedings:

10. On 23 July 2023, Gubad Ibadoghlu was detained by officers of the Main Department for Combating Organised Crime; the official protocol records the restriction of his liberty from 01:10 on 24 July 2023. On the same day, the Baku Narimanov District Court charged him under Article 204.3.1 of the Criminal Code and ordered his pre-trial detention for three months and 26 days. His detention was extended for three months on 16 November 2023 and again on 15 February 2024. The defence's applications challenging his detention and seeking its replacement with house arrest were initially unsuccessful. On 22 April 2024, after 274 days in custody and amid a serious deterioration in his health, the court replaced pre-trial detention with house arrest. On 29 July 2024, the preliminary proceedings were suspended indefinitely, without the charges or restrictions being lifted. Ibadoghlu has not been brought to trial or convicted and, according to the latest available information, remains under house arrest.

LEGAL ANALYSIS

Reasons why Gubad Ibadoghlu should be regarded as a political prisoner:

11. **Assessment of whether G. Ibadoghlu 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)⁵. The legal proceedings against and conviction of G. Ibadoghlu satisfy two criteria established by the paragraph. 3 of the Resolution for defining political prisoners ((a) and (e)):**

- a. Gubad'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.

12. 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 emphasised 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.

Gubad Ibadoghlu's public profile:

13. Gubad Ibadoghlu is a prominent Azerbaijani political economist, academic, anti-corruption advocate and opposition figure. His research and public work have focused on government accountability, transparent management of public finances and natural-resource revenues, and the economic consequences of corruption and authoritarian governance in Azerbaijan.
14. Ibadoghlu founded and led the Economic Research Centre, an independent organisation conducting research on public budgets, economic policy and good governance. He also represented civil society on the international board of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and participated in regional and international networks promoting transparency in the extractive industries. Through these activities, he became one of Azerbaijan's most internationally recognised independent economic experts.
15. His academic career has included positions and fellowships at institutions such as Duke University, the Institute for Advanced Study, Rutgers University and the London School of Economics. Alongside his academic work, he regularly published critical analyses of Azerbaijan's economic policies, oil and gas revenues, public expenditure and systemic corruption. Shortly before his arrest, he was involved in establishing a foundation intended to support Azerbaijani students using assets confiscated abroad in corruption proceedings.
16. Ibadoghlu has also been active in opposition politics as chair of the Azerbaijan Democracy and Prosperity Movement, which the authorities repeatedly refused to register as a political party. His combination of opposition activity, independent economic research and international anti-corruption advocacy made him a prominent critic of the Azerbaijani government. International organizations consider his arrest and prosecution an apparent retaliation for his criticism of the government and his peaceful political and civic activities.

The sequence of events:

17. Gubad Ibadoghlu's arrest formed part of an escalating pattern of repression in Azerbaijan in which political opponents, civil-society activists, journalists and other government critics were prosecuted on ostensibly ordinary criminal, financial or national-security charges. His detention in July 2023 was not an isolated event but occurred at a transitional point between an earlier series of targeted arrests and the broader campaign against independent media and civil society that began later that year.
18. A discernible escalation was already visible in 2022. The authorities prosecuted individuals returned or deported from abroad, persons perceived as affiliated with the PFPA/AXCP or Musavat, and minority activists. Restrictive legislation governing the media and political parties further narrowed the space for independent activity. In December 2022, civic activist Bakhtiyar Hajiyev was arrested on charges widely considered politically motivated.⁶
19. The repression intensified in June 2023 following protests against the operation of a gold mine near Soyudlu village in the Gadabay district. Police violently dispersed the protests, restricted access to the village and obstructed independent reporting. The authorities and pro-government media subsequently accused NGOs and critical media outlets, including Toplum TV, of inciting the unrest.⁷ This response indicated an increasing tendency to portray independent civic activity and critical reporting as threats to public order and State stability.
20. It was in this context that Gubad Ibadoghlu was arrested on 23 July 2023. As a prominent opposition politician, independent economist and anti-corruption advocate, he had repeatedly criticised the government's management of public finances and natural-resource revenues. His arrest followed his involvement in establishing a foundation intended to support Azerbaijani students using assets confiscated abroad in corruption proceedings. The authorities initially accused him of involvement in an organised counterfeit-currency operation and subsequently added an accusation concerning religious-extremist materials. Ibadoghlu denied both charges, while Human Rights Watch described them as bogus and called for his release.⁸
21. Ibadoghlu's arrest was therefore an important stage in the developing crackdown. It demonstrated that the authorities were prepared to use serious organised-crime and national-security accusations against an internationally recognised academic and opposition figure whose work directly challenged official control over public resources and corruption narratives. His prosecution also preceded and anticipated the broader use of financial and other ordinary criminal charges against independent civic organisations and media outlets.

22. The campaign continued in the following months. In August 2023, pro-government media targeted peace activists who opposed renewed military operations in Nagorno-Karabakh.⁹ In September 2023, several activists were administratively detained, while members of İşçi Masası (Labor Desk), an initiative seeking to organise gig-economy workers, were prosecuted.¹⁰
23. A more systematic campaign began in November 2023 with smear articles against independent NGOs and media outlets, followed by the arrests of Abzas Media journalists.¹¹ It expanded in 2024 to Toplum TV, the Institute for Democratic Initiatives, parliamentary-monitoring platform Meclis.info, and the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Centre. Among those arrested were Imran Aliyev in April 2024 and election-monitoring advocate Anar Mammadli in May 2024.¹² These proceedings were primarily based on allegations of smuggling and other financial offences, reflecting the same practice of presenting repression of independent civic work as ordinary law enforcement.
24. The crackdown subsequently extended further into academic research, minority studies and peace advocacy. Talysh historian and ethnographer Iqbal Abilov was detained in July 2024 and later sentenced to 18 years' imprisonment on treason-related charges.¹³ Political scientist and peace activist Bahruz Samadov was detained in August 2024 and later sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment for treason.¹⁴ Independent media remained a central target, including through the Meydan TV case beginning in December 2024.¹⁵ By late 2025, the repression had also widened against formal opposition politics, including the detention of PFPA leader Ali Karimli.¹⁶
25. Ibadoghlu's arrest must consequently be understood as an early and significant component of the 2023–2025 wave of repression, rather than as an unrelated prosecution for ordinary criminal conduct. It occurred after the initial narrowing of political and civic space but before the mass arrests targeting independent media and NGOs. His case helped establish the repressive model subsequently applied more broadly: serious but weakly substantiated criminal accusations, prolonged restrictions on liberty, and indefinite unresolved proceedings used to neutralise a prominent critic without securing a conviction. His continued house arrest and exposure to criminal prosecution therefore serve the same instrumental purpose as the later arrests, namely, removing an influential independent voice from public life and deterring political, academic and anti-corruption activity.

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

26. The investigation in Gubad Ibadoghlu's case has been marked by serious procedural deficiencies and reliance on contested evidence. He and his wife were intercepted by plain-clothes officers on 23 July 2023 and reportedly subjected to physical violence. The authorities subsequently searched premises formerly used by the Economic Research Centre and claimed to have discovered USD 40,000 in counterfeit banknotes. Ibadoghlu denied any connection to the money, while the defence maintained that it had been planted and that the search was conducted unlawfully. The subsequent accusation concerning religious-extremist materials was similarly based on electronic devices and documents allegedly recovered from the premises. The defence stated that neither the devices nor the materials belonged to Ibadoghlu and that they had not been recorded in the original search protocol. These circumstances raise serious concerns about the origin, integrity and reliability of the principal evidence underlying both charges.
27. Judicial consideration of the case has remained confined to preventive measures because Ibadoghlu has never been brought to trial. The Narimanov District Court initially ordered his detention for three months and 26 days, and subsequently extended it twice. The detention decisions relied primarily on the seriousness of the accusations and general assertions that he might abscond or obstruct the investigation, without sufficiently identifying concrete facts establishing those risks or explaining why less restrictive measures would be inadequate. The courts repeatedly rejected the defence's challenges and applications for release despite Ibadoghlu's established residence, professional standing and deteriorating health. Only on 22 April 2024, after 274 days in custody, was his detention replaced with house arrest.
28. The preliminary proceedings were suspended indefinitely on 29 July 2024 without the charges being withdrawn or the restrictions imposed on Ibadoghlu being lifted. Consequently, the prosecution's allegations have never been tested through an adversarial trial: the defence has had no opportunity to challenge the evidence through the examination of witnesses, forensic scrutiny or a judicial determination on the merits. The indefinite suspension has instead prolonged the effects of the criminal prosecution while leaving Ibadoghlu under house arrest and subject to movement and travel restrictions. This continuing state of legal uncertainty raises particular concerns regarding the presumption of innocence, the right to trial within a reasonable time and the availability of an effective means of contesting the accusations.

The authorities' conduct:

29. From the outset, the authorities failed to provide safeguards commensurate with the seriousness and political sensitivity of the case. Ibadoghlu was apprehended in a violent operation, his premises were searched in contested circumstances, and he was placed in prolonged pre-trial detention on the basis of evidence that he alleged had been planted or did not belong to him. The authorities did not ensure a sufficiently independent examination of these allegations. Instead, the courts accepted the prosecution's account for the purpose of ordering and repeatedly extending his detention without meaningfully addressing the defence's objections concerning the legality of the searches, the provenance of the physical and electronic evidence, or the absence of a credible connection between Ibadoghlu and the alleged offences.
30. The authorities' treatment of Ibadoghlu's health further aggravated these concerns. During his detention, his serious medical conditions reportedly deteriorated substantially, while requests for adequate specialist treatment, hospitalisation or release on medical grounds were repeatedly refused or inadequately addressed. His transfer to house arrest occurred only after sustained international pressure and did not amount to full release: the charges remained in force and he continued to be deprived of his liberty and prevented from travelling abroad, including to obtain medical care.
31. Taken together, the circumstances indicate that the proceedings served purposes extending beyond the legitimate investigation of identifiable criminal conduct. The disputed origin of the principal evidence, the addition of an unrelated extremism charge, the repeated use of formulaic detention reasoning, the inadequate response to his medical condition and the indefinite suspension of the investigation have allowed the authorities to restrict Ibadoghlu's liberty and remove him from political, academic and civic life without proving the accusations at trial. In light of his opposition activity, anti-corruption work and criticism of the government's management of public finances and natural-resource revenues, this pattern strongly supports the conclusion that the criminal proceedings have been used instrumentally to punish and silence a prominent government critic.

Additional considerations:

32. Finally, international human-rights organisations, including Human Rights Watch¹⁷ and Amnesty International¹⁸, have denounced the charges against Gubad Ibadoghlu as fabricated and politically motivated, describing his prosecution as retaliation for his legitimate political and civic activities

CONCLUSION

33. The personal factors (Gubad Ibadoghlu'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 Gubad Ibadoghlu 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, he should be released unconditionally and immediately. Furthermore, Gubad Ibadoghlu should be compensated restitutio in integrum.

¹ European Parliament, ‘Resolution of 14 September 2023 on the case of Dr Gubad Ibadoghlu, imprisoned in Azerbaijan’ (2023/2832(RSP)) P9_TA(2023)0323, paras A–B https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C_202401763 accessed 10 September 2026.

² Human Rights Watch and others, ‘Joint Open Letter to the Council of Europe Secretary General on the Case of Dr Gubad Ibadoghlu’ (28 March 2024) <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/03/28/joint-open-letter-council-europe-secretary-general-case-dr-gubad-ibadoghlu> accessed 10 September 2026.

³ Reuters, ‘Azerbaijan transfers jailed opposition figure to house arrest’ (22 April 2024) <https://www.reuters.com/world/azerbaijan-transfers-jailed-opposition-figure-house-arrest-2024-04-22/> accessed 10 September 2026.

⁴ Shaun Walker, ‘British MPs appeal to Azerbaijan government to free detained academic’ The Guardian (16 August 2024) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/aug/16/british-mps-appeal-azerbaijan-free-detained-academic-gubad-ibadoghlu> accessed 10 September 2026.

⁵ 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.

⁶ Eurasianet, ‘Prominent activist detained following US sanctions on Azerbaijani official’ <https://eurasianet.org/prominent-activist-detained-following-us-sanctions-on-azerbaijani-official> accessed 28 August 2025.

⁷ 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.

⁸ Human Rights Watch, ‘Azerbaijan: Free Academic Facing Bogus Charges’ (23 July 2024) <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/07/23/azerbaijan-free-academic-facing-bogus-charges> accessed 10 September 2026.

⁹ Musavat, ‘No-Warçılarının dosyesi: onlar harada və necə yetişiblər’ https://musavat.com/news/no-war-cilarin-dosyesi-onlar-harada-ve-necə-yetisibler_1001622.html accessed 28 August 2025.

¹⁰ Eurasianet, ‘Azerbaijan authorities smash unionization efforts for gig workers’ <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-authorities-smash-unionization-efforts-for-gig-workers> accessed 28 August 2025.

¹¹ Amnesty International, ‘Azerbaijan: Seven journalists sentenced in latest shocking crackdown on free speech’ (20 June 2025) <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/06/azerbaijan-seven-journalists-sentenced-in-latest-shocking-crackdown-on-free-speech/> accessed 28 August 2025.

¹² 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.

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¹³ 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.

¹⁴ 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

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch, 'Azerbaijan: Free Academic Facing Bogus Charges' (23 July 2024) <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/07/23/azerbaijan-free-academic-facing-bogus-charges> accessed 10 September 2026;

¹⁸ Amnesty International, 'Azerbaijan: Authorities Must Immediately Release Prominent Scholar Gubad Ibadoghlu' (7 September 2023) <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/09/azerbaijan-authorities-must-immediately-release-prominent-scholar-gubad-ibadoghlu/> accessed 10 September 2026.

