

RAMIN DEKO



FACTS

Personal data:

1. Ramin Jabrayilzade (Deko), (DOB: 18.02.1987) is an Azerbaijani independent journalist and field reporter. He began his journalism career at Azadliq and later worked with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, before joining Meydan TV in 2023. He is known for on-the-ground coverage of politically sensitive developments, including protest-related reporting; notably, he was detained at Baku airport upon return from Georgia, where he had been covering anti-government protests.¹ Since his detention in December 2024 in the framework of the criminal case publicly known as the “Meydan TV case,” Ramin Jabrayilzade has been widely treated by press-freedom organizations and observers as a political prisoner². His arrest is part of a broader crackdown on civil society and independent media that escalated in the autumn of 2023.³

Date of detention:

2. Ramin Jabrayilzade was detained on 6 December 2024 at Heydar Aliyev International Airport by officers of the Baku Metropolitan General Police Department (BMGPD) in connection with the criminal case known publicly as the “Meydan TV case.”

Legal accusations:

3. On 8 December 2024, Ramin Jabrayilzade 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 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. Ramin Jabrayilzade 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, Ramin Jabrayilzade was detained by law-enforcement authorities at Heydar Aliyev International Airport. The indictment records his formal procedural status as a suspect from 7 December 2024.
7. According to the indictment, the arrest was based on the discovery of 38,000 EUR in his luggage during an airport inspection. Following his detention, officers conducted a search of his personal belongings and residence. His lawyer later reported procedural irregularities, including the absence of legal counsel during initial questioning and the failure to properly record parts of the search and seizure operation.
8. On 8 December 2024, the Khatai District Court ordered Ramin Jabrayilzade’s pre-trial detention for four months, citing the gravity of the alleged offence and the risk of interference with the investigation.
9. On 14 March 2025, the Khatai District Court extended his pre-trial detention until 6 July 2025.
10. On 24 June 2025, the court further extended his detention until 6 October 2025. In September 2025, an additional extension was approved for all defendants in the Meydan TV case, bringing the total detention period to 6 January 2026.

11. On 12 December 2025, the trial in the “Meydan TV case” commenced before the Baku Assize Court, with Ramin Jabrayilzade listed among the twelve defendants tried jointly.

LEGAL ANALYSIS

Reasons why Ramin Jabrayilzade should be regarded as a political prisoner:

12. Assessment of whether Ramin Jabrayilzade 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 Ramin Jabrayilzade 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.

Ramin Jabrayilzade’s public profile:

14. Ramin Jabrayilzade is a well-known independent journalist and field reporter in Azerbaijan, recognized primarily for on-the-ground coverage of politically sensitive developments. Public sources describe him as having worked for *Azadliq* newspaper, later contributing to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and subsequently working with Meydan TV. He is particularly associated with reporting that documents civic mobilization and state responses, including coverage of protests and other high-sensitivity public events.

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

Sequence of events and contextual factors:

16. Ramin Jabrayilzade’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 Hajiyev was arrested.⁴ 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.⁵

18. In July 2023, politician and economist Gubad Ibadoglu was detained.⁶ In August 2023, pro-government media organized a smear campaign against peace activists protesting military operations in Nagorno-Karabakh.⁷ 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.⁸

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.⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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).¹¹ 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 Abilov¹², 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 Samadov¹³ 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:¹⁴ 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 (Ramin Jabrayilzade 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 Karimli¹⁵, 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)¹⁶ and the Law on Political Parties (2022)¹⁷. 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 Ramin Jabrayilzade's case and, from the outset, relied on an evidentiary architecture that is structurally conducive to circumvention of procedural safeguards. As reflected in the indictment, the 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 then used not only to justify his detention, but also to initiate a consolidated case against a wider circle of journalists and media workers.

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 through informal channels. However, the indictment does not disclose the provenance of these operational inputs in a manner that permits meaningful scrutiny: it does not identify whether the information came from surveillance, an informant, witness testimony, or other measures, nor does it provide reliability indicators, or an explanation of why the information should be considered credible. This opacity is legally significant because it deprives the defense of an effective opportunity to contest the lawfulness and credibility of the very material that precipitated the operation and subsequent deprivation of liberty.

26. Such reliance on non-transparent operational inputs is problematic under the logic of *Ibrahimov and Mammadov v Azerbaijan* (2020) §§ 119–120, where the European Court criticized reliance on vague operational information that is neither specific nor challengeable. Although the present case concerns a different factual setting, the principle is the same: where operational information is used as the gateway to arrest and detention, the authorities must be able to demonstrate, through accessible and verifiable procedural materials, how that information was obtained, why it was reliable, and how the defense can contest it in adversarial proceedings.

27. The indictment locates the initiating material evidentiary moment in the airport interception: immediately after entry through the border checkpoint, 38,000 EUR is described as having been discovered in Ramin Jabrayilzade's luggage during the operational measures. In public reporting, this detention is described as occurring upon his arrival from Georgia, where he had reportedly been covering politically sensitive developments.
28. Even taking the indictment's narrative at face value, the decisive evidentiary episode was generated under conditions of exclusive police control, and the subsequent case construction proceeds by treating the airport seizure as corroboration of a broader group-based accusation. The legal concern is not limited to whether cash was physically present, but whether the seizure and subsequent evidentiary handling were protected by safeguards sufficient to ensure integrity, traceability, and effective challenge by the defense. In analogous contexts, the European Court has held that evidence-generation practices dominated by police control, particularly where searches and seizures are contested and not subject to robust safeguards, may raise legitimate concerns about evidentiary integrity and the risk of material being used to support a pre-determined accusation (*Sakit Zahidov v Azerbaijan* (2015) § 53; *Layijov v Azerbaijan* (2014) § 69). While those cases concerned searches in different settings, the underlying safeguard logic is transferable: where the operation is fully controlled by the arresting authority and the defense is procedurally constrained, the risk of arbitrariness and evidentiary manipulation increases.
29. Public reporting further intensifies those concerns. Multiple sources reported that the detainees were held overnight at the police station and questioned without effective access to counsel, and that lawyers were prevented from meeting some of their clients in the initial stage. In relation specifically to Ramin Jabrayilzade, public reporting alleged that he showed visible signs of assault (bruising around the eyes) after detention and that he could not contact a lawyer for several hours. These allegations, taken together, indicate a coercive early-phase environment in which the defense's ability to secure legal assistance and preserve the integrity of seized materials was materially weakened.

30. Finally, the subsequent procedural trajectory reinforces the inference of a detention-driven investigative approach. Ramin Jabrayilzade's pre-trial detention was repeatedly extended on standardized grounds, and in August 2025, the prosecution escalated and expanded charges across the case into a broad package of financial and document-related offences. In overall assessment, the combination of opaque operational triggers, a police-controlled initiating seizure event, reported early-stage obstacles to access to counsel, and the later expansion of charges supports serious doubts as to the good faith of the investigation and the sufficiency and individualization of reasonable suspicion applied to Ramin Jabrayilzade in a context of systemic pressure on independent journalism.

Authorities' conduct:

31. The relevant authorities, at first, denied Ramin Jabrayilzade 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:

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

CONCLUSION

33. The personal factors (Ramin Jabrayilzade'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 Ramin Jabrayilzade 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, Ramin Jabrayilzade should be released unconditionally and should be compensated *restitutio in integrum*.

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