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Attacks on the Press in 2011 - Azerbaijan

Key Developments

- International pressure prompts release of unjustly jailed editor.
- Domestic journalists face violence; foreign press obstructed.

Four years after Eynulla Fatullayev was imprisoned on a series of fabricated charges, and more than a year after the European Court of Human Rights ordered his immediate release, the editor finally walked free. In an interview with CPJ, Fatullayev praised the international community for its sustained support. Attacks against domestic journalists covering sensitive subjects continued with impunity. Freelance reporter Rafiq Tagi, who wrote critically about Islamist politics and government policies, died after being stabbed on a Baku street. Two reporters for the pro-opposition newspaper *Azadlyg* were beaten in reprisal for their work, while the editor of the independent newspaper *Khural* was jailed in late year on retaliatory charges. Hostility toward international reporters was on the rise: Members of a Swedish television crew working on a human rights documentary were deported; a U.S. freelancer and a British researcher were assaulted; and a photojournalist was denied entry based on her Armenian ethnicity.

[Refworld note: The sections that follow represent a best effort to transcribe onto a single page information that appears in tabs on the CPJ's own pages, which also include a number of graphics not readily reproducible here. Refworld researchers are therefore strongly recommended to check against the original report: [Attacks on the Press in 2011](#).]

Reporters attacked, 2011: 6

The fatal stabbing of Tagi in November underscored a year of heightened violence against local and international journalists. Amanda Erickson, a U.S. freelance contributor to *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, and Celia Davies, a British staffer at the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety, were attacked outside their Baku apartment building in June. Ramin Deko and Seimur Khaziyev, reporters for the pro-opposition *Azadlyg*, were beaten 10 days apart in early spring. And assailants targeted the home of Idrak Abbasov, a journalist with the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety, in September. The attacks are unsolved.

Internet penetration: 36%

With government censorship rampant in the broadcasting sector, an increasing number of consumers were going online for independent information. Internet penetration was three times what it was in 2006. Most users, however, were concentrated in the capital, Baku, and other large urban centers, according to the International Telecommunication Union, or ITU.

Days Fatullayev was jailed: 1,497

Authorities arrested Fatullayev after he wrote an article that accused the government of complicity in the murder of his colleague, Elmar Huseynov. Several other journalists have served extended prison terms on retaliatory charges during President Ilham Aliyev's tenure.

Other journalists jailed for long periods:

1,015 days: Sakit Zakhidov, columnist, *Azadlyg*

861 days: Emin Milli, blogger

860 days: Adnan Hajizade, blogger

856 days: Genimet Zakhidov, editor, *Azadlyg*

Independent TV station: 1

Of the nine television stations broadcasting nationwide, only ANS TV was independent. The others were owned directly by the state or controlled by administration allies. Because of its editorial policy, ANS has been subjected to repeated censorship through the years.

A TV station under fire:

2000: The government cut electricity to ANS 15 minutes into its broadcast interview with Chechen rebel commander Shamil Basayev.

2006: The government shut ANS for two weeks in late year. Authorities sealed off facilities and confiscated its equipment, saying the station violated media laws and failed to pay fines.

2007: ANS was forced to tone down its critical coverage after a five-month politically motivated suspension of its license.

2010: ANS was subjected to a politicized tax inspection after it reported on vote rigging in parliamentary elections in late year.

International journalists obstructed: 4

In April, a three-member team with the Swedish public broadcaster Sveriges Television was detained while reporting on a protest rally. The crew, which had traveled to Baku to film a documentary on human rights and freedom of speech, was expelled despite having valid Azerbaijani visas. Separately, Diana Markosian, a freelance photographer for

Bloomberg Markets magazine, was denied entry to Azerbaijan in July. Authorities cited her Armenian ethnicity as reason.

Recent hostility toward international reporters:

January 2009: The government barred local radio transmissions of three international broadcasters: the BBC, the U.S. government-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and Voice of America. All three had aired programming in Azerbaijan for at least 15 years.

May 2010: Unidentified men at Baku International Airport seized footage from a Norwegian television reporter and a cameraman who were working on a film about freedom of expression in Azerbaijan.

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