

NATIG JAVADLI



FACTS

Personal data:

1. Natig Javadli (DOB: 13.03.1971) is an Azerbaijani independent journalist and reporter. He is publicly identified as a reporter for Meydan TV and has long worked in Azerbaijani print and online media. He is known for sustained reporting and interviews on politically sensitive topics and media freedom and has received international recognition for press-freedom-related work (including the Gerd Bucerius Prize for Press Freedom in Eastern Europe). Since his detention¹ on 6 December 2024 in the framework of the “Meydan TV case” on alleged currency-smuggling charges, he has been treated by press-freedom organisations and observers as a political prisoner within the broader crackdown on independent journalism. His 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. Natig Javadli was detained on 06 December 2024 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 06 December 2024, Natig Javadli 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. His case is being prosecuted under what has become known as the “Meydan TV case.”
4. On 28 August 2025, the investigative authorities requalified the accusations and announced the 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. Natig Javadli is in pre-trial detention and a remand prisoner. Despite numerous appeals to release him during the trial period, the Court kept him in custody. At the time of writing, his case is pending before the Baku Assize Court together with other defendants in the “Meydan TV case”.

Legal proceedings:

6. On 6 December 2024, Natig Javadli was detained by law-enforcement authorities in connection with the criminal case publicly known as the “Meydan TV case.”
7. Public reporting indicates that, following the detentions, law-enforcement officers conducted searches and seizures in relation to detained journalists, and that detainees and/or their lawyers raised concerns about ill-treatment and the conditions under which initial investigative actions were carried out. In particular, reporting notes that Natig Javadli complained of mistreatment while in custody.
8. On 8 December 2024, the Khatai District Court ordered four months’ pre-trial detention for detained Meydan TV journalists, including Natig Javadli.
9. On 25 February 2025, the Khatai District Court rejected a defense request to replace detention with house arrest, leaving him in custody.
10. On 2 April 2025, the Khatai District Court extended pre-trial detention for several defendants, including Natig Javadli.
11. In the course of 2025, detention extensions continued, including a three-month extension reported in June 2025 and a further extension reported on 16 September 2025. The trial for the Meydan TV case began on 12 December 2025 before the Baku Assize Court, with Natig Javadli listed among the defendants.

LEGAL ANALYSIS

Reasons why Natig Javadli should be regarded as a political prisoner:

12. Assessment of whether N. Javadli 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 N. Javadli satisfy two criteria established by paragraph 3 of the Resolution for defining political prisoners ((a) and (e)):

(a) His 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 him, which caused preliminary detention and imprisonment.

13. 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.

Natig Javadli’s public profile:

14. Natig Javadli is a well-known independent journalist in Azerbaijan, recognised primarily for sustained reporting and interviewing on politically sensitive issues, including governance, rights, and media freedom. He is a long-standing media professional who worked as a correspondent for Bizim Yol and later became publicly associated with Meydan TV as a reporter. His public visibility is further reinforced by international recognition: he has been a recipient of the Gerd Bucerius Prize for Press Freedom in Eastern Europe, which positions him as a prominent figure within the independent media community.

15. 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 media environments by reframing journalism and journalistic networks as financial or foreign-funding criminality. In this context, Natig Javadli’s public profile provides reasonable grounds to believe that he was targeted not for genuine criminal conduct, but because of his role as an independent journalist and his visibility within the independent media sphere that has been subjected to intensified pressure since 2023.

Sequence of events and contextual factors:

16. Natig Javadli’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.

17. The proto-repression began in the last quarter of 2022. In December 2022, civic activist Bakhtiyar Hajiyevev 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

18. In July 2023, politician and economist Gubad Ibadoglu was detained.⁵ In August 2023, pro-government media organized 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

19. 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.
20. 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 paralyse 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.
21. 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 (Natig Javadli was among the first individuals arrested), with later arrests 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.
22. 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.

23. 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.

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

24. The investigative authorities acted in bad faith in Natig Javadli's case and relied on 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 used as the foundation for a widening set of arrests and charges, including Natig Javadli's detention on that date.

25. According to the indictment's narrative, law-enforcement bodies acted on unspecified operational information/data suggesting that persons linked (in the authorities' framing) to Meydan TV were involved in transporting undeclared foreign currency into Azerbaijan and coordinating its handling. However, the indictment does not disclose the provenance of that operational information in a manner that allows meaningful scrutiny: it does not identify whether the information came from surveillance, witnesses, informants, or other means, nor does it present reliability indicators. This opacity is legally consequential because it prevents the defense from effectively challenging the origin and credibility of the material precipitating detention and prosecution (*mutatis mutandis*, *Ibrahimov and Mammadov v Azerbaijan* (2020) §§ 119–120).

26. The indictment locates the initiating material evidentiary moment in the airport interception immediately after border entry, where 38,000 EUR is described as having been discovered in the luggage of another defendant (Ramin Jabrayilzade/Deko).

27. Natig Javadli's detention was executed within the same initial December 2024 operational phase, and public reporting indicates that the authorities then consolidated multiple arrests into a single group-based prosecution framed through the same currency-smuggling narrative, later expanded into a broad suite of financial and document-related allegations.

28. In substantive terms, this sequencing supports the concern that the evidentiary logic of the case operates as an associative group narrative, rather than demonstrating individualized conduct attributable to each defendant sufficient to establish bulk-cash smuggling.
29. Public reporting also raises serious concerns about the integrity and fairness of early-stage measures in Natig Javadli's case. He reportedly complained of ill-treatment in custody, which, if substantiated, directly undermines the voluntariness and reliability of any statements obtained during the initial period and indicates coercive conditions incompatible with effective defense participation. In the broader Meydan TV case, reporting described overnight detention, obstacles to lawyer access, and home searches/seizure of devices. These are features that place evidence generation under near-exclusive police control. In analogous contexts, the European Court of Human Rights has emphasized that deficiencies surrounding police-dominated evidence generation and searches can raise legitimate concerns about evidentiary integrity and the risk of pre-determined accusations being supported through contested investigative acts (*Sakit Zahidov v Azerbaijan* (2015) § 53; *Layijov v Azerbaijan* (2014) § 69).
30. Finally, the subsequent procedural trajectory reinforces the inference of a detention-driven approach. Natig Javadli's pre-trial detention was maintained through repeated court decisions and extensions during 2025 (including rejection of a request to replace detention with house arrest and further detention extensions), while the investigation escalated the accusations across the group in August 2025 and moved the defendants into a consolidated trial that began in December 2025.
31. Taken together, (i) reliance on non-transparent operational inputs, (ii) the use of an initiating airport seizure attributed to another person as the platform for a group-based prosecution, and (iii) reported coercive conditions at the initial detention stage, there are serious grounds to question the good faith of the investigative authorities and the sufficiency and individualization of reasonable suspicion applied to Natig Javadli within the "Meydan TV case."

Authorities' conduct:

32. The relevant authorities, at first, denied Natig Javadli 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:

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

CONCLUSION

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

RECOMMENDATION

35. Based on this conclusion, Natig Javadli should be released unconditionally and should be compensated *restitutio in integrum*.

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