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CRACKDOWN ON CIVIL SOCIETY IN AZERBAIJAN

- The Best Defense is a Good Offense: The Role of Social Media in the Current Crackdown in Azerbaijan 2
By Katy E. Pearce, Seattle
 - No Holds Barred: Azerbaijan's Unprecedented Crackdown on Human Rights 6
By Rebecca Vincent, London
 - Does Advocacy Matter in Dealing with Authoritarian Regimes? 9
By Arzu Geybullayeva, Prague
-
- CHRONICLE 14
From 27 January to 23 February 2015
-
- CONFERENCE / CALL FOR PAPERS 16
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The Best Defense is a Good Offense: The Role of Social Media in the Current Crackdown in Azerbaijan

By Katy E. Pearce, Seattle

Abstract

While Azerbaijan has been on the path to full-fledged authoritarianism for quite some time, the increased repression of 2013 and 2014 is, to many Azerbaijan watchers, unprecedented. Other articles in this issue detail the legislative and practical actions taken by the regime over the past few years. This piece focuses on the role of social media with historical contextualization.

Introduction

Many pundits give too much credit to the role of information and communication technologies in political events. Policymakers enthusiastically assume that through “putting cracks in the wall” of authoritarianism, regimes can be defeated and, moreover, that information and communication technologies are a powerful crack-making tool, although rarely are the mechanisms for this process elucidated. Yet any tool that can put a crack in the wall can also be used to nail a door shut, build a new prison, or hit someone over the head. Readers must understand that information and communication technologies are merely tools and authoritarian regimes have the resources to use the tools more efficiently and effectively than the resource-less.

Contextualization is also essential: it must be acknowledged that most Azerbaijani citizens are in fact *not* using social media. Facebook’s own user numbers show that only 18% of Azerbaijanis are on the site as of January 2015.¹ And in the last Caucasus Barometer public opinion survey in 2013, only 33% of Azerbaijani adults have ever used the Internet² and only 13% of adults are online every day. So while certainly many urban educated Azerbaijanis use social media, it is impossible to judge what *all* Azerbaijanis think based on the social media behavior of a few. Additionally, the use of social media for political information gathering and deliberation are not popular for *any* individuals. Most social media users spend their time communicating with friends.

Yet the Internet and social media’s role in Azerbaijani political life is far from unimportant. We know that information and communication technologies can allow for easier collective action in authoritarian states where freedom of assembly is limited. The Internet can also provide a space for public deliberation and discussion as well as a platform for expressing discontent, all more challenging in an authoritarian environment. But perhaps

most importantly, the Internet can provide more news and information alternatives to state-provided media.

All of this also occurs in Azerbaijan. Yet, changes in the regime’s approach toward social media require a more careful examination. Essentially, the regime moved from ignorance to tolerance to defense to offense in a decade. It is only with contextualization and an understanding of history can the effect of social media in the current crackdown be understood.

Ignorance Era

In the early 2000s, few Azerbaijanis used the Internet. While Internet cafes and some workplaces may have provided Internet in this era, it was not until the end of the 2000s that over 10% of Azerbaijani homes had a personal computer with online access (See Figure 1 on p. 5). In this era, the Internet seemed to be a glimmer of political hope in Azerbaijan because at that time individuals who were interested in politics and were active online were more likely to be pro-democracy advocates. And with so few citizens online, the regime essentially ignored online activities.

Tolerance Era

Internet use in Azerbaijan grew at the end of the first decade of the 2000s. Netbooks and personal computer prices dropped significantly at this time, making them more affordable for more households. This was also the beginning of the social media era—MySpace, Facebook, vKontakte, and Odnoklassniki joined established sites like LiveJournal and encouraged many established and new users to join them. Some early Azerbaijani Internet celebrities, like Ilgar Mammadov and Hebib Muntezir, formed small discussion groups that were popular among the politically active.

Given the Azerbaijani regime’s control over mainstream media, the Internet and social media have long played a role as an information source providing views outside of what the regime broadcasts. And, according to history professor Altay Goyushov, after the first round of media crackdowns in Azerbaijan in 2008, the Internet and social media took on new meaning as one of the few spaces for alternative information and indepen-

1 <<http://www.katyppearce.net/january-2015-facebook-use-in-armenia-azerbaijan-and-georgia-according-to-facebook/>>

2 <<http://www.katyppearce.net/2013-internet-penetration-armenia-azerbaijan-georgia/>> <<http://www.katyppearce.net/2013-caucasus-internet-and-technology-infographic/>>

dent deliberation.³ Goyushov argues that in 2009 and 2010, the growth of social media and especially Facebook completely changed information flow in Azerbaijan and, he argues, that over time Facebook became the center of everything in Baku—new ideas, social and political issues, and discussions that would have never been allowed before were now happening online.

Defense Era

But, as time passed and more Azerbaijanis went online, Azerbaijani Internet users became more diverse. The regime became increasingly concerned that the relative free space of social media would no longer be contained to well-educated Bakuvians. The regime also witnessed the speed by which critical content can spread on social media and became increasingly concerned that it would be less able to predict and control citizens' reactions to such content. Thus, what was once considered a safe space for free expression was no longer. The regime took advantage of the perceived freedom of expression online and used it for greater surveillance of citizen behavior. The regime also realized that it needed to demonstrate to citizens that online dissent would not be tolerated. We can specifically point to the Donkey Blogger case in 2009 as a turning point: what happens online in Azerbaijan has offline repercussions. This has been repeatedly demonstrated: the N!DA trials, the Harlem Shake arrest, and punishment of popular online personalities like Mehman Huseynov. Popular online dissent is swiftly and severely punished for everyone to see.

Offense Era

Unlike earlier eras, current oppositional Azerbaijani Internet users are *well aware* of the regime's capacity and willingness to punish online dissent. And more recently, the regime has moved from purely defense to the addition of well-funded offense in dealing with dissent online. The regime does tolerate some alternative information sharing as it provides the regime with a sense of what oppositionists think, and social media discussion about alternative news provides information to the regime even better than a formal opposition press does. Yet the regime and its supporters do not allow for unfettered online alternative news and discussion. Individuals who share alternative news are frequently harassed by family and friends. The regime has also passed legislation that gives it more legal authority to combat online dissent through individual charges of libel and defamation.⁴

In what seems like a coordinated offensive plan, pro-regime youth organizations hijack hashtags and flood social media with attempts at discrediting alternative media, frequently using fake social media accounts to appear to have more support.⁵ And numerous pro-regime gossip sites leak *kompromat* and rumors about oppositionists—all at a much lower cost and with fewer direct links and attribution to the regime than in the pre-social media era. In fact, in authoritarian media systems, the Internet and social media are even more rumor and scandal-laden than traditional media.

Yet—especially due to the current wave of crackdowns on independent media, including the harassment and closure of independent media outlets like Radio Liberty and Azadliq Newspaper and the blocking of foreign grant funds to support independent media—in the current crackdown era, even more than in the past, social media and the Internet provide one of the few spaces where alternative information can be distributed and found. And, despite the risks involved in sharing or publishing oppositional content, for some brave Azerbaijanis, the Internet and social media are truly all that is left.

These brave outspoken Azerbaijanis are essentially Internet celebrities. Their celebrity was built on the structure and norms of social media and Facebook in particular. There is an unusual mix of interpersonal and broadcast communication that enables followers to have a parasocial relationship with a figure. While an individual posts political commentary between photos of a new baby or a child's graduation and a video clip of a favorite song, followers have a sense of intimacy with that person that is likely not reciprocated but enables a connection much deeper than what they would have with a traditional political figure.

Recent Crackdown in the Offense Era—Do They Even Know There Is a Crackdown?

In the most recent wave of crackdown, social media have essentially become the only place for individuals to share and receive information and discuss what is happening. But after witnessing the repercussions of online dissent both interpersonally and politically, it is likely that many Azerbaijanis, even those who are oppositionally-minded, are reluctant to share their feelings online.

But do Azerbaijani citizens realize that there is a crackdown? The answer likely varies by the degree of emotional involvement with those being targeted—and this is where these parasocial relationships may play a role. Active oppositionists with “real” or parasocial relationships with targeted individuals and organizations

3 <<http://www.ned.org/events/the-crackdown-on-independent-voices-in-azerbaijan>>

4 <<http://www.rferl.org/content/azerbaijan-internet-defamation-law-criminal-aliyev/25008799.html>>

5 <<http://www.katypearce.net/we-are-young-heartache-to-heartache-we-stand-no-promises-no-demands-azvote13/>>

are quite aware of the crackdown and social media have provided an efficient and low-cost way for information to spread. Nearly every arrest in the recent crackdown has been accompanied by a socially mediated play-by-play. For example, (now imprisoned) investigative journalist Khadija Ismayilova's arrival at the Baku airport and subsequent near-arrest in October 2014 was being "live blogged" by Ismayilova herself as well as numerous commentators. It seemed as if all of oppositional Baku and exile was online on a Friday evening waiting for the next bit of information. This also occurred during human rights defender Leyla Yunus' various encounters with the police. After court appearances, fuzzy smartphone photos of the detained at a distance go viral. I suggest that the (mediated) experience of "being there" or at least being involved more intimately has an effect on the emotional involvement and possibility commitment to those most affected by the crackdown. If these experiences actually translate into any concrete action remains to be seen.

But those not actively engaged in oppositional activities may or may not be aware that a crackdown is taking place for three reasons. First, the unintentional exposure to social media content *about* the crackdown depends on an individual's social network. It is entirely possible that some Azerbaijanis who previously had no sense of crackdowns may now know more because individuals post content and it appears in a newsfeed. This unintentional exposure may have both short- and long-term effects on attitudes toward the regime and the opposition in Azerbaijan. Second, an individual could choose to use social media to reinforce their own viewpoint—oppositional or pro-regime and actively avoid any content that does not resonate with pre-existing beliefs. Third, the flood of pro-regime media, both officially and unofficially affiliated, clouds the media landscape. Pro-regime media actively attacks oppositionists and likely confuses individuals.

Some exceptional cases may break through though. The August 2014 brutal beating of Azerbaijani human rights advocate and journalist Ilgar Nasibov in Nakhchivan is a clear example.⁶ Photographs of the results of the beating were released (by his family) to opposition online newspapers a few days after the event. The Facebook thumbnail of the story showed a graphic photograph that was impossible to ignore.

Conclusion

The "cracks in the wall" argument, while appealing, does not hold up under careful scrutiny. Authoritarian regimes like Azerbaijan use information and commu-

nication technologies to their own advantage and often more effectively than oppositions do.

One small crack that should be considered, however, is the power of social media to bring new voices to the mainstream. In Azerbaijan, the traditional opposition parties are threatened by new and charismatic independent voices. These new players have built their reputations on social media. Some are information disseminators like Hebib Muntezir, arguably one of the most important information sources in Azerbaijan, with over 22,000 followers on Facebook. Others are interesting political commentators like historian Altay Goyushov or journalist Mirza Khazar. Khadija Ismayilova is both information disseminator and commentator. Other young upstarts like Emin Milli, Bakhtiyar Hajiyev, Gunel Movlud, Turkan Huseynova, and Mehman Huseynov have significantly larger social media audiences than any traditional opposition figures. And importantly, there would be no way for these individuals to have grown their political influence without social media and the parasocial relationships that their followers have with them. These individuals, further, are *fueled* by the social media, and sometimes offline, support that their followers give them. Every post gets immediate feedback and is "liked" or re-tweeted or shared. They are learning more about what their audience wants and likes and how to properly respond to the needs. Social media is like a political marketing university for them. This feedback and message testing is incredibly empowering for these independents and adds a new dynamic to Azerbaijani political life.

I posit that the regime, that has well-established ways of dealing with the traditional opposition parties, feels more threatened by these young upstarts than they do by the opposition parties because of their savvy followers and potential power. And the regime's response to these independents is to punish them severely. The Donkey Bloggers, Bakhtiyar Hajiyev, the NIDA members, among others—all have felt the brunt of the regime's fist in a way that the traditional parties usually do not.

And when historians and others try to understand this current crackdown, I suggest that this is the regime's experimental attempt at dealing with this new type of threat—social media-fueled, savvy, charismatic, and emboldened individuals. While I cannot subscribe to the "cracks in the wall" perspective, I see why these people and their affiliated organizations have frightened the regime and the regime has responded with defense and offense to deal with them.

See overleaf for information about the author and further reading.

6 <<http://www.rferl.org/content/azerbaijan-attack-rights-activist-nasibov/26545123.html>>

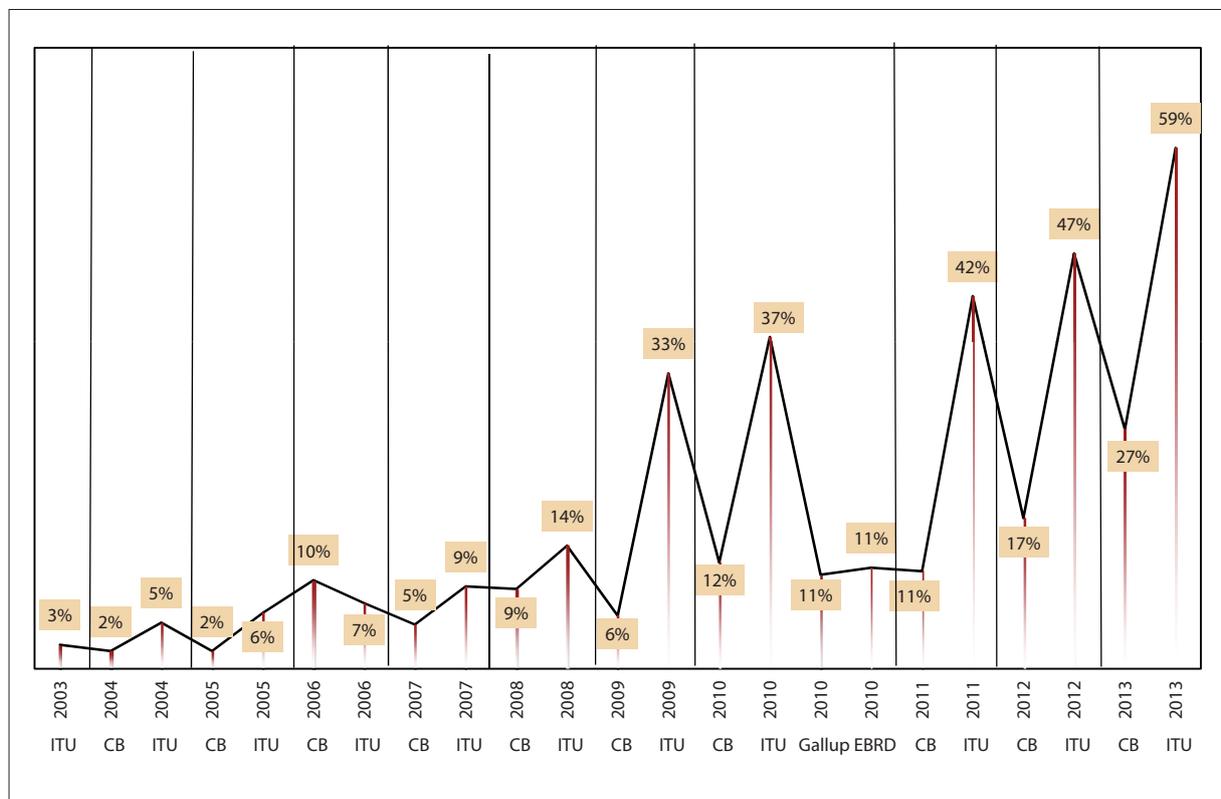
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Katy E. Pearce is an assistant professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Washington and holds an affiliation with the Ellison Center for Russian East European, and Central Asian Studies. Her research focuses on social and political uses of technologies and digital content in the transitioning democracies and semi-authoritarian states of the South Caucasus and Central Asia, but primarily Armenia and Azerbaijan.

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Figure 1: Household PC-Based Internet Connection in Azerbaijan—the Most Consistent Over-Time Internet Use Measure Available, 2003–2013, Various Sources



Source: <<http://www.katypearce.net/lets-have-a-data-party/>>

No Holds Barred: Azerbaijan's Unprecedented Crackdown on Human Rights

By Rebecca Vincent, London

Abstract

In 2014, the Azerbaijani authorities worked more aggressively than ever before to silence all forms of criticism and dissent. The crackdown reached alarming new lows between May and November, during Azerbaijan's Chairmanship of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers. This article provides an overview of the most significant violations of the year, and examines what made the crackdown unprecedented.

The Highs and Lows of 2014

In many ways, 2014 was a big year for Azerbaijan. President Ilham Aliyev settled into his third term in office. Officials began preparing for the first European Games, to be held in Baku in June 2015. A major regeneration project continued in Baku, aiming to give the capital a more modern and glamorous appearance. For the first time, the country assumed political leadership of the Council of Europe, serving as the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers from May to November.

But behind these headlines lie some disturbing truths. Aliyev's re-election was marred by widespread electoral fraud, and followed by the persecution of his political opponents and election monitors who dared to report the violations. Ahead of the European Games, authorities worked to silence those who might have shown the international public a side of the country they would prefer to keep hidden. The regeneration project has been accompanied by widespread property rights violations, as thousands of families have been forcibly evicted. And the Council of Europe Chairmanship coincided with the worst human rights crackdown in Azerbaijan to date.

Indeed, in 2014, the Azerbaijani authorities engaged in an unprecedented crackdown on human rights and fundamental freedoms, aggressively targeting journalists, bloggers, human rights defenders, and political activists—anyone who dared to criticize or oppose the government. By the end of the year, many of the country's most prominent critics had been jailed, driven from the country, forced into hiding, or broken into submission.

A Year of Serious Repression

During 2014, the fundamental rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and association came under serious attack in Azerbaijan. Parliament adopted further regressive legislation affecting the ability of independent NGOs to operate, and cutting off their main sources of funding. Public officials and their supporters continued to target critical journalists and media outlets with excessive civil defamation cases. Opposition political parties

remained unable to function normally due to unfair conditions imposed by authorities, and opposition leaders and their families faced extensive persecution.

But perhaps the most significant human rights development was the acceleration of cases of political arrest and imprisonment. The beginning of the year was marked by the pursuit of cases linked to the October 2013 presidential election. On 17 March, the opposition Republican Alternative (REAL) movement's would-be presidential candidate Ilgar Mammadov was convicted on spurious charges of inciting violent protest and sentenced to seven years in prison. On 6 May, eight young Azerbaijani activists involved with organizing a series of peaceful protests were convicted on a range of trumped-up charges and sentenced to between six and eight years in jail. On 26 May, election monitors Anar Mammadli and Bashir Suleymanli were convicted on spurious charges of tax evasion, illegal entrepreneurship, and abuse of office, and sentenced to five and a half years and three and a half years in prison, respectively.

As Azerbaijan settled into its Chairmanship of the Council of Europe, the crackdown at home intensified. Between 30 July and 8 August, prominent human rights defenders Intigam Aliyev, Rasul Jafarov, Arif Yunus, and Leyla Yunus were all arrested on politically motivated charges including tax evasion, illegal entrepreneurship, abuse of office, and treason. A number of other human rights defenders were forced to flee the country or hide out of fear for their safety.

At the same time, authorities conducted audits of both local and international NGOs, investigating them on trumped-up criminal charges, and reportedly freezing the bank accounts of at least 50 organizations. As a result, international organizations such as IREX, the National Democratic Institute, and Transparency International, closed their Baku offices.

Many of the most active local human rights NGOs were also forced to close. On 8 August, authorities searched the office of the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety and seized all of its equipment. They returned to seal the office on 11 August, forcing the orga-

nization to cease its activities. Under similar pressure, the Media Rights Institute announced its closure on 15 August. The Human Rights Club, the Institute for Peace and Democracy, and the Legal Education Society were also effectively closed when their leaders were arrested.

Authorities also continued arresting critical journalists and bloggers, as well as opposition political activists. By the end of the year, local groups reported there were as many as 100 cases of political prisoners. This included at least eight journalists, seven bloggers and social media activists, and eight human rights defenders.

Violence against journalists also continued, with full impunity for the attackers. Nakhchivan-based journalist Ilgar Nasibov was particularly brutally attacked on 21 August by a group of then-unknown assailants in his office, where he was found unconscious. Nasibov sustained serious injuries from the attack, including a concussion, broken bones in his face and ribs, and loss of vision in one eye.

In a final assault on freedom of expression during the year, on 5 December, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) investigative journalist Khadija Ismayilova was arrested on charges of allegedly driving a former coworker to attempt suicide. Then on 26 December, authorities searched and closed the Baku office of RFE/RL—one of the country's few remaining independent media outlets—in connection with a trumped-up criminal case.

The Unprecedented Nature of the Crackdown

Although widespread human rights violations have taken place in previous years in Azerbaijan, what made the 2014 crackdown truly unprecedented was the acceleration of violations in such a short space of time, the manner in which they were conducted, and the prominence of those targeted. The crackdown took place with the apparent full confidence of officials that they would not be held accountable for the violations, and that the crackdown would not significantly damage Azerbaijan's international relations. Those targeted included the leaders of the country's most daring human rights organizations, the most courageous journalists, and the most creative youth activists. Instead of making examples of a select few as in previous years, authorities seemed intent on removing a whole generation of civil society leaders.

It is also worth noting that the worse things became, the more vehemently top officials denied what was taking place. "There are no political prisoners in Azerbaijan" is a refrain that was echoed many times by top officials, including by President Aliyev himself, who also

repeatedly claimed that freedom of expression, assembly, and association, as well as other human rights, were respected in Azerbaijan.

Despite these claims, there is overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Reports published so far on 2014 have shown a drastically deteriorating human rights situation. Human Rights Watch's 'World Report 2015' noted: "The Azerbaijani government escalated repression against its critics, marking a dramatic deterioration in its already poor rights record." Freedom House's 'Freedom in the World 2015' report classed Azerbaijan as 'not free,' adding: "Azerbaijan received a downward trend arrow due to an intensified crackdown on dissent, including the imprisonment and abuse of human rights advocates and journalists." Reporters' Without Borders '2015 World Press Freedom Index' ranked Azerbaijan as number 162 out of 180 countries, noting: "It was a bad year in Azerbaijan, which registered one of the biggest falls in score of any country in the index." The Committee to Protect Journalists included Azerbaijan in its list of the top 10 worst jailers of journalists in 2014.

International human rights experts were similarly united in their statements on Azerbaijan during the year. On 15 May, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatovic stated: "There are now more than 10 members of the media in prison in Azerbaijan, convicted or awaiting trial, which is the highest number in that country my Office has observed since it was established."

On 24 November, Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner Nils Muižnieks posted on Facebook: "Most countries chairing the organisation, which prides itself as the continent's guardian of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, use their time at the helm to tout their democratic credentials. Azerbaijan will go down in history as the country that carried out an unprecedented crackdown on human rights defenders during its chairmanship."

He added:

"The Council of Europe's primary friends and partners in the country have almost all been targeted. While this pains me deeply, it also makes practical cooperation between Azerbaijan and the Council of Europe extremely difficult."

The Council of Europe was not the only body to experience difficulties in its relationship with Azerbaijan. In an unusually obstructive move, in September, Azerbaijani authorities refused to cooperate with the United Nations Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture during its mission to the country. The delegation was forced to suspend its visit, citing "official obstruction." The subcommittee's 17 September statement explained:

“The delegation was prevented from visiting several places where people are detained and was barred from completing its work at other sites, despite repeated attempts to do so and assurances of unrestricted access to all places of deprivation of liberty by Azerbaijani authorities.”

The statement added that this constituted “serious breaches of Azerbaijan’s obligations under the Optional Protocol.”

European politicians began to comment on the escalation of violations in the country. On 18 September, the European Parliament adopted a resolution ‘on the persecution of human rights defenders in Azerbaijan,’ referring to the “major escalation of government repression, pressure and intimidation directed at NGOs, civil society activists, journalists and human rights defenders taking place in recent months.” On 30 September, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights adopted a statement noting concern that “during Azerbaijan’s chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, within the space of a few weeks, four prominent, respected civil society activists have been placed in pre-trial detention on trumped-up charges related to their activities.”

By the end of the year, senior Western government officials were forced to acknowledge the gravity of the human rights situation in Azerbaijan. In an 18 December interview with RFE/RL, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Tom Malinowski said:

“At this point, we are having very serious discussions with the Azeri government on this subject at high levels, they know our views, and they understand that the kind of relationship they want to have with the United States, that they have had with the United States over the years

since Azerbaijan became independent, is jeopardized by this crackdown on civil society, which frankly, we cannot understand.”

A Bleak Prospect for the Year Ahead

So far in 2015, the crackdown shows no signs of abating. On 15 and 16 January, the trials of human rights defenders Rasul Jafarov and Intigam Aliyev began, and have already been marred by procedural irregularities and due process violations. On 26 January, human rights defender Gunay Ismayilova was attacked by an unknown assailant outside her home in Baku. On 29 January, journalist Seymur Hezi was convicted on trumped-up hooliganism charges and sentenced to five years’ imprisonment.

On 3 February, President Aliyev signed a law making it easier for authorities to shut down media outlets. On 11 February, it was made public that human rights defender Emin Huseynov had been in hiding at the Swiss Embassy in Baku since August 2014, prompting the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to announce that he was wanted on criminal charges similar to the other detained human rights defenders. On 13 February, detained journalist Khadija Ismayilova’s lawyer announced that more serious charges had been filed against her, meaning she now faces up to 12 years’ imprisonment.

Indeed, as Azerbaijan prepares to host the European Games in June, and with parliamentary elections approaching in November, the authorities seem more determined than ever to continue silencing the country’s dwindling few critics. Until the international community finds a way to put meaning behind words, and takes action to hold the authorities accountable in a tangible way, these violations seem destined to continue.

About the Author

Rebecca Vincent is a human rights activist and former U.S. diplomat posted to Baku. She has worked with a wide range of international and Azerbaijani human rights and freedom of expression organizations. She has published widely on human rights issues in Azerbaijan for outlets including Al Jazeera English, Index on Censorship, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and The Foreign Policy Centre, a London-based think tank where she is a Research Associate.

Does Advocacy Matter in Dealing with Authoritarian Regimes?

By Arzu Geybullayeva, Prague

Abstract

Azerbaijan's leadership is growing in power and influence. So far it has managed to attract support from many European and American politicians through its skilled "caviar diplomacy." At the same time, advocates for more transparency, democracy and freedom in Azerbaijan face harsh crackdowns. Many of the country's well-known activists, rights defenders and journalists are currently in jail. In fact, foreign analysts described the repressions of 2014 as "unprecedented." International rights advocates played a tremendous role in telling the stories of those who have been unlawfully silenced in Azerbaijan. However, these criticisms are not enough to hold the political leadership accountable for its actions. A consolidated effort by governments, rights institutions, media and international organizations is needed to trigger change.

Introduction

There are two parallel Azerbaijanians that exist today. The one on the surface, the most visible one, claims to be many things: democratic, egalitarian and liberal, to name a few. It presents itself as a modern nation-state, with a booming economy benefiting all. It promotes an attractive image through high-quality commercial ads featured on international television channels, international newspapers and even billboards. To the broad foreign public, unaware even of where the country is located, Azerbaijan is a pearl to be discovered—a "charm of the orient" as the country is described in many of its ad campaigns. Within this ostensibly appealing Azerbaijan hides an ugly reality. Here, democracy, equality and liberty are long forgotten words, buried deep under the rule of one family, which controlled the country for over four decades, both during the Soviet Union and following the country's independence. Beneath the shining, crystal, "Champaign and caviar" lies a life defined by suffering, struggle, and crackdown.

Many have tasted both worlds in Azerbaijan. Some chose caviar over freedoms; others continue the fight. But, as the recent years have shown, there seems to be more of the caviar type and a shrinking number of the fighting type. The number of fighters is shrinking not due to their personal choice, but because many end up in jail, exile, or some other form of escape.

The Azerbaijani government invests billions in its lobbying efforts and engages in untraditional diplomacy—it buys votes, bribes sports competition judges, hosts international events all the while putting on a show of masked, pampered, retouched "democracy." And, in order to prevent any kind of disruption to its image-building plans, it is putting its prominent journalists, veteran activists and rights advocates in jail. In the meantime, the international community of rights advocates is fighting back by drawing attention to the on-going crackdown and the stories of those unjustly silenced. Whether they are succeeding at this is yet to

be seen. As attention abroad becomes stronger, so do official Baku's reactions and, by now, well-mastered line of argumentation: "there are no limits to any kind of freedoms in Azerbaijan," say government officials; in the meantime another activist, journalist or advocate ends up in jail. This situation calls for changes in advocacy measures.

Aliyev's Wonderland

Aliyev's wonderland of opulence would lure anyone with a weakness for luxury. This is why Aliyev's influence abroad is termed "caviar diplomacy." Aliyev is surrounded by an abundance of it. And since choking on it is not option, handing it out in large sums in an exchange of favors works just as well. So far "caviar diplomacy" worked wonders in the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Well paid lobby firms help find suitable candidates to promote Aliyev's foreign policy objectives. Events, glossy magazines, art exhibitions, generous individual donations and gala dinners all are part of these efforts—on the visible side.

The invisible side involves bribing jurors, as during the 2013 Eurovision Song Contest. Or, as in 2012, when Azerbaijan bribed a boxing official in exchange for two gold medals. There is nothing that the authorities cannot "influence" with money and the help of their lobbyists—the combination works wonders.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe's (PACE) rejection of the controversial political prisoners report on January 23, 2013, was just one of these wonders. Thanks to Azerbaijani apologists at PACE (and there were plenty), the resolution did not pass, leaving rights activists defeated, not to mention close to a hundred political prisoner's lives at the mercy of the Azerbaijani judicial system.

In its 2012 report, the Berlin based think-thank, European Stability Initiative, quoted one Azerbaijani source that said:

“One kilogram of caviar is worth between 1,300 and 1,400 euro. Each of our friends in PACE receives at every session, four times a year, at least 0.4 to 0.6kg. Our key friends in PACE, who get this, are around 10 to 12 people. There are another 3 to 4 people in the secretariat.”

And this is just a small part of Aliyev’s untraditional diplomatic skills:

“Caviar, at least, is given at every session. But during visits to Baku many other things are given as well. Many deputies are regularly invited to Azerbaijan and generously paid. In a normal year, at least 30 to 40 would be invited, some of them repeatedly. People are invited to conferences, events, sometimes for summer vacations. These are real vacations and there are many expensive gifts. Gifts are mostly expensive silk carpets, gold and silver items, drinks, caviar and money. In Baku, a common gift is 2kg of caviar.”

With that much caviar, any political prisoner can be forgotten.

Campaigning for Silenced Voices

Despite the well-established and growing influence of Aliyev’s “caviar diplomacy,” efforts to keep the crack-down in Azerbaijan on the international agenda have also been successful to some degree.

In a 2010 report, the human rights organization Amnesty International stated, “Amnesty International supporters have already demonstrated they can have impact in Azerbaijan. Journalist Eynulla Fatullayev, bloggers Adnan Hajizada and Emin Milli, and youth activist Jabbar Savalan were all released early after international campaigning on their behalf.”

For the past several years, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Index on Censorship, Article 19, Human Rights House Network, Pen International, Reporters Without Borders and others have engaged in advocacy campaigns condemning unfair jail terms, bogus charges, the intensified crackdown and so on. By now, there have been hundreds of calls on the government of Azerbaijan to end repression and release jailed men and women.

When the donkey bloggers story broke in 2009, many of the rights and advocacy organizations launched international campaigns calling for their immediate release, and condemning the government for jailing young activists for practicing their freedom of speech. Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizada—known as the donkey bloggers due to a viral video they created that featured a donkey—were arrested and placed in pre-trial detention in the summer of 2009. The duo was later sentenced on hooliganism charges following a sham trial.

Milli received a two-and-a-half year sentence, while Hajizada was sentenced to two years in jail.

Surely they committed no act of hooliganism. The two men used the government’s decision to import two expensive donkeys (each costing approximately \$41,000) to raise awareness about the on-going corruption in the country. And what better way to do this than to dress up in a donkey costume and give a press conference praising Azerbaijan for the opportunities it provides, especially when one is an imported donkey with talents ranging from playing the violin to speaking a number of foreign languages.

The humor was not appreciated as much inside Aliyev’s cabinet. Milli and Hajizada were arrested in a staged scuffle in a Baku restaurant just weeks after the video went viral—the two men were attacked and later convicted of hooliganism and intentional infliction of bodily harm.

The international outcry was immense. It was also the first time when the arrest of two youth activists developed into a massive anti-Aliyev campaign. The authorities were startled. The charge was strikingly similar to the charges brought against opposition journalist Ganimat Zahid, who was arrested in 2007. But even in Zahid’s case, the outcry was not this strong. Both Milli and Hajizada were Western-educated, spoke fluent English and were founders of youth networks of like-minded men and women interested in changing Azerbaijan for the better, promoting tolerance, engaging in discussions, and emphasizing the importance of education. Their networks made a difference. International campaigning efforts at home and abroad led to U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton mentioning their case in a meeting with President Aliyev during her visit to Azerbaijan. President Obama urged Azerbaijani authorities to free the men.

On November 18, 2010, Hajizada was released a year into his sentence. Milli was released the next day. But their discharge meant little in terms of reforms in Azerbaijan. In fact, as one of the articles on the case of the bloggers said, this was “just the beginning”¹ of what was to come.

As energy revenues trickled down into the pockets of Azerbaijani state officials, the authorities became bolder. In the aftermath, a string of events at home and abroad paved the way for a more authoritarian Azerbaijan.

2009 marked a new era in the history of censorship in Azerbaijan. In March the government amended the

1 Luke Allnut, “Azerbaijan’s Donkey Bloggers Are Just The Beginning”, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, July 8, 2010, <http://www.rferl.org/content/Azerbaijans_Donkey_Bloggers_Are_Just_The_Beginning/2094553.html>

constitution, scratching out presidential term limits and thereby allowing Aliyev to stay in power indefinitely. The same year three international news broadcasters—BBC, Voice of America, and the local bureau of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty—were banned from broadcasting on national FM frequencies. Criminal defamation charges against journalists soared to a record high.

The parliamentary elections of 2010 succeeded in excluding all of the remaining opposition representatives from the parliament. This election was described as “the most fraudulent election ever monitored in a member state of the Council of Europe”² (although the following presidential elections of 2013 raised the fraud bar to another level). By this point, “caviar diplomacy” influence in PACE was highly visible. The organization’s representatives who came to Azerbaijan to observe the elections spoke of “progress,” “transparency” and praised the voting for being “in line with international standards and procedures.”

It was clear that the authorities were honing their skills and planning to become even more punitive. The change in rhetoric and reactions became more visible with time—ignorance replacing shame and becoming a popular way to scorn the international calls and demands to reform and prevent any further silencing of voices. The authorities labeled anyone who spoke against Aliyev a traitor or an agent of the West. More arrests and intimidation followed.

In 2015, when U.S.-based Freedom House ranked Azerbaijan as “not free” the authorities were quick to dismiss the report and its conclusions, calling the assessment biased and based on untrue information.³ Similarly, the Committee to Protect Journalists’ ranking of Azerbaijan in the top 10 worst jailers resulted in a similar response.

The crackdown also took on new dimensions. Arrests no longer sufficed as a crude form of censorship. As the authorities continued to throw activists in jail, legislative amendments were introduced to existing legislation on media, freedom of association, and non-governmental organizations. As a result, it became much easier to control civil society, media and activists. For instance, the most recent amendment to the law on mass media lets the Ministry of Justice shut down any foreign-funded media outlet and any outlet, which had at least two cases of defamation launched against it in a year.

2014: Worst Year for Rights Defenders and Activists

The rights to freedom of expression and association were repeatedly violated in Azerbaijan in 2014. Many analysts described the past year as unprecedented in the number of crackdowns (see related article in this issue). Aliyev locked up not only prominent journalists and activists, but also rights defenders and peace building advocates. Anyone who had access to the international community and was engaged in some form of advocacy was punished with a jail sentence. A series of new amendments to existing laws were also adopted.⁴

Aliyev is determined to silence or lock up anyone who would get in the way of the upcoming European Games and the parliamentary elections. At all costs, the authorities want to avoid the international campaigning that took place during Azerbaijan’s hosting of the Eurovision Song Contest in 2013.

Leyla Yunus documented forced evictions of Baku residents during the preparation for the Eurovision song contest. She exposed entrenched corruption and Aliyev’s authoritarian grip on power in the country by telling stories of people who lost their homes. Yunus too lost her home and office during the illegal demolitions. Today she is in jail on trumped-up charges of treason and other crimes. And, to teach a lesson, the authorities ordered the arrest of her husband, political scientist Arif Yunus.

So far, the international calls, including from the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, for her immediate release (especially due to her deteriorating health) have only resulted in more mistreatment, pressure and intimidation for Yunus. The authorities refuse to budge.

In August 2014 a group known as the Civic Solidarity Platform⁵—a coalition of some sixty human rights organizations within the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) region—called on the authorities of Azerbaijan to release Rasul Jafarov, a human rights activist and initiator of democracy and rights campaigns such as “Sing for Democracy” and “Art for Democracy.” Jafarov was on the front lines of advocacy campaigns in the run-up to the Eurovision song contest. He had also met with Loreen—the Swedish finalist of the Eurovision song contest who visited a number of NGOs, including the currently shuttered Institute for Reporters Freedom and Safety (IRFS). Jafarov

2 European Stability Initiative, “Caviar Diplomacy: How Azerbaijan Silenced Council of Europe”, May 24, 2012, p. 29, <http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi_document_id_131.pdf>

3 Freedom House Recognizes Azerbaijan “Not Free Country” Again, Contact.az, January 28, 2015, <<http://www.contact.az/docs/2015/Politics/012800104447en.htm#.VODOpMYfnLU>> last accessed on February 14, 2015

4 “2014: The Great Azerbaijani Crackdown”, Arzu Geybulayeva, February 2, 2015, Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso, <<http://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Regions-and-countries/Azerbaijan/2014-The-great-Azerbaijani-crackdown>>

5 Azerbaijan: Freedom to Rasul Jafarov, August 3, 2014, <<http://www.civicsolidarity.org/article/995/azerbaijan-freedom-rasul-jafarov>>

briefed Loreen on forced evictions and the stories of the on-going crackdown in the country.

He was arrested on August 2, 2014. He is charged with tax evasion, illegal entrepreneurship, and abuse of office.

Emin Huseynov, journalism and media freedom advocate, is facing criminal charges on accusations of tax evasion and engaging in illegal business related to allegedly unregistered grant contracts. Huseynov went into hiding in August when his organization—Institute for Reporter’s Freedom and Safety—was raided and its equipment confiscated. According to a story that broke on February 12, Huseynov has been living at the Swiss Embassy in Baku. As part of their international advocacy efforts, international rights organizations have called on the government of Azerbaijan to drop all charges against him. In the meantime, the Swiss Foreign Ministry is making efforts behind closed doors with the government of Azerbaijan to let Huseynov go.⁶

Not all of the imprisoned would opt for “secret diplomacy”. Among these is Khadija Ismayilova, an award winning investigative reporter and host of a daily radio show on Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). For years she has been conducting investigations into the illegal businesses of the ruling family. Her work came at a price. She was threatened, intimidated, defamed and blackmailed. On December 5, 2014, she was arrested. The government has not relented on her case despite the on-going international campaign for her release. To the contrary, additional charges were brought against Ismayilova on February 13, when the journalist faced the usual charges of tax evasion, abuse of power and illegal entrepreneurship. Ismayilova strongly advocated against secret diplomacy. Predicting her own arrest, she wrote on her Facebook page that this is one thing she calls on the Western governments not to do.

There is a dilemma facing the Aliyev regime. On the one hand, no one on the level of the government wants to give in and appear to be changing based on the international naming and shaming. This thinking explains why the Azerbaijani government so far failed to respond to the decision of the European Court of Human Rights, which ruled that the Azerbaijani authorities violated a series of basic human rights provisions in the case of opposition leader Ilgar Mammadov. The authorities also so far failed to pay the compensation fee the court ordered.

On the other hand, however, Aliyev still cares greatly about his image. Why else would he go after other activ-

ists and journalists and increase the level of crackdowns? Or why would he waste time in responding to each internationally raised criticism and expect his foreign aides and diplomats to write letters to international media outlets like the *New York Times*, explaining and justifying his actions?

Surely Aliyev cares. Why else would his chief of staff Ramiz Mehdiyev write a 60-page diatribe accusing the West of colonialism, “interference in the country’s internal affairs” and paying for a revolution to topple the regime?

It is not a coincidence that the individuals mentioned here and many others are currently in jail. Most of them, while engaged in advocacy, also acted as bridges between international organizations and the local civil society groups. Many spoke at events in Brussels, Strasbourg and Washington, DC, exposing the on-going crackdown. Surely such exposure was getting in the way of the Azerbaijani leadership’s by now quite successful “caviar diplomacy.” By locking up many of the country’s outspoken critics, Aliyev and his close circle ensured no further interruptions in their lobbying efforts.

Are We Failing?

It is clear that statements of “concern” and “grave concern” issued by the Western governments no longer suffice on diplomatic levels. Condemnations on behalf of the international rights groups produce few results. The authorities no longer care as they have become more powerful, with better connections and enhanced “convincing” methods.

Some governments and organizations have begun discussions about the possibility of sanctions against Azerbaijan or specific individuals. The Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI) is among these organizations. Made up of governments, companies, and civil society organizations, the initiative “promotes openness and accountable management of natural resources.”⁷ One of the organization’s main features is that it believes the country’s natural resources belong to a country’s citizens.

Following the reports of human rights organizations, opposition politicians, and journalists on the on-going crackdown in the country, the EITI Board concluded that the situation was “unacceptable and that EITI implementation could not take place with the current circumstances”⁸ and called on the government of Azerbaijan for an early validation. Now the eyes are on the next board meeting, which is scheduled for April.

6 “Emin Huseynov forced into hiding in Azerbaijan”, Human Rights House Network, February 11, 2015, <<http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/20730.html>>

7 <<https://eiti.org/eiti>>

8 EITI Implementation, Azerbaijan, <<https://eiti.org/Azerbaijan>>, last accessed on February 14, 2015

Should the validation process conclude that Azerbaijan systematically dismissed EITI principles and requirements, the EITI Board will have to suspend or delist Azerbaijan.⁹

This would be the first time that Azerbaijan would be suspended due to the government-imposed clamp-down and as a result of international campaign efforts.

In an interview with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, David Kramer, Senior Director for Human Rights and Democracy at the McCain Institute, also spoke about the possibility of some actions being taken against Azerbaijan in the U.S.

So advocacy is working, it just needs an additional push. Perhaps it is time for more consolidated efforts in case of Azerbaijan in order to be able to hold the government accountable and change its course of action. While international organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch continue increasing international attention to the plight of persecuted groups and

individuals, there should be an equal amount of effort on behalf of western governments and international media to put pressure on the authorities to release prisoners unjustly jailed for their activism and work.

So far this is proving to be a difficult task given the priorities many Western governments have. Surely energy is high on the agenda. And where energy security is a concern, there is little space, if any, for human rights or any other freedoms. Then there is also the caveat, in fact so much of it that one may forget even about energy security and other priorities. How much longer can indifference, greed and neglect get in the way of those western governments who promote rights and freedoms when needed? And even if they are engaged in some form of behind-closed-doors diplomacy, does not this create another venue for financial inducements, something the Azerbaijani government is already quite good at?

About the Author

Arzu Geybullayeva is a regional analyst and correspondent. She is the recipient of 2014 Vaclav Havel Journalism Fellowship with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Previously Arzu worked for the National Democratic Institute in Baku and European Stability Initiative, a Berlin-based think tank, in Istanbul. Her main focus is human rights, advocacy, freedom of the press, and net freedom. Arzu holds a MSc degree in Global Politics from the London School of Economics and a BA degree in International Relations from Bilkent University.

9 EITI and Azerbaijan: headed for divorce? Marinke Fan Riet, January 15, 2015, <<http://www.publishwhatyoupay.org/newsroom/blog/eiti-and-azerbaijan-headed-divorce>>, last accessed on February 14, 2015

CHRONICLE

From 27 January to 23 February 2015

27 January 2015	Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif says at a press conference after meeting with his Armenian counterpart Eduard Nalbandian in Yerevan that Armenia's membership in the Eurasian Economic Union opens new opportunities for Tehran to develop relations with Russia via Armenia
28 January 2015	A bus driver in Baku is hospitalized after setting himself on fire to protest against alleged misconduct by inspectors of the Azerbaijani Transport Ministry
29 January 2015	The foreign ministers of Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Turkmenistan hold a trilateral meeting in the Turkmen capital of Ashgabat to discuss cooperation in transport, including the project of a Afghanistan–Turkmenistan–Azerbaijan–Georgia–Turkey transport link
2 February 2015	Azerbaijan launches military maneuvers involving 20,000 soldiers amid rising tensions with neighboring Armenia
4 February 2015	Russian President Vladimir Putin signs into law the ratification of an “alliance and strategic partnership” treaty between Russia and the breakaway region of Abkhazia that is opposed by Tbilisi
5 February 2015	NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg announces that a dozen NATO allies are supporting the implementation of a package of cooperation with Georgia, including the setting up of a joint training center in Georgia, following a NATO–Georgia Commission meeting in Brussels
5 February 2015	A Baku court finds two Azerbaijani citizens guilty of cooperating with representatives of Iran's intelligence services and sentences them to jail on the same day
6 February 2015	Russia's permanent representative at NATO, Alexander Grushko, says that a planned NATO training center in Georgia is a “provocative step” that can damage regional security
8 February 2015	US Vice President Joe Biden meets with Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili on the sideline of the Munich security conference to discuss relations in energy and security issues with Biden urging Georgia “to keep its focus on democratic reforms”
11 February 2015	Swiss public television reveals that Azerbaijani rights activist Emin Huseynov has been sheltered in the Swiss embassy in Baku since August 2014
11 February 2015	The Georgian Interior Ministry says that the head of administration of supervisory service at the Tbilisi Mayor's Office has been arrested on bribery charges
13 February 2015	Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko announces the appointment of former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili as head of a newly established International Advisory Council on Reforms in Ukraine
13 February 2015	Romanian Foreign Minister Bogdan Aurescu stresses Romania's support for Georgia's European and Euro–Atlantic integration during a visit to Tbilisi
16 February 2015	Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian withdraws from parliament protocols on the normalization of ties and establishment of diplomatic relations with Turkey, citing Ankara's lack of political will
16 February 2015	Russian President Vladimir Putin's aide in charge of overseeing relations with the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Vladislav Surkov, says during a visit to Abkhazia that despite economic difficulties Moscow does not envisage cutting financial aid to the region
17 February 2015	The U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland starts her Caucasus tour in Baku and meets with President Ilham Aliyev to discuss bilateral ties and the situation in the disputed region of Nagorno Karabakh
17 February 2015	The Georgian Prosecutor General's Office urges Ukrainian authorities to extradite former President Mikheil Saakashvili to Georgia along with former Justice Minister Zurab Adeishvili on charges of fraud and abuse of power
18 February 2015	US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland holds talks with Armenian Foreign Minister Eduard Nalbandian in Yerevan to discuss bilateral ties, democratic reforms in Armenia and the US role in providing a solution to the Nagorno Karabakh conflict
18 February 2015	Russia and the breakaway region of South Ossetia sign a border agreement in Moscow opposed by Tbilisi
19 February 2015	Armenian authorities reject claims that no request had been submitted to Moscow to ask for the transfer to an Armenian prison of a Russian soldier accused of having killed seven members of an Armenian family

Continued overleaf

19 February 2015	The Georgian Prime Minister's special representative for relations with Russia, Zurab Abashidze, says that Georgia's cooperation with NATO does not envisage the deployment of any "military infrastructure" by the Alliance on Georgian territory
21 February 2015	The Central Bank of Azerbaijan abruptly devalues the country's currency, manat, against the dollar and the euro
22 February 2015	Georgian Economy Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili says that the Georgian economy is expected to grow 2–2.5% in 2015 instead of initially forecasted 5%
23 February 2015	The Georgian presidential administration says that Georgian President Giorgi Margvelashvili held talks with his Ukrainian counterpart Petro Poroshenko in Kyiv and invited him to Georgia
23 February 2015	Authorities in the disputed region of Nagorno Karabakh reject the release of two Azerbaijani nationals who were arrested and imprisoned last year on a number of charges, including murder

Compiled by Lili Di Puppò

For the full chronicle since 2009 see <www.laender-analysen.de/cad>



4th ASCN Annual Conference
“Protest, Modernization, Democratization:
Political and Social Dynamics in Post-Soviet Countries”
4-5 September 2015, Tbilisi - Georgia

The Academic Swiss Caucasus Net (ASCN) is pleased to announce its 4th Annual ASCN Conference that will take place in Tbilisi, Georgia on 4 and 5 September 2015.

Content

The chain of revolutions in post-Soviet countries, starting with the November Revolution of 2003 in Georgia and ending with Maidan in Ukraine of 2014 have been a transforming factor not only for the countries where they were successful (Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova), but also for those where large-scale political protest was attempted or just feared (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Belarus). These instances of political protest were mostly considered in the context of democratization; the electoral context - many of these revolutions succeeded or failed against the background of the allegations of vote fraud - reinforced the tendency to frame them in the context of democracy. But this framing is one-sided; in many cases it was the failing state, with its corruption and inability to provide basic services to its citizens, as well as the failing economy which have motivated the protesters. The drive to modernize was at least as important as the drive to democratize.

The modernization process leads to the protest of its own. Those left behind during the rapid transformation of society affected through radical reforms resort to extreme nationalism or religious fundamentalism to stop and to revert it. The backlash soon halts the reforms, forcing the political elite to accommodate the demands of the more conservative forces. As for the democratization process, it brings with it variety of forms of contestation, pluralizing the latter. No longer the revolution but nascent social movements with their particular focus on women's rights, minorities, ecology, labor rights etc. serve as paradigms for contestation. At the intersection of these instances of protest there arise tensions between modernization and democratization imperatives, which are then exploited by authoritarian or semi-authoritarian governments who choose or pretend to choose prosperity over democracy.

Is there an essential tension between modernization and democratization? Or do these two processes imply each other? How do different forms of contestation of power relate to them? Which are the social forces behind the protest dynamics and what function is played by different systems and organizations in the processes of transformation of post-soviet countries?

The conference aims to discuss different approaches for analyzing political and social dynamics in post-Soviet countries against the background of the politics of contestation and the processes of modernization and democratization

Objectives

The conference aims to gather junior scholars and researchers from various disciplines of the social sciences (political science, sociology, anthropology, etc.) dealing with post-Soviet states. More specifically, the conference will address the following points of interest:

- It will provide opportunities for researchers vested in post-Soviet countries to engage, network, exchange and discuss their research projects, papers and findings;
- It will provide a forum for discussion regarding the political and social dynamics of the transformation processes in the post-Soviet countries.

Call for Papers

Deadline for the submission of abstracts (300 words): 31 March 2015

Eligibility

- PhD students and recent PhD graduates (2012 or later) dealing with post-Soviet countries, in particular (but not limited to) Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, who are eager to present and discuss their research work (especially current PhD projects and/or research results) with colleagues from the region and beyond.

The papers to be presented must deal specifically with one of the above-mentioned countries. Papers with a comparative dimension are also accepted.

Topics

Proposals can be linked to one of the following themes dealing with modernization:

- Social movements and contentious politics (including color revolutions)
- Political regimes and political elites (democracy vs. autocracy; democratization process, etc.)
- Social change (value systems, Europeanisation, youth identity, gender politics, minority issues, etc.)
- Forms of capitalism (state capitalism vs. liberal capitalism)

Selected candidates will have the opportunity to present and discuss their work in one of the thematic panels, wherein some researchers involved in ASCN research projects will also present their research results. For more information about current ASCN research projects, please consult the ASCN website, section '[Research](#)'.

Submission Instructions

All interested scholars are requested to submit an abstract (no more than 300 words) of their paper together with a short biographical statement (including author, affiliation, postal address, phone number and e-mail address) and a CV (maximum 2 pages). Applicants are requested to mention into which of the proposed topics the abstract would fit. Submissions must be sent no later than **31 March 2015** to archil.abashidze@ascn.ch and to tiko.kadagishvili@ascn.ch with the following email subject: *ASCN Annual Conference 2015*. All documents have to be in English and need to be merged into a single PDF file. The result of the selection process will be announced by **the beginning of May 2015**.

Selected candidates will then be invited to submit full papers (5,000 words) by 15 August 2015.

Venue, Accommodation and Transport

The ASCN programme will cover travel and accommodation expenses for all selected participants residing outside of Georgia. Opportunities for co-financing will arise should the travel costs in individual cases exceed the average expenses per participant attending the conference.

The selected participants will be informed about the programme, the specific conference panels and the format of the paper to submit, as well as organisational details, in due time.

Timeline

- Application deadline: 31 March 2015
- Selection of abstracts: beginning of May 2015
- Submission of papers: 15 August 2015
- Conference: 4-5 September 2015

Website

www.ascn.ch → "Events" section

Further Questions

Archil Abashidze, ASCN Local Coordinator Georgia, archil.abashidze@ascn.ch

For more information about our previous ASCN conferences held in 2011, 2012 and 2013, please visit our website (<http://www.ascn.ch/en/Events.html>).

About ASCN

ASCN is a programme aimed at promoting the social sciences and humanities in the South Caucasus (primarily Georgia and Armenia). Its different activities foster the emergence of a new generation of talented scholars. Promising junior researchers receive support through research projects, capacity-building trainings and scholarships. The programme emphasizes the advancement of individuals who, thanks to their ASCN experience, become better integrated in international academic networks. The ASCN programme is coordinated and operated by the Interfaculty Institute for Central and Eastern Europe (IICEE) at the University of Fribourg (Switzerland). It is initiated and supported by Gebert Rűf Stiftung.

ABOUT THE CAUCASUS ANALYTICAL DIGEST

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Caucasus Research Resource Centers

The Caucasus Research Resource Centers program (CRRC) is a network of research centers in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. We strengthen social science research and public policy analysis in the South Caucasus. A partnership between the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Eurasia Partnership Foundation, and local universities, the CRRC network integrates research, training and scholarly collaboration in the region.

ASCN

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