MAHAMMAD IBRAHIM



FACTS

Personal data:

1. Mammad Ibrahim (DOB: 04.10.1966) is an Azerbaijani citizen and long-standing opposition politician. He is an adviser to the chair and a member of the Presidium of the Azərbaycan Xalq Cəbhəsi Partiyası/Popular Front Party of Azerbaijan (hereafter AXCP/PFPA). He has been affiliated with the Popular Front since 1989 and has previously been imprisoned in cases regarded as politically motivated. He is married and has completed specialised secondary education.[1]

2. Ibrahim was detained by the State Security Service (SSS) on 29.11.2025 following a search of his home. On 01.12.2025, he was charged under Article 278.1 of the Criminal Code with actions aimed at violently seizing power and forcibly changing the constitutional order. The prosecution alleged that, acting with Ali Karimli and others, he had received USD 46,400 between 2019 and 2023 and transferred it to Karimli to finance the recruitment of participants for mass disturbances and other violent acts in Baku. Ibrahim denied the charge. On the same day, the Sabail District Court ordered his pre-trial detention until 13.02.2026. His detention was subsequently extended, most recently until 13.11.2026.[2]

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3. Ibrahim's prosecution has been denounced by the AXCP/PFPA as fabricated and politically motivated. Amnesty International placed his detention within an intensifying crackdown on opposition figures, journalists, academics and activists and reported that he was initially held incommunicado. The case forms part of the same proceedings as that against Ali Karimli and appears directed at weakening the PFPA's leadership and organised opposition activity.[3]

4. Ibrahim's case is politically motivated and the allegations against him 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.[4]

Date of detention:

5. On 29.11.2025, Mammad Ibrahim was detained by the SSS following a search of his home in Baku. On 01.12.2025, the Sabail District Court ordered his pre-trial detention for two months and 15 days, until 13.02.2026.

Legal accusations:

6. On 01.12.2025, the SSS's Main Investigation Department charged Ibrahim under Article 278.1 of the Criminal Code with actions aimed at violently seizing power and forcibly changing the constitutional order.

7. The prosecution alleged that Ibrahim had joined a criminal association with Ali Karimli and others in 2019 and, between 2019 and 2023, had received USD 46,400 from persons purportedly connected to foreign intelligence services. It claimed that he transferred these funds to Karimli to finance the recruitment of individuals for mass disturbances and other violent acts in Baku. Ibrahim denied the charge, while the AXCP/PFPA characterized the allegations as fabricated and politically motivated. His case forms part of the wider investigation involving Karimli and former Presidential Administration head Ramiz Mehdiyev, despite the PFPA's rejection of any political or organizational connection with Mehdiyev.

Legal status of prisoner:

8. Mammad Ibrahim is a pre-trial detainee. His initial detention was extended on 09.02.2026 and again on 10.06.2026. The latest extension authorized his continued detention until 13.11.2026.

Legal proceedings:

9. Ibrahim was detained on 29.11.2025 following a search of his home and was formally charged on 01.12.2025. At a closed hearing that day, the Sabail District Court ordered his detention until 13.02.2026, calculated from the date of his apprehension.

10. The proceedings arose from a wider investigation opened on 13.10.2025 against Ramiz Mehdiyev and others. At the remand hearing, Ibrahim denied guilt and stated that the allegations did not concern him. His lawyer argued that the application for detention was unfounded. The court nevertheless granted the investigator's request.

11. The detention order referred generally to witness statements, a confrontation record, transfer records, materials obtained through a search in Russia and other evidence, without explaining how those materials established Ibrahim's participation in preparations to seize power. It also relied on broadly formulated risks that he might abscond, influence other participants, conceal evidence or encourage disturbances, without identifying specific conduct demonstrating that any such risk existed.

12. Ibrahim has remained in custody since his detention. Following successive extensions, his pre-trial detention is currently authorized until 13.11.2026. The investigation remains ongoing, and he has not been convicted of any offence.

LEGAL ANALYSIS

Reasons why Mahammad Ibrahim should be regarded as a political prisoner:

13. Assessment of whether M. Ibrahim 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 the conviction of M. Ibrahim satisfy two criteria established by the paragraph. 3 of the Resolution for defining political prisoners ((a) and (e)):

- (a) Mahammad'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 the 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.

Mahammad Ibrahim's public profile:

15. Mammad Ibrahim is a long-standing opposition politician and senior member of the AXCP/PFPA. Affiliated with the Popular Front since 1989, he serves as an adviser to the party's chair and a member of its Presidium. He has remained publicly active through party organization, political statements and criticism of the authorities. His detention therefore concerns an established opposition figure closely involved in the leadership of one of Azerbaijan's principal opposition parties.

16. Ibrahim's prosecution follows a longer pattern of pressure against him and the AXCP/PFPA. He has previously been imprisoned in cases regarded as politically motivated and was detained again during opposition protests in 2020. His arrest alongside Ali Karimli, his initial incommunicado detention and the disputed attempt to connect the PFPA leadership with Ramiz Mehdiyev indicate that the present case forms part of a broader campaign to weaken the party's leadership, disrupt organized opposition activity and deter political dissent.

The sequence of events:

17. Mahammad Ibrahim'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 quantities 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 suggest 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.[6] 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.[7]

20. In July 2023, politician and economist Gubad Ibadoglu was detained.[8] In August 2023, pro-government media organized a smear campaign against peace activists protesting military operations in Nagorno-Karabakh.[9] 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.[10]

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.[11] 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.[12] 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).[13] 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 Abilov[14], 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[15] was detained in August 2024 on treason charges similarly and later sentenced to a 15-year prison term. Both of their arrests are widely condemned as politically motivated.

23. Repression further continued against independent media through the Meydan TV case:[16] 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[17], 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)[18] and the Law on Political Parties (2022)[19]. 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 investigation and remand proceedings against Mammad Ibrahim were conducted in a manner indicating bad faith from the outset, heavily steered by the state security apparatus rather than an adversarial judicial inquiry. Ibrahim was detained on 29 November 2025 at 13:40 as a suspect and formally charged under Article 278.1 of the Criminal Code on 1 December 2025, before being brought that same day before the Sabail District Court in a closed judicial hearing. The proceedings were dominated by the SSS and the Prosecutor General's Office, without providing the defense a genuine opportunity to test or rebut the evidentiary basis of the allegations.

27. The prosecution narrative accepted by the court was broad, retrospective, and weakly substantiated. Instead of demonstrating concrete, recent, and independently verifiable acts warranting a charge of attempting forcibly to seize power or alter the constitutional order, the authorities linked Ibrahim to the overarching criminal case initiated on 13 October 2025 against former Presidential Administration head Ramiz Mehdiyev and others. The indictment alleged that dating back to 2019, acting on instructions from PFPA chairman Ali Karimli, Ibrahim coordinated with Moscow resident Elshan Karimov to covertly receive $46,400 (78,800 AZN) controlled by foreign special services to finance mass riots in Baku between 2019 and 2023. Although Ibrahim and his defense counsel categorically denied the accusations, maintaining that the charges had no relation to him and that the petition was groundless, the court admitted SSS operational materials, search protocols, and wire transfer summaries without subjecting them to critical examination.

28. The central defect in the remand decision is that the court failed to establish that Ibrahim posed any evidenced, objective risk justifying deprivation of liberty. The order mechanically recited boilerplate statutory grounds under Article 155 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, asserting that he might abscond, conceal or falsify evidence, unlawfully influence participants, or re-offend and endanger society. However, the court did not identify a single concrete act, threat, or attempt demonstrating that Ibrahim had tried or was able to obstruct the investigation. Rather than establishing necessity through substantiated evidence, the court simply inferred these risks from the gravity of the national-security charge and his political position as an advisor to the PFPA chairman. The closed hearing, the SSS custody, and the formulaic risk analysis demonstrate judicial deference to the executive apparatus, maintaining pre-trial detention until 13 February 2026 without an independent assessment of necessity.

The authorities' conduct:

29. The relevant authorities failed to provide basic procedural safeguards, actively constructing a coercive environment around Ibrahim's prosecution. Following his apprehension, he was placed under the direct control of the SSS preliminary investigation department and held in their temporary detention and investigative isolator. By integrating Ibrahim into the wider high-profile case against Ramiz Mehdiyev and tying his political role as advisor to the PFPA leadership to alleged foreign intelligence funding and civil unrest, the authorities operated within an ongoing campaign targeting the political opposition. In that broader context, the authorities' conduct in Ibrahim's prosecution reflects a politically instrumentalized use of the state security and judicial machinery to incapacitate opposition figures under the guise of national security, rather than a neutral, evidence-based criminal inquiry.

Additional considerations:

30. Finally, international human rights observers such as Amnesty International[20] and Human Rights Watch[21] have denounced the charges against M. Ibrahim as politically motivated.

CONCLUSION

31. The personal factors (Mahammad Ibrahim'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 Mahammad Ibrahim should be considered a remand political prisoner in light of Resolution 1900 (2012) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

RECOMMENDATION

32. Based on this conclusion, Mahammad Ibrahim should be released unconditionally and immediately. Furthermore, he should be compensated *restitutio in integrum.*

[1] ‘Azerbaijani Opposition Figure Gets Three Years in Prison’ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (15 March 2016) https://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan-opposition-figure-three-years-in-prison/27612365.html accessed 16 September 2026.

[2] ‘Məmməd İbrahimin həbs müddəti uzadılıb’ Toplum TV (11 June 2026) https://toplummedia.tv/mehkeme/pmemmed-ibrahimin-hebs-muumlddeti-uzadilibnbspp accessed 16 September 2026.

[3] Amnesty International, ‘Azerbaijan: Arrest of Opposition Leader Is Further Evidence of Consolidation of Authoritarian Practices’ (2 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 16 September 2026;

[4] 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.

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

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[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 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, Safety Of Journalists — FOM Alert https://fom.coe.int/en/alerte/detail/107640886 accessed 28 August 2025

[13] 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

[14] 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

[15] 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 202

[16] 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.

[17] 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.

[18] 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

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[21] Human Rights Watch, 'Azerbaijan Intensifies Crackdown on Political Opposition: End Repression of Popular Front Party; Investigate Party Member's Death in Custody' (22 December 2025) https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/12/22/azerbaijan-intensifies-crackdown-on-political-opposition accessed 16 September 2026.

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