AHMAD MAMMADLI



FACTS

Personal data:

1. **Ahmad Mammadli (DOB: 2001) is an Azerbaijani civic activist, journalist, and former chairman of the pro-democracy movement Democracy 1918 (D18). Following the suspension of D18, he founded Yoldash Media, an independent online media initiative covering human rights violations, socio-political trials, and labour struggles in Azerbaijan. Previously subjected to administrative detention in September 2022 and an arbitrary travel ban due to his political and anti-war advocacy, Mammadli has long been targeted for his critical stance against the government.**

2. **A. Mammadli was detained on the night of 6–7 May 2025 following a staged confrontation in a shared taxi, after which an individual claimed Mammadli had assaulted and stabbed him with a folding pocket knife. He was subsequently charged with intentional infliction of grievous bodily harm committed with hooligan intent (Article 126.2.4 of the Criminal Code) and aggravated hooliganism committed with a weapon (Article 221.3 of the Criminal Code). On 16 March 2026, the Baku Assize Court convicted Mammadli under Article 126.2.4 (while dropping Article 221.3) and sentenced him to 6 years of imprisonment.**

3. **The criminal allegations against A. Mammadli lack credibility, reproduce an established pattern of fabricated knife-attack charges previously deployed against other activists (such as Afiyaddin Mammadov), and are widely recognized as politically motivated retaliation for his journalistic work, civil society activism, and the ongoing crackdown on independent media in Azerbaijan.** [1]

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Date of detention:

4. On 6 May 2025, Ahmad Mammadli was detained by police authorities, with his official arrest protocol registered on 7 May 2025 at 01:55.

5. On 8 May 2025, based on the decision of the Baku City Binagadi District Court, he was remanded in custody for an initial pre-trial detention period of four months.

Legal accusations:

6. On 7–8 May 2025, the Binagadi District Police Department (BDPD) officially charged A. Mammadli with the following criminal offences:

- Intentional infliction of grievous bodily harm dangerous to human life, committed with the intent of hooliganism under Article 126.2.4 of the Criminal Code;
- Aggravated hooliganism committed with the use of a weapon or an item used as a weapon, accompanied by violence against a person under Article 221.3 of the Criminal Code.

7. His prosecution followed an established pattern of fabricated knife-stabbing accusations weaponized against government critics, social activists, and independent journalists in Azerbaijan.

Legal status of prisoner:

8. A. Mammadli is a convicted prisoner. On 16 March 2026, the Baku Assize Court found him guilty under Article 126.2.4 of the Criminal Code and sentenced him to 6 years' imprisonment in a general-regime penal institution. He is currently held in custody.

Legal proceedings:

9. On the night of 6 May 2025, A. Mammadli was seized by police officers following an alleged altercation in a shared taxi.

10. On 8 May 2025, the Binagadi District Court granted the investigator's application and ordered that A. Mammadli be remanded in pre-trial custody for four months, calculating the term from 7 May 2025.

11. His pre-trial detention was subsequently extended throughout the preliminary investigation until the completion of the indictment, after which the criminal case was transferred to the Baku Assize Court.

12. On 16 March 2026, the Baku Assize Court delivered its judgment. The court excluded the charge under Article 221.3 (aggravated hooliganism) on the grounds that the allegations lacked the objective elements of gross violation of public order and were subsumed under the offense against the person. However, the court convicted A. Mammadli under Article 126.2.4 of the Criminal Code and sentenced him to 6 years of imprisonment.

13. The conviction was based on contentious and legally doubtful evidence, resting primarily on the contradictory testimonies of the purported victim (who claimed to have been stabbed), police officers, and procedural documents prepared by the investigative authorities, while entirely dismissing Mammadli's accounts of an orchestrated ambush, physical abuse, and torture while in police custody.

LEGAL ANALYSIS

Reasons why Ahmad Mammadli should be regarded as a political prisoner:

14. Assessment of whether A. Mammadli 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)[2]. The legal proceedings against and conviction of A. Mammadli satisfy two criteria established by the paragraph. 3 of the Resolution for defining political prisoners ((a) and (e)):

- (a) Ahmad'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.

15. 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.

Ahmad Mammadli's public profile:

16. The set of circumstances manifestly reveals that Ahmad Mammadli is a prominent civic activist, journalist, and former political youth leader committed to human rights, freedom of expression, and democratization. It is indisputable that the Azerbaijani government has long targeted him through systemic administrative repression, arbitrary travel bans, and fabricated criminal proceedings. As the former chairperson of the pro-democracy movement Democracy 1918 (D18), Mammadli was subjected to severe pressure, including a 30-day administrative detention and a subsequent hunger strike in September 2022 following his public calls for peace and outspoken criticism of military clashes. He subsequently faced an arbitrary foreign travel ban, criminal harassment preventing him from pursuing master's studies abroad, police summonses, and continuous surveillance.

17. Following the suspension of D18's public activities, Mammadli founded Yoldash Media, an independent investigative online platform dedicated to documenting political persecutions, monitoring controversial court proceedings of political prisoners (including Abzas Media and prominent opposition figures), and amplifying suppressed labour and social struggles.

18. As demonstrated by the sequence of events leading to his arrest on 6 May 2025, Mammadli was targeted precisely because of his uncompromising journalistic coverage and leadership in alternative youth activism. The state authorities routinely weaponize violent criminal pretexts, specifically staged street or taxi confrontations involving alleged knife assaults (identical to patterns applied against other activists such as Afiyaddin Mammadov) to discredit and silence critical voices. The procedural violations, including the denial of fundamental fair trial safeguards and the use of torture in police custody, illustrate that the judicial mechanism was utilized to incapacitate an independent observer. Consequently, Ahmad Mammadli's public profile asserts reasonable grounds to believe that he was prosecuted, detained, and convicted solely in retaliation for his independent media work and peaceful civil advocacy.

The sequence of events:

19. A.Mammadli's arrest forms part of a broader, state-engineered campaign to suppress emerging independent civic actors—this time targeting independent grassroots activists along with established civil society and media. The goal of this wave of repression is to paralyse the activities of post-2014 informally networked NGOs, grassroots and critical media.

20. This process started with passing the Law on Media in 2021 and the Law on Political Parties in 2022. The Venice Commission of the Council of Europe criticized both laws for being restrictive.[34] Nevertheless, both Acts are valid and enforceable. Following the enactment of restrictive NGO and media laws, repression intensified from late 2022 into 2023, enveloping a new generation of grassroots networks once deemed relatively safe.

21. Ahmad's arrest is part of a continuing wave of systemic repression, especially against grassroots activists and independent journalists. His administrative detention in September 2022 and subsequent criminal targeting signified the earlier phase of this targeted harassment, which was further compounded by arbitrary foreign travel bans and persistent surveillance. His apprehension in May 2025 marked the continuation of this systematic campaign, coming amid the government's coordinated escalation against critical media initiatives, including his platform Yoldash Media, and independent civic monitoring of high-profile political trials. The deployment of fabricated violent confrontations, specifically staged knife-stabbing charges under the guise of hooliganism and bodily harm, mirrors the exact tactics previously weaponized against trade union leaders like Afiyaddin Mammadov and other dissident figures during the broader civil society crackdown. The litany of arbitrary, overlapping charges, ranging from hooliganism to drug trafficking against activists, mirrors the tactics seen in the media and NGO crackdowns of the same period.

22. The main goal of this campaign of political arrests is to destroy the informal, networked NGOs, grassroots and critical media, which have revived and taken a new format in the post-2014 era, and political arrests have an instrumental purpose here.

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

23. The investigative authorities acted in bad faith regarding A. Mammadli's case and systematically circumvented essential procedural safeguards. The criminal proceedings against him were marred by glaring procedural violations, including reliance on highly questionable, rehearsed testimonies of police officers who detained him, hand-picked prosecution witnesses, lack of independent access to evidence, and manufactured links between him, an alleged folding pocket knife, and the purported victim. The prosecution failed to present verifiable, objective evidence establishing that Mammadli initiated an attack or possessed a weapon, turning the entire judicial process into an instrument of political retaliation rather than a lawful prosecution.

24. T**he judgment of the Baku Assize Court reveals critical contradictions and unsubstantiated claims:**

- F*abricated Incident and Pre-arranged Ambush:* The entire case rests on an alleged altercation inside a shared taxi travelling to Khirdalan on 6 May 2025, where Mammadli was accused of escalating a dispute over seating space, slapping the complainant, and stabbing him in the abdomen with a folding pocket knife. In stark contrast, Mammadli testified that he was under active surveillance and that the vehicle stopped in an isolated dark spot where plainclothes operatives immediately yanked him out, subjected him to severe physical violence, shouted "we caught the journalist," and cordoned off a staged crime scene where a knife was tossed to the ground.
- Inconclusive and contradictory forensic evidence: Forensic biological examination report No. 284/2025 explicitly confirmed that no bloodstains or traces of blood were detected on the seized knife. Furthermore, no fingerprint, DNA, or dactyloscopic analysis was conducted to establish that Mammadli had ever touched or wielded the weapon. The medical-forensic reports merely stated in non-definitive terms that the victim's abdominal injury could have been inflicted by a blade with similar structural characteristics, failing to prove that this specific knife was ever used.
- Rehearsed and conflicting testimonies: None of the civilian witnesses or passenger witnesses testified to having actually seen Mammadli stab the complainant. Key witness "Shahid2" recanted his preliminary investigation testimony in court, confirming that he never saw any fight, stabbing, or blood, and revealed that the local precinct officer instructed him to sign pre-drafted statements. The patrolling police officers gave nearly identical, rehearsed accounts claiming they arrived by coincidence while two men were lying on the ground, yet their versions diverged substantially regarding how the knife was supposedly dropped or discovered

- Refusal to investigate torture and abuse: Following his transfer to the Binagadi District Police Department, Mammadli was subjected to severe beatings and electroshock torture to coerce him into surrendering his mobile phone password, resulting in severe physical injuries, trauma to his eyes, and loss of consciousness. Medical entry records at the pre-trial facility documented these bodily traumas. Despite this, the trial court completely refused to investigate his substantiated torture allegations, arbitrarily dismissing his entire defense as "self-serving" while uncritically adopting the police narrative.
- Absence of objective evidence: The prosecution failed to produce video surveillance footage from the highway or the adjacent military post of the Ministry of Emergency Situations, completely depriving the defense of objective proof to verify the sequence of events.

25. Taken together, the absence of objective proof, reliance on state-subordinated forensic experts, blatant disregard of police abuse, and the broader context of Mammadli's journalistic and anti-war advocacy confirm that this was a punitive measure designed to neutralize an outspoken critical voice. This underscores the complete lack of institutional independence within the judicial system, violating Mammadli's right to a fair trial under Article 6 of the Convention.

The authorities' conduct:

26. The relevant authorities denied Ahmad Mammadli essential procedural safeguards from the very inception of his detention. He was intercepted by plainclothes operatives without lawful explanation, physically beaten, framed at a staged scene, and subsequently subjected to electroshock torture in police custody to extract credentials and device access, all while being deprived of immediate access to an independent lawyer or timely medical assistance. The domestic courts acted as rubber stamps for the executive, refusing to review the visible signs of physical abuse or order an inquiry into his ill-treatment. By uncritically endorsing conflicting police testimonies, ignoring the total absence of blood or fingerprints on the alleged weapon, and dismissing Mammadli's coherent defense without legal reasoning, the judiciary reversed the burden of proof and nullified the presumption of innocence. This conduct demonstrates an orchestrated, bad-faith persecution driven entirely by political motives.

Additional considerations:

27. Finally, international human rights observers, including Committee to Protect Journalists[5] and Human Rights Watch[6] have denounced the charges against A. Mammadli as politically motivated.

CONCLUSION

28. The personal factors (Ahmad Mammadli'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 Ahmad Mammadli should be considered a political prisoner in light of Resolution 1900 (2012) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

RECOMMENDATION

29. Based on this conclusion, should be released unconditionally and immediately. Furthermore, Ahmad Mammadli should be compensated *restitutio in integrum.*

[1] 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 accessed 29 May 2025.

[2] 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.

[3] 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

[4] 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

[5] Committee to Protect Journalists, 'Azerbaijan Arrests 2 More Journalists, Increasing Crackdown Tally to 25' (CPJ, 9 May 2025) https://cpj.org/2025/05/azerbaijan-arrests-two-more-journalists-increasing-crackdown-tally-to-25/ accessed 17 September 2026.

[6] Human Rights Watch, 'World Report 2026: Azerbaijan' (Human Rights Watch, 4 February 2026) https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2026/country-chapters/azerbaijan accessed 17 September 2026.

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