



## Resolution 2663 (2026)<sup>1</sup>

# Silencing critical voices in Azerbaijan

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly deeply deplores the systemic pattern of silencing dissent and independent voices that has become firmly entrenched in Azerbaijan. The latest Press Freedom Index, published annually by Reporters Without Borders, ranks Azerbaijan 171st out of 180 countries. Azerbaijan's score reflects years of continued suppression of independent media, in what can only be described as a blatant and systemic disregard for freedom of expression, as guaranteed by Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5, "the Convention").

2. The Assembly is equally concerned by a broader climate of silencing critical voices in Azerbaijan, facilitated by restrictive legislative measures, notably the Law on the Media, the Law on Political Parties and the Law on Non-Governmental Organisations (Public Associations and Funds). Their cumulative effect has been to suppress independent journalism, genuine political opposition, civic space and freedom of expression in Azerbaijan. As of 2026, not a single independent media outlet operates within Azerbaijan, a Council of Europe member State. The Council of Europe Platform for the safety of journalists records 36 journalists currently detained in Azerbaijan.

3. The Assembly deeply regrets that, instead of addressing the serious concerns it expressed in [Resolution 2527 \(2024\)](#) "Challenge, on substantive grounds, of the still unratified credentials of the parliamentary delegation of Azerbaijan", including with regard to respect for human rights, Azerbaijan chose not to participate in the work of the Assembly by deciding not to submit its delegation's credentials for the years 2025 and 2026. Despite the absence of the Azerbaijani delegation, the Assembly finds it imperative to address the increasingly concerning situation in Azerbaijan, which raises serious doubts as to its willingness to abide by its membership obligations to the Council of Europe.

4. The Assembly remains concerned by the high number of leading judgments of the European Court of Human Rights still pending implementation in respect of Azerbaijan, many of which have been pending for years. Groups of judgments pending implementation include those relating to: the unlawful blocking of online media; the arbitrary disbarment of lawyers; the arbitrary application of criminal law to limit freedom of expression; the unlawful and/or unjustified refusal to register civil society organisations, or their dissolution; violations of the safety and security of journalists; and the misuse of criminal law to punish and silence human rights defenders, civil society activists and journalists. The Assembly recalls that, in order to implement these judgments, Azerbaijan is obliged not only to ensure justice for the applicants concerned, but also to undertake prompt and effective reforms to ensure that similar violations do not recur.

5. The Assembly recalls that Azerbaijan has an unconditional obligation to implement the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights under Article 46, paragraph 1, of the Convention. It rejects any attempts to use Azerbaijan's non-participation in the Assembly as justification for failing to comply with the judgments of the Court, or for failing to participate fully in the Convention system. This includes the obligation to submit, in due time, a list of candidates for the post of judge at the Court to the Assembly, in accordance with Article 22 of the Convention and the procedure established by the Assembly.

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1. *Assembly debate* on 24 June 2026 (24th sitting) (see [Doc. 16414](#), report of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, rapporteur: Mr Christophe Lacroix); and [Doc. 16436](#), opinion of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, rapporteur: Mr Andries Gryffroy). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 24 June 2026 (24th sitting).

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6. The Assembly notes that none of the recommendations made by the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) in its opinions regarding the Law on the Media, the Law on Political Parties, and the Law on Non-Governmental Organisations (Public Associations and Funds) have been implemented. Instead, further restrictions have been introduced, including a simplified process for dissolving foreign media branches, stricter naming rules for press outlets, and an effective blockade preventing non-governmental organisations from receiving any form of international funding, thereby exacerbating the chilling effect on the media and broader civic space in Azerbaijan.

7. Recalling its [Resolution 2322 \(2020\)](#) “Reported cases of political prisoners in Azerbaijan”, the Assembly is deeply concerned about the significant rise in the number of reported political prisoners. According to the Union for the Freedom of Political Prisoners of Azerbaijan, a non-governmental organisation, as of May 2026, there were 328 political prisoners in Azerbaijan.

8. In this context, the Assembly particularly deplores the ongoing detention and prosecution of Anar Mammadli, a prominent Azerbaijani human rights defender and election monitor, laureate of the 2014 Václav Havel Human Rights Prize, and recalls that the European Court of Human Rights had found his previous detention to be politically motivated, in violation of Articles 5 and 18 of the Convention. The Assembly finds it alarming that the current indictment against Anar Mammadli explicitly cites his previous criminal proceedings, which the European Court of Human Rights found to constitute an attempt to silence and punish him as a civil society activist for his work in electoral monitoring, as part of his criminal record. It recalls that the implementation of the Court’s judgment in his case is not yet closed and that, in this context, the Azerbaijani authorities therefore have an obligation to ensure that the previous conviction does not have any bearing on the new criminal proceedings against him.

9. Mr Mammadli’s latest detention, on charges of conducting illegal business activities, money laundering, tax evasion, and several other offences, occurred shortly after his NGO, the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Centre, reported irregularities in the February 2024 presidential election and after he engaged with the United Nations Human Rights Council. Accordingly, the Assembly considers that Mr Mammadli’s current detention appears to have been imposed for purely political reasons, which indicates that he falls within the definition of political prisoner set out in its [Resolution 1900 \(2012\)](#) “The definition of political prisoner”.

10. The Assembly further condemns, in the strongest possible terms, the sentencing of the journalists and staff of Abzas Media, an independent media outlet, to lengthy prison terms, and notes with particular concern that among those convicted is Ulvi Hassanli, its editor-in-chief, who had previously testified before the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights of the Assembly about the situation of journalists in Azerbaijan. The Assembly firmly denounces the misuse of criminal law to punish individuals co-operating with international organisations.

11. Equally alarming for the Assembly is the similar pattern of repression affecting journalists and staff of other independent media outlets previously operating in Azerbaijan, including Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Toplum TV, Meydan TV, Kanal 11 and Kanal 13, who have either been convicted or prosecuted on what appear to be fabricated charges. Similar measures have been applied against other journalists bloggers, pro-democracy activists, opposition figures, anti-corruption experts and human rights defenders, including Gubad Ibadoghlu, Akif Gurbanov, Alasgar Mammadli, Ruslan Izzatli, Elnara Qasimova, Nargiz Absalamova, Ali Zeynal, Farid Mehralizade, Bakhtiar Hajiyev, Rufat Safarov and Ali Karimli, all of whom are either in detention or under house arrest on allegedly politically motivated charges, or have already received disproportionate sentences.

12. The Assembly also condemns the harsh prison sentences imposed upon Iqbal Abilov and Bahruz Samadov, independent researchers convicted on fabricated charges of high treason based on their routine interactions with Armenian universities and nationals. Referring to its [Resolution 2352 \(2020\)](#) “Threats to academic freedom and autonomy of higher education institutions in Europe”, the Assembly reiterates that academic freedom is an essential component of democratic societies.

13. The Assembly is appalled by recent reports of sexual violence against nine female journalists imprisoned in Azerbaijan, including threats of rape and sexual harassment by prison guards.

14. The Assembly therefore urges Azerbaijan to:

14.1. respect its international obligations under the Statute of the Council of Europe (ETS No. 1), particularly Article 3, and under the European Convention on Human Rights and other international human rights treaties;

14.2. cease the threats, intimidation and prosecution of individuals who have been targeted due to their journalistic activities, reporting on corruption, pro-democratic stance, defence of human rights or independent academic research, and ensure the immediate release of those who are in detention;

14.3. re-examine the cases of all persons appearing on the regularly updated lists of political prisoners maintained by the Union for the Freedom for Political Prisoners of Azerbaijan, release those found to be political prisoners in accordance with the definition set out in [Resolution 1900 \(2012\)](#) while dropping all politically motivated charges or quashing their convictions;

14.4. pending their release, ensure that the conditions of detention of all such prisoners are compliant with international human rights law (including access to adequate medical care and contact with their lawyers, families and others);

14.5. ensure that prisoners are not subjected to torture or other forms of ill-treatment, and that any such allegations are investigated promptly, transparently and effectively and that perpetrators are prosecuted;

14.6. ensure that any physical attacks or violence, or threats of violence, including hate crimes, against journalists, human rights defenders and civil society activists, are properly investigated, and that the perpetrators are prosecuted;

14.7. adopt, without delay, effective general measures to address the structural and systemic problems identified by the European Court of Human Rights and the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe with regard to freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, the right to liberty and the right to a fair trial;

14.8. review its legal framework with a view to ensuring the full enjoyment of human rights in Azerbaijan, the respect for the rule of law, and the independence of the judiciary, including by implementing the recommendations of the Venice Commission and in accordance with [Resolution 2184 \(2017\)](#) "The functioning of democratic institutions in Azerbaijan";

14.9. guarantee the publication of all CPT report and implement the recommendations contained in those reports;

14.10. rescind measures declaring certain members of the Assembly as *personae non gratae* in Azerbaijan.

15. Recalling the unconditional obligation of States to implement judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, the Assembly urges Azerbaijan to:

15.1. re-initiate its engagement in the Committee of Ministers' process to supervise the implementation of judgments of the Court, including by fully and actively participating in quarterly "CM/DH" meetings dedicated to the implementation of judgments, and fulfilling its obligation to submit timely and comprehensive action plans and action reports;

15.2. ensure the protection of human rights defenders, civil society organisations and journalists by promptly implementing all judgments of the European Court of Human Rights that are pending implementation.

16. The Assembly calls on the Milli Mejlis to resume dialogue with the Assembly with a view to addressing the concerns expressed in this resolution. It also calls on the authorities of Azerbaijan to refrain from using their decision not to submit the credentials of its parliamentary delegation to the Assembly as a pretext not to fully abide by their obligations and commitments as a member State and as a State Party to Council of Europe treaties. This includes full participation in the European Convention on Human Rights system, particularly by submitting a list of candidates for the post of judge at the Court and re-engaging in the supervision process for the execution of the Court's judgments. The same applies to their full participation in other Council of Europe treaties and their co-operation with the relevant monitoring bodies and projects. The Assembly believes that it is also in the best interest of Azerbaijan to co-operate effectively with all Council of Europe bodies and to benefit fully from this co-operation.

17. The Assembly calls on Council of Europe member States and, where applicable, observer States and the European Union, to:

17.1. engage with the Azerbaijani authorities, both bilaterally and within multilateral fora, to secure the release of political prisoners;

17.2. facilitate the granting of visas and give careful consideration to requests for asylum from former political prisoners and Azerbaijani opposition politicians, civil society activists, journalists and human rights defenders who need to leave Azerbaijan in order to avoid persecution and/or arrest, and ensure their safety if they are at risk of violence or transnational repression;

17.3. refuse extradition requests for Azerbaijani nationals for charges which could be considered politically motivated;

17.4. refrain from deporting those Azerbaijani nationals who would face a genuine risk of political persecution.

18. The Assembly calls on the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to make use of the powers conferred upon him under Article 52 of the European Convention on Human Rights, in order to obtain from the Azerbaijani authorities explanations as to how their internal law ensures the effective implementation of the Convention.

19. Recalling that, upon becoming a member of the Council of Europe, Azerbaijan committed to co-operate fully in the implementation of the Assembly's monitoring procedure and that such a procedure continues irrespective of the Milli Mejlis' decision not to submit credentials to the Assembly, the Assembly invites the co-rapporteurs of the Monitoring Committee to take into account this resolution and to intensify their work.

20. Finally, the Assembly resolves to remain seized of the matter of protecting human rights defenders and independent journalists in Azerbaijan.