



Free Anar Mammadli!
By Krzysztof Bobinski

Update 10 January 2014

The Azerbaijan authorities are continuing to hold Anar Mammadli, the head of the Election Monitoring and Democratic Studies Centre (EMDS) who was arrested on December 16 2013 as part of an investigation into alleged tax evasion by the organization. Anar Mammadli, a former member of the Civil Society Forum steering committee, is a widely respected election observer and civil rights activist. He is being held under a three month detention order. The case arises from grants which EMDS received from abroad to conduct its monitoring activities including most recently the presidential election in Azerbaijan on October 9 2013. According to the Azerbaijani Prosecutor General's Office the criminal case arises from 'a great profit and tax evasion' allegedly made by EMDS and the International Cooperation of the Volunteers Public Union (ICV), its partner organization. Bashir Suleymanli from EMDS and Elnur Mammadov, the head of ICV are also being investigated on the same charges but have not been detained.

The case generated protests from the moment charges were brought against Anar Mammadli and his colleagues on October 29 2013. Statements came from the Civil Society Forum (CSF) steering committee as well as the Association of European Journalists (AEJ). Both demanded that the charges be dropped. The demands were also echoed in several petitions signed by participants at the Civil society Conference in Vilnius at the end of November 2013 as well as conferences earlier in Vilnius and in Warsaw. The petitioners and the CSF and AEJ urged that the Council of Europe postpone the chairmanship by Azerbaijan of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe which falls due in May 2014 until Azerbaijan's civil rights record improves.

After Anar Mammadli's arrest the case was raised on December 17 by William Hague, the British Foreign Minister on a visit to Baku and the next day by Richard Morningstar, the US ambassador in Baku. Two days later Daniel Baer, the US ambassador to the OSCE also raised the case. Anar Mammadli's case is being closely followed by the European Platform for Democratic Elections of which EMDS is a member as well as by the the CSF steering committee. Both condemned his arrest. Janez Lenarcic, the head of ODIHR, the OSCE's election monitoring organization was also quick to protest against the detention. On December 19th Deepak Obhrai, the parliamentary secretary to the Canadian Foreign Minister also raised the case. Amnesty International has also protested.

The next day, four members of the European parliament protested including Filip Kaczmarek, a Polish MEP who had been an observer during the October presidential election. Christopher Strasser, a Bundestag deputy who had been a rapporteur on the civil rights situation in

Azerbaijan in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) had earlier criticized the detention. The current reporters in PACE on Azerbaijan, Pedro Agramunt and Joseph Debono Grech have also expressed concern.

On December 20th Catherine Ashton, the European Commission's High Representative for Security and Foreign Affairs and Stefan Füle, the enlargement commissioner announced they were watching the case closely. On the same day a long list of Azerbaijani civil society organizations published a protest against the case and the detention of Anar Mammadli.

The protests have yet to yield results and on December 20th Azerbaijan's prosecutor general's office said in a statement that "interference in the internal affairs of Azerbaijan...is inadmissible and we regard these groundless demands as pressure on Azerbaijan's judicial and prosecuting authorities"

However six days later Ali Hazanov, the head of the political and public affairs department of the presidential administration told journalists "Azerbaijani society does not regard as meaningless and unimportant the assessments and statements on Anar Mammadli's arrest made by various international organizations and states....We are analysing the opinions expressed in these statements". "A statement will be issued about any developments", he said.