

Azerbaijani Reporters Stopped at Border

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“We fear that this growing harassment is a forerunner of a new crackdown” – Reporters Without Borders.

In the continuing clampdown on press freedom in Azerbaijan, a group of journalists has been prevented from leaving the country.

When Aytan Farhadova, Shirin Abbasov, Elnur Mukhtarli and Natiq Javadli, who report for the online channel Meydan TV, arrived at an overland border crossing on June 30, they were told to go back. They had been hoping to travel to neighbouring Georgia to attend a seminar on journalism.

Frontier officials offered no explanation for the travel bar, but suggested asking Azerbaijan’s interior ministry. Farhadova did so, but received no response of any kind.

In a Facebook post, Meydan TV’s director Emin Milli said that based on past experience, the logical conclusion was that the authorities had begun a criminal investigation into Meydan TV.

Milli launched Meydan TV as an online platform in 2013. It carries material critical of the Azerbaijani government and its policies, and allegations of financial wrongdoing.

Lawyers Alaskar Mammadli said that if the Meydan team was indeed under investigation, the authorities were legally advised to inform those concerned. He added that only actual suspects could be banned from leaving the country, not those who were liable to be called as witnesses.

“Journalists have a right to move around and out of the country in pursuit of their profession,” he said. “Cases like this represent persecution. The state must be tolerant of journalists who criticise it.”

Milli said on June 26 that he had received a message from Azerbaijan’s sports minister via an intermediary, threatening to “punish you for this smear campaign”.

Media freedom watchdog Reporters Without Borders urged the international community to let the Azerbaijan government know it was continuing to monitor the situation.

“We fear that this growing harassment is a forerunner of a new crackdown targeting Meydan TV’s staff,” Johann Bihr, head of RSF’s Eastern Europe and Central Asia desk said in a statement. “Enraged by the failure of their European Games media plan to conceal their massive human rights violations, the authorities apparently want to scapegoat Meydan TV. International attention must not let up now that Azerbaijan is out of the spotlight.”

For more than a year, independent journalists, opposition supporters and dissidents have arrested and jailed. (See **In Azerbaijan, It's Press Unfreedom Year** and **Convictions Don't Convince**.)

The official narrative continues to be that Azerbaijan is a model of press freedom and democracy.

“Our journalism completely satisfies the public’s demand for information,” presidential advisor Ali Hasanov told a June 5 gathering to mark national press day. He cited the Press Council, a government-created body, and other regulatory steps as examples of how well things were run.

Hasanov also implied that Azerbaijan was the target of an international conspiracy.

“Western and other systems don’t want to accept the truth based on objective reality. The transnational media that represent the West produce information to order for certain centres,” he said, without elaborating on whether he meant specific governments.

Afgan Mukhtarli is an Azerbaijani journalist living abroad.

Location: [Azerbaijan](#)

Topic: [Promoting Free Expression](#)

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