

AI Index: PRE 01/658/2013  
17 December 2013

## **Azerbaijan: Detained election watchdog chief must get fair trial**

The Azerbaijani authorities must ensure a prompt and fair trial for the chairman of a well-respected election watchdog who was arrested yesterday, Amnesty International said as European leaders signed a major energy deal in the capital Baku.

A Baku court has ordered that Anar Mammadli, head of the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Centre (EMDS), serve three months of pre-trial detention pending his trial on charges of “illegal enterprise”, “abuse of authority” and tax evasion.

EMDS was investigated by the authorities after it documented widespread electoral violations during the October presidential poll, in which Ilham Aliyev was controversially re-elected for a third term.

“Anar Mammadli has championed democracy and human rights for years in Azerbaijan, despite persistent pressure by the authorities to silence him and his colleagues,” said Denis Krivosheev, Europe and Central Asia Deputy Programme Director at Amnesty International.

“His arrest sends a chilling message to Azerbaijani civil society and adds to an atmosphere of self-censorship and fear that has grown under the authoritarian rule of Ilham Aliyev.”

Anar Mammadli was arrested a day before politicians including UK Foreign Secretary William Hague penned a deal involving ambitious plans to build a massive gas pipeline from Azerbaijan to Europe.

“The willingness of European leaders to turn a blind eye to Azerbaijan’s continued crackdown on government critics is glaringly obvious as they endorse a new energy deal with the increasingly vengeful Aliyev regime,” said Denis Krivosheev.

“European delegates visiting Azerbaijan have an obligation to hold a mirror to the wretchedness of Azerbaijan’s worsening human rights record, regardless of the commercial interests that bring them there.”

Anar Mammadli had been called in for questioning several times over the course of the two months leading to his arrest.

Yesterday he was summoned to the Grave Crimes Investigation Department of the Prosecutor General’s Office in Baku, but on this occasion he was not allowed to return home.

Instead, he was sent to Nasimi District Court to face a pre-trial detention hearing without a lawyer of his choosing.

“This arrest is the latest in a series of increasingly repressive measures adopted by the Azerbaijani authorities to silence dissenting voices” said Denis Krivosheev.

“Azerbaijani NGOs have had to endure years of ever tightening restrictions, arbitrary denials of registration and constant attacks on their members – both physical and psychological.”

Prior to his arrest, Anar Mammadli told Amnesty International how election monitoring organizations had been repeatedly targeted for their pro-democracy projects.

He was questioned about the activities of the EMDS during the presidential election - an investigation he said was politically motivated and in direct response to EMDS’ scathing assessment of the poll.

“Today’s signing of a pipeline deal worth an estimated \$45 billion reveals how the Azerbaijani regime has managed to escape with hushed and infrequent criticism thus far,” said Denis Krivosheev.

“However, there can be no price on human rights and commercial considerations should not overshadow the growing contempt shown by the Azerbaijani government for the rights of its own citizens.”

#### Background

Anar Mammadli told Amnesty International that three senior members of EMDS and at least one member of a partner NGO, the Volunteers’ International Cooperation, were questioned by the authorities on 28 October.

Three days later, officials from the Prosecutor General’s office raided the EMDS office and seized documents and computers.

EMDS was formed in December 2008 after the registration of its predecessor, the Election Monitoring Centre, was annulled by the authorities.

To this day, EMDS remains unregistered, which has severely hindered the organization’s ability to carry out its work.

It currently has a case pending at the European Court of Human Rights regarding the refusal of the Ministry of Justice to register the NGO in May 2010.