

## European Stability Initiative

### Generation Facebook on trial

*June 2011*



## Adnan, Emin and friends – voices of a new generation

### Creative dissent – videos

In June 2009, Adnan Hajizada, the creative "locomotive" of the OL! youth movement, posted a satirical video on YouTube. Titled "[Esel Heinz](#)" (German for "Donkey Heinz"), the video was based on a news story alleging that the Azerbaijani government was about to import donkeys from Germany at a cost of 41,000 dollars each. In the video Adnan, wearing a donkey costume, gives a press conference to students posing as journalists. The costume he is wearing was brought by Emin from the US.

The following month, on 8 July 2009, Adnan Hajizada and Emin Milli were arrested on trumped-up hooliganism charges. After major news outlets including the New York Times reported "Donkey" video, already popular in Azerbaijan, went viral worldwide. The video has received over 127,000 views on YouTube to date.

But even before "Donkey Heinz" and the subsequent arrest of Emin and Adnan in July 2009, Adnan had attracted the attention of Azerbaijan's young social media users. In November 2006, Adnan posted a video on YouTube, entitled "[What do you believe in?](#)" (in Azeri and Russian), which asks young people about their beliefs. In February 2011, Adnan produced [Part 2 of "What do you believe"](#).

Adnan, Emin and their friends represent a different approach to politics than the older generation of opposition politicians. For an insight read Radio Liberty's [interview<sup>\[1\]</sup>](#) (July 2009) with **Hikmet Hajizade**, Adnan's father, a political scientist and long-time member of the oppositional Musavat party. Hikmet Hajizade explains:

"Adnan thinks that the [Musavat] party represents the older generation, he has his own circle and friends and according to him, youth should define their own behaviour and their own politics ..."

Hikmet Hajizade said he did not view his son as a politician:

"No, Adnan is socially active. Is an "Interview with the "politics? No! He wanted to see democracy thriving in Azerbaijan."



*Adnan Hajizade with his parents Hikmet and Bahar*

### **"Because I am Azerbaijani"**

OL! Media also produced a series of satirical videos entitled "Because I am Azerbaijani" (in Azeri). The short video clips, depicting everyday life situations, poke fun at some aspects of Azerbaijani culture and mentality.

- "I bow my head and work" ("Bashimi ashaghi salim ishleyirem").
- "They tear down my house" ("Evimi Sokurler").
- "Don't have units" ("Kontur Yoxdu").
- "I throw the cigarette on the ground" ("Siqareti yere atiram").

### **OL! flash mobs**

Aside from producing catchy video clips, the OL movement also became known for organizing flash mobs in Azerbaijan and abroad. OL's street actions sought to bring to the fore Azerbaijan's democratic heritage and the legacy of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (1918-1920) as well as the personality of the first Republic's founder, Memmed Emin Resulzade. Photos of the flashmobs are available from OL Youth Movement's [Facebook group](#).



*ADR photo shoot, May 2009. Ruslad Asad, Adnan Hajizada, Rashad Shirin*



*ADR Flashmob on Baku's Bulvar*



*Resulzade flash mob in Baku*

### **Emin Milli – speaking out**

In 2005, Emin Milli and his friends founded the Alumni Network as a common platform uniting Azerbaijan's foreign-educated youth. In the subsequent years, Emin became known for his increasingly critical stance vis-à-vis the government. On 13 November 2008 Emin delivered a [speech](#) at an Azerbaijani forum at the House of Lords in London, calling for change in Azerbaijan and denouncing corruption, authoritarianism and conformist thinking. The speech was entitled "Manifesto for Change" (the [video](#) can be viewed on "script" that Azerbaijan was following:

"The script" fails to stop and to change the mentality of corruption, authoritarian thinking and attitudes in our families, in our organizations, in our society and in our state. It is turning our potential human gold into black stones without hope, dream and belief ...

I believe that it is time to make fundamental changes and to re-write "the script" of our future. We need a new "script" for our FUTURE deeply rooted in our ADR heritage and its spirit. The leaders of ADR, the leaders of the first recognized democratic republic in the Moslem world, started our long way to freedom from the belief in the power of ideas, in the power of dreams and in the power of education."



*Emin Milli delivering his "Manifesto for Change" speech at the House of Lords, London, November 2008*

Emin's criticism grew more pointed after the March 2009 referendum which removed presidential [Speaking](#) at Columbia University on 15 April 2009, Emin said,

"The recent referendum held on 18th of March was a culmination of the power consolidation of the ruling regime. In my opinion, the whole referendum was not legitimate and it was neither fair, nor legal. Azerbaijani authorities decided to follow the path of Chad, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Cameroon, Algeria, Belarus, Uzbekistan and Venezuela in terms of opening the constitutional doors for lifelong presidency."

Soon after their release from prison, Emin and Adnan published a thank you video addressed to all their supporters. The video can be viewed on [YouTube](#). The closing credits list individuals, organizations and media outlets to whom Emin and Adnan offer their special gratitude.

### **Free Thought University (Azad Fikir Universiteti)**

[Free Thought University \(AFU\)](#) is OL!'s biggest project aimed at organizing public lectures and discussions. The university describes itself as "an alternative education and discussion place for youth and students."

The range of topics addressed at FTU has included:

- What is liberty?
- Post-modernist Philosophy
- What is Civil Society?
- Court System in Azerbaijan
- NATO and Azerbaijan

- Importance of democracy
- Problems of Eurointegration
- The Concept of Human Rights
- Freedom of Expression
- Law, History and Literature
- Web 2.0 and Citizen Journalism

Videos of the lectures (in Azeri) are available from the [Azad Fikir website](#).



*Adnan and Emin giving a presentation at FTU soon after their release from prison, December 2010. Source: Azad Fikir Universiteti Facebook group*

## Shirband



Some disaffected Azerbaijani youth have channeled their protest into contemporary music. In recent years, several bands in Azerbaijan have made music a means of expressing their outrage at the situation in the country. One of the better known bands is **Shirband**, which wrote a rap anthem *Ol Azad* ([download](#)) for the OL! youth movement. The lyrics of the song, translated from Azeri, are as follows:

"This road is our own present to ourselves  
Our future won't come with time  
We will bring the future ourselves  
Here is our manifesto for you to know.  
Even if there are mountains and stones on our road  
We will break through them all  
With the ones dedicated to the idea  
and their breaths hungry for freedom"

Shirband also wrote a song "[Davar edim 37](#)" about Emin and Adnan's arrest, drawing a parallel between the suffocating situation in Azerbaijan and the 1937 purges in the Soviet Union. For an overview showcasing examples of protest music in Azerbaijan see Onnik Krikorian's blog entry "[Rapping for freedom and democracy in Azerbaijan \(updated\)](#)" (30 August 2009).

### Adnan and Emin's friends

Adnan and Emin are part of a larger group of Azerbaijani youth activists who belong to Baku's FACEBOOK GENERATION. Many of their friends blog about political and social issues. Many also took part in the campaign calling for Emin and Adnan's release.

**Ali Novruzov**, a widely read Azerbaijani blogger, commented on Emin and Adnan's imprisonment on his [blog](#), *In Mutatione Fortitudo*:

"If you ask my opinion - the reason why Emin and Adnan are in jail is that they refused to whitewash a prison called Azerbaijan."

Novruzov tweets under the nickname [@LJMaximus](#).



*Ali Novruzov*

**Erkin Gadirli**, born in 1972, is a lawyer and co-founder of the Alumni Network. Emin Milli credits Erkin Gadirli's influence for giving shape to his ideas about activism. Erkin saw Emin and Adnan's arrest as part of the a campaign against the new phenomenon of social media:

"Emin and Adnan have been targeted by the government, because the government could not comprehend what they were doing. The fact that Emin and Adnan had been arrested clearly showed that the preference of many young people to be engaged in networks, rather than old-styled organizations, became a visible trend.

Emin and Adnan have become icons of networking. Their arrest, as the government may think, could possibly be aimed at destroying the niche for such a format. Not being able to identify the process, the government personalized it and criminalized the persons ahead of it. The fabricated accusation of hooliganism is a typical response in such cases. No need for legal arguments here, as everything is evident."<sup>[2]</sup>



*Erkin Gadirli. Photo: irfs.az*

Erkin runs a [blog](#) (in Azeri) in which he writes about philosophy, law and politics, focusing on the application of theoretical concepts to the situation in Azerbaijan.

For insights into blogging in Azerbaijan and the legal status of bloggers, watch an [interview](#) with Erkin Gadirli and Ali Novruzov.

### **Nigar Fatali**

Many Azerbaijani activist youth have also been closely following the developments in the Middle East in early 2011. **Nigar Fatali** has been blogging extensively about Egypt. She highlighted an interview from Sandmonkey, Egypt's oppositional blogger, whom she had met at a blogging forum in Berlin in 2010. The interview "[Egyptian](#) " (1 February 2011) is available from RFE/RL.



*Nigar Fatali*

Nigar Fatali also reflects on the significance of activism for her personal life, stressing the need to take a principled stand on issues that matter. In her blog entry of 17 February 2011, entitled "[Being an Activist](#)", she wrote:

"If the last three years of my life taught me something, it would be the toughness of being firm in what I believe in and standing up for this as long as it's needed.

During [recent events in Egypt](#) many people around would ask me and my friends why we cared about it so much to write posts and tweet and facebook about it. We couldn't explain, that their victory will affect all of us. And, apparently, [it did](#).

Now that [Jabbar Savalan's case](#) is happening, I know exactly what those close to him feel. When [Emin and Adnan](#) got arrested in July 2009 it was also a start to a whole new page of my life – the one when I had to pick a side and stick to it. I did and have never regretted it. I was most certainly sure that my friends were not guilty and did not deserve what they got. It was also the time when I realized that most of the things I cared about before didn't mean a thing.

Ever since, among my oldest friends I was perceived as a "dissident" and would often be asked: "Are you still not arrested?" by the most sarcastic of them. On Facebook, where most of our activity was concentrated, many unfriended or hid me. Losing some of them, was pretty painful, but the cause was worth it. Especially, given that it introduced me to the whole new dimension – the world of activism."

## Arzu Geybullayeva



*Arzu Geybullayeva. Photo: Salon24*

Arzu Geybullayeva is a former ESI analyst and widely-read Azerbaijani blogger writing in English. Her blog is called [Flying Carpets and Broken Pipelines](#). Arzu is an outspoken critic of the Azerbaijani government and frequently writes about corruption, social problems and human rights abuses. She has also been writing for [Global Voices Online](#), an international blogging platform. As she commented on the results of the November 2010 parliamentary elections in a [blog post](#) dated 15 November 2010:

"There are things I understand about this country- corruption, lack of freedom, '0' tolerance, lack of transparency and much more. But one thing never seems to really settle - when government officials, members of the ruling party or those who consider (and don't mind) being puppets in the hands of authorities say things like democracy, free and fair elections, transparency, freedom of expression while speaking of Azerbaijan in their interviews. It strikes me every time!"

"And once again, I read something I have grown used to by now- when it suits, Azerbaijan is a European country, when it doesn't it's only a new democracy and an ex- Soviet country that cannot be compared to countries of Europe but instead should only be compared to its bordering neighbors."

In her blog, she explains her consistent criticism of the government's policies:

"I want this country to be fair and just to its people. Its economy be transparent and distributed fairly (rather than used by certain individuals for their personal purposes or stacked away in some foreign banks or simply not accessible to the country en masse). Because I simply want truth and no more hidden reality.

It might work perfectly for visitors who come to visit Azerbaijan (though that might not be the case anymore, give the recent visa changes) but not for its people. We all know that renovated facades look great (especially at night) but the actual life underneath those facades continues to rot and fade away. Azerbaijan might have a lot of money and prosper day by day (based on numerous speeches of government officials) but the corruption, lies, distrust and degrading overall approach to the people and general welfare is a sign of spoiled behavior, and definitely not something we should be proud of and pretend as if everything is just absolutely great..."

In February 2010, Arzu's blog was [featured by BBC](#) on Blogworld. Watch her [video message](#) to learn more about Arzu's blogging experience and her views on blogging in Azerbaijan.

### **The Middle East in 2011 seen from Baku**

Azerbaijani bloggers, such as Nigar Fatali and Arzu Geybullayeva, have closely followed developments in the Middle East in early 2011. In March 2011, Elnur Majidli, an independent Azerbaijani journalist living in France and the founder of the European Azerbaijanis for Democracy, created a Facebook page for a public event called [11 March - Great People's Day in Azerbaijan / 11 Mart - Böyük Xalq Günü](#). The page called for anti-government protest actions on March 11. As Majidli wrote,

"Azerbaijani people, community, individuals will do whatever it is they see in March 11 themselves. Maybe there are going to be tens and hundreds of different protests, someone will hang an Azerbaijani flag from their window, someone will wear a t-shirt, others distribute leaflets and etc."

On March 7, the number of people who clicked "attending", was nearing 3,000.



On March 4, one of the organizers of the campaign, Bakhtiyar Hadjiyev, a 2009 graduate of the Harvard Kennedy School for Government who ran as an independent candidate in the 2010 parliamentary elections, was arrested in Azerbaijan. He has become the center of an internet campaign "[Support Bakhtiyar](#)" calling for his release. There is also a Facebook group "[Bəxtiyara Dəstək Ol! - Support Bakhtiyar.](#)"



*Bakhtiyar Hajiyev at Harvard  
graduation ceremony, 2009*

On 7 March 2011, the US Embassy in Azerbaijan released a public statement on Hajiyev's detention, which said:

"We urge the Government of Azerbaijan to uphold the rule of law, ensure due process and assure Mr. Hajiyev all rights afforded to accused persons under Azerbaijani law, including access to legal counsel and to medical care, if necessary."

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<sup>[1]</sup> The original version in Azeri is available at: Azadlıq Radiosu, "[Hikmət Hacızadə oğlu haqqında...](#)", 16 July 2009

<sup>[2]</sup> His blog: <http://erkin13.blogspot.com/>

## The court case and reactions

### *Media reports and blogs*

The story of Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizada generated a great deal of media interest. Internationally renowned media outlets from [The New York Times](#) to [BBC](#) and [CNN](#) reported.

*The Collegiate*, the student newspaper of Richmond University, which Adnan had attended until 2005, published an [article](#) soon after receiving news of Adnan's arrest. The article cites one of Adnan's professors, Tanja Softic, who said of Adnan,

"I remember thinking, 'Here is the future Prime Minister of Azerbaijan,' and it certainly looks like he has begun a time-honored trajectory of a young idealist in politically corrupt system. Azerbaijan needs people like Adnan."

The story of the "donkey bloggers" also sparked creative responses, which made their way into European news outlets. For example, in November 2010, Dutch TV ran [a news story](#) on a group of young Azerbaijanis who gathered next to the Azerbaijani embassy in The Hague in protest against Emin and Adnan's imprisonment dressed in donkey costumes. They wore tags with the names of key Azerbaijani government officials.



*Expat Azerbaijanis protest in front of the Azerbaijani Embassy in The Hague.*

*Photo: Ataxan Abilov, Facebook, November 2010*



*Protester posing as Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov.  
Photo: Ataxan Abilov, Facebook, November 2010*

There is also an [interview with Emin and Adnan](#) soon after their release from prison in November 2010 available from BBC. Here the two describe their thoughts about their arrest and imprisonment and talk about the history of the creation of the "Donkey Video". ["Freed Azerbaijani Blogger Says Year Without Internet Was "Torture" done immediately after Emin Milli's release.](#)

Some of the most detailed English-language reporting on the case was provided by [Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty](#). Azerbaijani state-controlled media largely neglected the case, presenting it as an instance of mere hooliganism. Most of the news about the court proceedings, which were closed to the general public, were relayed through blog posts and tweets from Emin and Adnan's friends and supporters. Some notable blogs that followed the developments after Emin and Adnan's arrest include Ali Novruzov's [In Mutatione Fortitudo](#) and Arzu Geybullayeva's [Flying Carpets and Broken Pipelines](#).

An interesting attempt to put Emin and Adnan's case into a broader framework of post-Soviet dissent is an article by Amanda Rivkin, an independent reporter, under the title "[Shown Trial: Emin Milli and the Future of Azerbaijan](#)" (26 November 2010).

### **International Reactions (NGOs and governments)**

Soon after Emin and Adnan's arrest, Erkin Gadirli, a legal expert and co-ordinator of the Youth Right Defence Committee launched a public campaign. The goal was to collect signatures in support of the young men and to demand from the Azerbaijani government to respect Emin's and Adnan's rights.<sup>[1]</sup>

Following Emin and Adnan's sentencing on 11 November 2009, the number of statements and condemnations exploded: from the [US Department of State](#), the [Secretary-General of the Council of Europe Thorbjørn Jagland](#) and the [OSCE Representative for Freedom of the Media Miklós Haraszti](#).

In November 2009, Amnesty International [officially classified the jailed activists as "prisoners of conscience"](#).

Criticism continued in 2010: a [PACE \(Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe\) Declaration of 31 May 2010 on the functioning of democratic institutions in Azerbaijan](#) condemns "the arrests, intimidation and harassment of journalists" and specifically mentions [report](#) on Azerbaijan authored by Thomas Hammerberg, the Human Rights Commissioner, noted:

"The Commissioner noted that in certain instances resort has been made to various provisions in the Criminal Code - such as incitement to racial, national and religious hatred, hooliganism, tax evasion, drug possession and terrorism – to prosecute journalists. As a result, certain journalists or other persons who have expressed critical views have been targeted. This appeared to be the case in the trial against the two youth "(p. 2)

The Commissioner called for the "immediate release" of the two youth activists.

During a bilateral meeting with President Aliyev on 24 September, in the margins of the UN General Assembly, US President Barack Obama [called on Aliyev to release the imprisoned bloggers](#).

### **The Internet campaign**

The young activists had an online following, and after their arrest, a campaign for their release was set up by other activists.

Media freedom NGO *Reporters without Borders* hosted a special blog titled "[Support Adnan and Emin](#)."

Another website set up in support of Emin and Adnan is [AdnanEmin.com](#).

There were also numerous websites where it was possible to submit a petition to the Azerbaijani government to free Emin and Adnan. One, launched by OL activist Vugar Salamli, was called [Video Petition](#): young people from around world posted their own video messages calling for Adnan and Emin's release.

### **The response of Azerbaijan's government**

Faced with strong international criticism, the Azerbaijani government protested what it called a "politicisation" of the case. In the official comments to the Council of Europe's June 2010 report (see pp. 22ff), the Azerbaijani Government denied that the trial was unfair, insisting that the court proceedings were conducted in:

"an objective and impartial manner and through a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial court, as prescribed in Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)."

The government's report also accused Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade of "attempt[ing] to circumvent justice and distract the public opinion from the crimes they had committed" and of trying to link the incident "to their public activities and political views." (pp. 24-25).

For an example of the Azerbaijani government's official rhetoric concerning Emin and Adnan's case [watch a YouTube video of Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov's Q&A session](#) at Columbia University in New York in September 2009. When a woman who identified herself as working for the Human Rights Watch asked (at 3:15) how the Azerbaijani government can ensure a fair trial for the young men, Mammadyarov responded that the right to a fair trial is ingrained in the Azerbaijani Constitution and that suggestions of possible violations of this right constitute "a prejudgment." Later he said that Azerbaijan, as a member of such international organisations as the OSCE; the Council of Europe and the UN, was already fulfilling all its democratic commitments.

### **Further reading**

- ESI: [The Emin-Adnan trial and the future of Azerbaijani democracy](#)

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<sup>[1]</sup> Civil Society Defense Committee, "[Youth Right Defense Committee Conducts Forum in Connection with Bloggers' Arrest](#)", 25 July 2009.

## Repression in Azerbaijan



*Two men with police assistance beat and drag away a man on Azadliq Square in Baku (2003).  
Photo: Peter Bouckaert/Human Rights Watch*

"Donkey-gate" was by no means a singular occurrence in Azerbaijan and Emin and Adnan were not the first youth activists to be put in jail.

In recent years, a number of journalists have been harassed, imprisoned or even murdered in Azerbaijan. One of the best reports on media freedom in Azerbaijan is by Human Rights Watch, titled ["Beaten, Blacklisted and Behind Bars: The Vanishing Space for Freedom of Expression in Azerbaijan"](#) (October 2010). The report details Azerbaijan's media landscape and documents cases of violence against and harassment of journalists.

"In a number of cases, government officials have brought other criminal charges against journalists to silence (critical journalists). For example, the authorities used terrorism, incitement to racial, national and religious hatred, as well as tax evasion charges to prosecute the outspoken government critic Eynulla Fatullayev, founder and editor of the two most popular newspapers in Azerbaijan. Fatullayev has been in prison since 2007, serving an eight-and-half-year sentence. In two other cases Ganimed Zahidov, an outspoken editor, and Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade, young activists who criticized government policies through social media sites were jailed on bogus hooliganism charges after entrapment in staged fights." (p. 2).

A good resource is also Freedom House's annual *Nations in Transit* and *Freedom in the World* reports. [The Freedom House Nations in Transit report of 2010 for Azerbaijan](#) rates Azerbaijan in the "independent media" category with 6.75 out of 7, with 7 being the lowest possible rating. This is the same figure as for 2009. Since 1999 when Azerbaijan was included in the index, its score has either worsened or stayed the same with the exception of 2002 when there was a 0.25 point improvement.

Amnesty International has also monitored the situation with regard to the freedom of expression. Its February 2008 report "[Azerbaijan: Mixed Messages on Freedom Expression](#)" contains profiles of several journalists that are believed to be in prison in Azerbaijan for political reasons. The report blames the government for the deteriorating situation:

"The government of Azerbaijan is engaged in concerted efforts to limit the space for freedom of expression in the country. Senior government officials frequently bring criminal defamation and other charges against journalists and human rights defenders criticizing the government. Dozens of journalists have been prosecuted and imprisoned or fined. Police carry out physical attacks on journalists with impunity, deliberately interfering with their efforts to investigate a range of issues of public interest." (p. 2).

Some of the most prominent recent victims of this deteriorating situation are the following:

### **Elmar Huseynov**



*Elmar Huseynov's funeral*

On 2 March 2005, Elmar Huseynov was shot dead in front of his house in Baku in what appeared to be a contract killing. The case attracted domestic and international attention.<sup>[1]</sup> Huseynov's funeral was attended by some 10,000 people in Baku.

Elmar Huseynov was born in 1967 and became an award-winning investigative journalist and editor-in-chief of the oppositional Russian-language weekly *Monitor*. He became known for his criticism of President Ilham Aliyev's administration and for articles exposing corruption within government ranks. For years prior to his murder, Huseynov was repeatedly slapped with heavy fines for "libel and defamation" of high-ranking government officials, including the president and the defence minister. In 2001, he was sentenced to six months in prison for defamation of Baku Mayor Hadjabala Abutalibov. His killer has not yet been found.<sup>[2]</sup> The prosecution identified two individuals, Georgians of Azeri descent, as prime suspects, yet no

arrests have been made. Azeri authorities claim that Georgia has refused to extradite the suspects, while Georgian authorities claim that no formal request has been made.<sup>[3]</sup>

### **Ruslan Bashirli**



*Ruslan Bashirli*

On 3 August 2005, 27-year-old Bashirli was arrested on charges of plotting a government coup at the instigation of Armenian secret services. On 12 July 2006 Bashirli was sentenced to seven years in prison in a trial where there were no defence lawyers or representatives of the media. He is still in prison (Feb 2011).

Ruslan Bashirli is a political youth activist and was the leader of the Yeni Fikir (New Idea) movement, established in 2004 as the youth wing of the Popular Front party. The movement campaigned for free and fair elections in the run-up to the November 2005 parliamentary ballot. His arrest in summer 2005 was based on a videotape which showed Ruslan Bashirli taking 2,000 USD in cash from a person whom Azerbaijani intelligence alleged was an Armenian agent. The recording had been allegedly made at an event in Tbilisi on 28-29 July where Bashirli had travelled to meet with democracy activists. Allegedly, Bashirli was supposed to receive another 20,000 USD in case the coup succeeded. Bashirli later confessed that he was acting at the request of the Washington-based National Democratic Institute and that Popular Front leader Ali Kerimli had instructed this transaction in preparation for a revolution and so on. Government-controlled television repeatedly ran the video showing Bashirli accepting the money. In September 2005 two deputy chairmen of Yeni Fikir were arrested as well, also on the charges of plotting a coup. His deputies also received prison sentences of four years and five years respectively.<sup>[4]</sup>

## Genimet Zahidov (Ganimat Zahid)



*Genimet Zahidov*

Genimet Zahidov is the former editor-in-chief of the major oppositional daily *Azadliq* and the author of many government-critical articles. In November 2007, he was arrested on hooliganism charges. He had allegedly insulted a female passer-by in the street and then injured the man accompanying her. During the trial Zahidov denied all charges. In March 2008, Zahidov was sentenced to four years in. In March 2010, Genimet was granted parole on presidential orders.

Amnesty International spoke of "a concerted attempt on the part of the Azerbaijani authorities to silence a critical opposition voice."<sup>[5]</sup> The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media declared that "a pattern of repression as damaging as actual criminalisation of journalism continues."<sup>[6]</sup>

Genimet is the brother of another oppositional journalist, Sakid Zakhidov, also of the *Azadliq* newspaper. The official website of the *Azadliq* newspaper (available in Azeri and English) is at [www.azadliq.info](http://www.azadliq.info).

## Mirza Sakit (Sakit Zahidov)



*Mirza Sakit. Photo: irfs.az*

Sakit Zahidov, the brother of Ganimat Zahidov, is a well-known journalist, poet and satirist for the opposition newspaper *Azadliq*. He was arrested in June 2006 on heroin possession charges and sentenced in January 2007 to three years in prison. Zahidov maintains that the drugs were planted on him.

Amnesty International did not consider Zahidov's trial fair.<sup>[7]</sup> The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe drew special attention to Sakit Zahidov's case, using it as evidence for the deteriorating media situation in Azerbaijan.<sup>[8]</sup> Sakit Zahidov was granted amnesty and released in April 2009.

## Eynulla Fatullayev



*Eynulla Fatullayev*

Eynulla Fatullayev, born in 1976, is an Azerbaijani journalist who was imprisoned from 2007 to 2011. In April 2007 Fatullayev was arrested for defaming "the Azerbaijani nation" due to an Internet forum posting attributed to him by prosecutors. The author of this posting claimed that the Khojaly massacre during the war over Nagorno Karabakh in February 1992 was committed by Azerbaijani forces. Although Fatullayev denied having written the entry, he was sentenced to two-and-a-half years in prison. In July 2007, the Ministry of National Security brought additional charges – of threat of terrorism and inciting ethnic and religious hatred – in connection with Fatullayev's article which criticised the government's "anti-Iranian" foreign policy stance.<sup>[9]</sup> Finally, in September 2007 Fatullayev was charged with tax evasion. Fatullayev is currently serving a combined sentence of 8.5 years. In April 2010, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the journalist must be granted immediate release and a substantial monetary compensation.<sup>[10]</sup> The Azerbaijani authorities failed to comply with the ruling. Instead in July 2010, Fatullayev was sentenced again, for an additional 2.5 years on drug possession charges. The prison authorities claimed they found drugs on the journalist.

Amnesty International declared Fatullayev to be a prisoner of conscience.<sup>[11]</sup> For Reporters without Borders, there was little doubt that Fatullayev has been put behind bars because of "his journalist activity -- because he is an outspoken critic of President [Ilham] Aliyev and his government."<sup>[12]</sup> He used to be the editor-in-chief of the independent Russian-language weekly *Realny Azerbaijan*, as well as of the Azeri-language daily *Gündelik Azerbaijan*. Both publications, which no longer exist, were known for their critical views. Fatullayev had also been a journalist at the oppositional weekly *Monitor*. As a result of his reporting, Fatullayev

has been repeatedly convicted of defamation, including of government ministers, and ordered to pay high fines. Among his most controversial articles was the "Karabakh Diary"<sup>[13]</sup> published in April 2005 in *Realny Azerbaijan*. In the article Fatullayev described his recent trip to the occupied territories here and challenged some aspects of the official Azerbaijani version of the Khojaly massacre, believed to be largest massacre committed during this conflict with 600 civilians killed by Armenian forces. In his article, Fatullayev wrote that he had spoken with surviving IDPs from Khojaly who allegedly said that the Armenian forces had warned them of the upcoming assault on the town and opened a "humanitarian corridor," which IDP's successfully used to escape.<sup>[14]</sup>



*Amnesty International poster: Free Eynulla Fatullayev!*

On 26 May, after having spent four years in prison, Fatullayev was unexpectedly released under a presidential pardon decree. The release came less than two weeks after Azerbaijan's victory in the Eurovision Song Contest 2011, which put the country into the international media spotlight, and two days after a "mass tweet" campaign in Fatullayev's support organized by Amnesty International UK.

## Adnan Hajizade



*Adnan Hajizade with his parents Hikmet and Bahar*

In July 2009, **Adnan Hajizade** was arrested on hooliganism charges. In November 2009, Adnan was sentenced to 24 months in prison. After several failed appeals, the remainder of this sentence was suspended and he was released on parole on 18 November 2010.

Adnan Hajizade was born in 1983 in Baku. Adnan's father, Hikmet Hajizade, is a prominent opposition figure in Azerbaijan. He was one of the leaders of the Azerbaijani Popular Front independence movement in the late 1980s. Adnan went twice to the US on US government fellowships. He attended high school in the US and obtained a Bachelor degree in political science from Richmond University in 2005, after which he returned to Azerbaijan. In Azerbaijan, he had studied at the private Khazar University in Baku. He did his military service in Azerbaijan and afterwards worked in the communications department at British Petroleum Azerbaijan. In 2006, Adnan became one of the founders of the OI! (To be) youth movement, which promotes youth empowerment and independent thinking. Adnan headed OI's media department, producing a number of videos. The most famous – which may have brought Adnan behind bars – is the "Esel Heinz video" (German for "Donkey Heinz video").

## Emin Milli



*Emin Milli*

Emin was arrested with his friend Adnan Hajizade in July 2009 on fabricated hooliganism charges. Sentenced to 30 months in prison in November 2009, Emin's sentence was suspended and he was released on parole on 19 November 2010, one day after Adnan.

Emin Abdullayev was born in 1979 in Baku. Emin Milli is his pen name and the name by which he is known widely. Emin studied law at Baku State University in Azerbaijan and at Saarbrücken University's European Law School in Germany. He worked for a number of international organisations in Azerbaijan, including the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES). He also advised the Council of Europe on matters related to political prisoners in Azerbaijan and was a political analyst for the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission in Azerbaijan.<sup>[15]</sup> In 2005, Emin co-founded the Alumni Network (AN), a loose organisation that unites mostly foreign-educated Azerbaijanis and promotes democratic values. He was also involved in the creation of the Forum for Azerbaijani Students in Europe (FASE), launched in 2006 in Brussels to bring together young expatriate Azerbaijanis. Emin later became increasingly critical of the Azerbaijani authorities.

After a March 2009 constitutional referendum which lifted limits on the number of presidential terms Emin gave a number of critical speeches at the House of Lords in London in November 2008 and at Columbia University in April 2009.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Then Secretary General of the Council of Europe Terry Davis said in a statement: "I am shocked by the brutal murder of Elmar Huseynov, which has all the hallmarks of a contract killing and I condemn it in strongest terms." Human Rights House, "[Remembering a Brave Journalist in Azerbaijan](#)", 2 March 2010.

<sup>[2]</sup> Reporters without Borders, "[Murder of Elmar Huseynov. The investigation should not stop at finding the killers](#)", Investigative report, May 2005, p. 7

<sup>[3]</sup> "[Five Years Later, Elmar Husseynov's Murder Goes Unsolved](#)", *RFE/RL*, 2 March 2010.

<sup>[4]</sup> Shahin Abbasov and Khadija Ismailova, "[Verdict against Azerbaijan youth activists raises international concern](#)", *EurasiaNet*, 18 July 2006

<sup>[5]</sup> Amnesty International, Public Statement, "[Azerbaijan: Persecution of opposition newspaper continues unabated](#)", 20 March 2008.

<sup>[6]</sup> AzeriReport, "[Last Words of Ganimat Zahid](#)".

<sup>[7]</sup> Amnesty International, "[Well-known satirist Sakit Zahidov imprisoned following an unfair trial with questionable evidence](#)", 24 January 2007.

<sup>[8]</sup> PACE, Resolution 1545 (2007), "[Honouring of obligations and commitments by Azerbaijan](#)", 16 April 2007.

<sup>[9]</sup> For the original text of the article in Russian, see IFEX; [www.ifex.org/download/en/EynullaFatullayevarticle\\_Rus.doc](http://www.ifex.org/download/en/EynullaFatullayevarticle_Rus.doc).

<sup>[10]</sup> ECHR, "[Case of Fatullayev v. Azerbaijan \(Application no. 40984/07\)](#)", Judgment, 22 April 2010, pp. 52-53.

<sup>[11]</sup> Amnesty International, "[Azerbaijan: Eynulla Fatullayev](#)".

<sup>[12]</sup> RFE/RL, "[Jailed Azerbaijani Journalist Receives Third Sentence](#)", 6 July 2010.

<sup>[13]</sup> "[Karabakh Diary](#)" (in Russian).

<sup>[14]</sup> For an English translation of the relevant excerpt of the article, see ECHR, "[Case of Fatullayev v. Azerbaijan \(Application no. 40984/07\)](#)", Judgment, 22 April 2010, pp. 3-4.

<sup>[15]</sup> "[Emin Milli's Bio](#)", AdnanEmin blog.

## The legacy of dissent



*Vaclav Havel speaking at the European Parliament on 12 November 2009.  
Photo: European Parliament*

Vaclav Havel, the dissident, playwright and later president of the Czech Republic (1993-2003) described the concept of "dissidents" in his 1984 essay "[Politics and Conscience](#)". There Havel argued that the impact of dissidents in authoritarian societies may be difficult to measure precisely and it usually has a long-term nature, yet he stressed that even a single person daring to speak the truth may have a greater influence than a well-organized state propaganda apparatus:

"I am convinced that what is called 'dissent' in the Soviet bloc is a specific modern experience, the experience of life at the very ramparts of dehumanized power. As such, that 'dissent' has the opportunity and even the duty to reflect on this experience, to testify to it and to pass it on to those fortunate enough not to have to undergo it. Thus we too have a certain opportunity to help in some ways those who help us, to help them in our deeply shared interest, in the interest of mankind.

One such fundamental experience, which I called 'anti-political politics', is possible and can be effective, even though by its very nature it cannot calculate its effect beforehand. That effect, to be sure, is of a wholly different nature from what the West considers political success. It is hidden, indirect, long term and hard to measure; often it exists only in the invisible realm of social consciousness, conscience and subconsciousness and it can be almost impossible to determine what value it assumed therein and to what extent, if any, it contributes to shaping social development. It is, however, becoming evident—and I think that is an experience of an essential and universal importance—that a single, seemingly powerless person who dares to cry out the word of truth and to stand behind it with all his person and all his life, ready to pay

a high price, has, surprisingly, greater power, though formally disfranchised, than do thousands of anonymous voters."

Baku's facebook generation is aware of its historic predecessors. In December 2010 Emin Milli told ESI that his activism was initially intuitive but that "now that I have read books, I see that this very much resembles the way it has been done in many other places." In an e-mail sent to friends soon after his release, Emin listed the books he had read in prison and which had most impressed him: top of the list was Vaclav Havel's *Power of the Powerless*, which he described as "a must-read." Emin drew attention to one quote in particular:

"In the post-totalitarian system the line of conflict runs de facto through EACH PERSON, for everyone in his own way is both a victim and a supporter of the system."

Can today's situation in Azerbaijan be likened to the events presaging tension and social changes in Eastern Europe, as described by Havel in his 1978 essay ["The Power of the Powerless"](#)?

"A specter is haunting Eastern Europe: the specter of what in the West is called "dissent." This specter has not appeared out of thin air. It is a natural and inevitable consequence of the present historical phase of the system it is haunting.

It was born at a time when this system, for a thousand reasons, can no longer base itself on the unadulterated, brutal, and arbitrary application of power, eliminating all expressions of nonconformity. What is more, the system has become so ossified politically that there is practically no way for such nonconformity to be implemented within its official structures."

In the 1980s Havel had become one of the most prominent members of the dissident movement [Charter 77](#), founded by Czechoslovak intellectuals to remind the communist government in Prague of human rights commitments it had entered into but which it failed to observe. The Charter's original declaration in 1977 described it as "a free, informal, open community of people of different convictions, different faiths, and different professions" standing up for the respect of human rights. "Responsibility for the observance of civil rights in the country naturally falls, in the first place, on the political and state power. But not on it alone," wrote the Charter's authors, including Vaclav

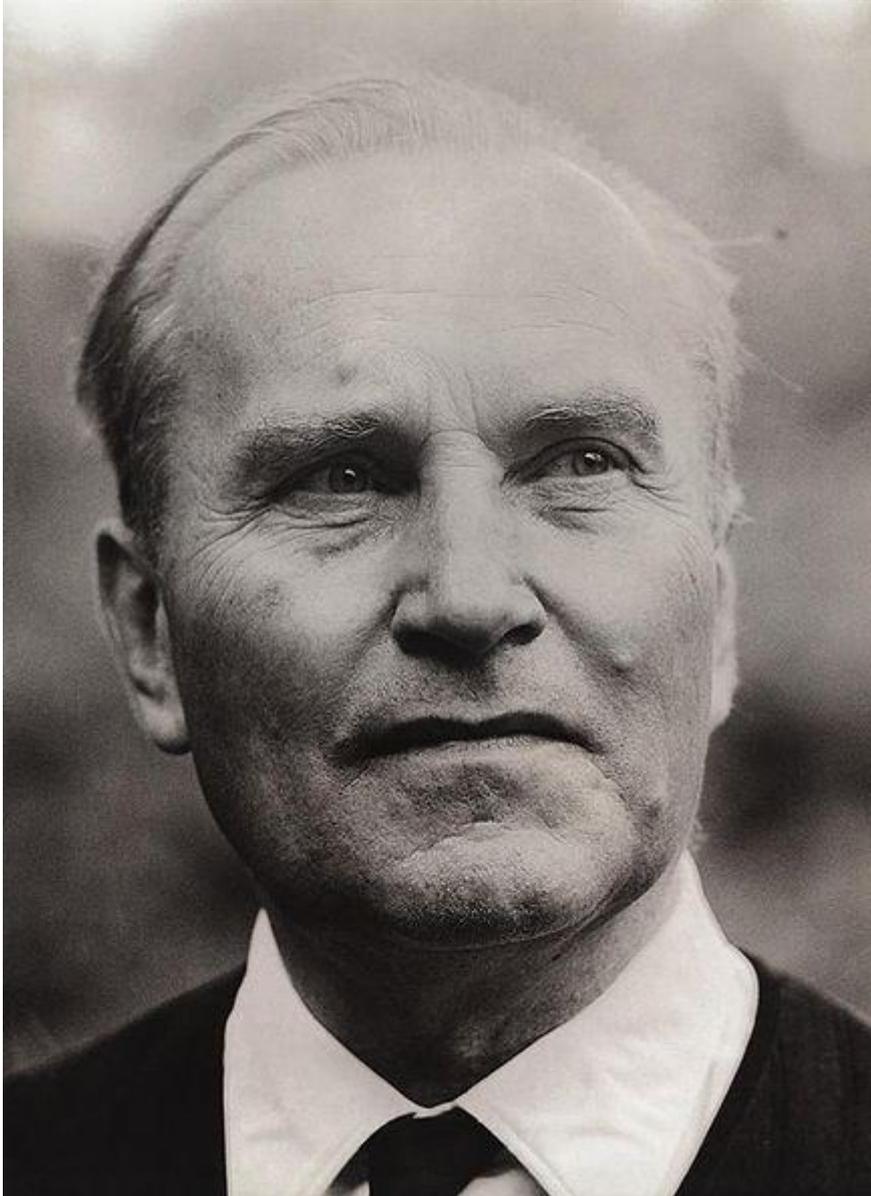
"Each and every one of us has a share of responsibility for the general situation and thus, too, for the observance of the pacts which have been enacted and are binding not only for the government but for all citizens."



*Timothy Garton Ash. Photo: Wikimedia Commons*

Writing in the early 1980s, British historian Timothy Garton Ash, a chronicler of the Eastern European dissident movement, described communist Czechoslovakia as

"a lake permanently covered by a thick layer of ice. On the surface nothing moves. But under the ice, among the philosopher-labourers, the window-cleaning journalists, and nightwatchman-monks –here things are on the move."



*Jan Patočka, Czech philosopher and one of the founders of Charter 77.  
Photo: Wikimedia Commons*

In the end it was also a normative revolution which brought down Soviet communism in Eastern Europe. East European dissidents regularly referred to the human rights principles in the [Helsinki Final Act](#), which their own governments had signed in 1975. One of the demands of Polish strikers in 1980 was that the government hand out and distribute 50,000 copies of the Helsinki Final Act. There were no bloggers then, no Facebook and no Twitter, but the struggle for full freedom of expression was as central then as now.



*Adam Michnik as a young man.  
Photo: University of Warsaw Archives*

In 1985 Adam Michnik wrote his [letter from the Gdansk Prison](#), outlining the dilemmas facing Poland's dissidents:

“But what does it mean "to rule according to the old ways"? It means to hope that the society is or will soon become completely terrorized and thus wholly molded by the state. Changing this sort of rule means to accept the autonomy of society not as a passing inconvenience but as an integral part of social reality. This is the road to dialogue and compromise.

Is this realistic? Is a compromise between the persecutor and his victim possible? Aren't our "fundamentalists" correct in maintaining that no democratic evolution is possible without a prior, total destruction of the Communist system and, therefore, the only sensible program of action must reject hopes for a future compromise with the

ruling group and opt instead for the integral idea of independence, i.e., full independence from the Soviet Union and complete removal of Communists from power? This is the central dilemma of the Polish opposition movement."

He also made a strong argument for normative revolutions as the key to regime change:

"No one in Poland is able to prove today that violence will help us to dislodge Soviet troops from Poland and to remove Communists from power. The USSR has such enormous military power that confrontation is simply unthinkable. In other words: we have no guns. Napoleon, upon hearing a similar reply, gave up on pursuing further questions. However, Napoleon was above all interested in military victories, and not in building democratic, pluralistic societies. We, by contrast, cannot leave it at that.

In our reasoning pragmatism is inseparably intertwined with idealism. Taught by history, we suspect that by using force to storm the Bastilles of old we shall unwittingly build new ones. It is true that social change is almost always accompanied by force. But it is not true to say that social change is merely an effect of the violent collision of various forces. Social changes follow above all from a confrontation of different moralities and visions of social order. Before the violence of rulers clashes with the violence of their subjects, values and systems of ethics clash inside human minds. Only when the old ideas of the rulers lose this moral duel will the subjects reach for force—sometimes."

Charter 77 and the democratic experience of Central and Eastern European countries continue to inspire democracy activists worldwide, from Belarus to Poland, from Azerbaijan to China. In 2008, Chinese dissidents published [Charter 08](#). Charter 08 proclaims the same fundamental principles: freedom, human rights, equality, republicanism, democracy, and constitutional rule. As the authors state, the time for change has come:

"Authoritarianism is in general decline throughout the world; in China, too, the era of emperors and overlords is on the way out. The time is arriving everywhere for citizens to be masters of states. For China the path that leads out of our current predicament is to divest ourselves of the authoritarian notion of reliance on an "enlightened overlord" or an "honest official" and to turn instead toward a system of liberties, democracy, and the rule of law, and toward fostering the consciousness of modern citizens who see rights as fundamental and participation as a duty."



*Lech Walesa. Photo: Solidarnosc*

"One of the central freedoms at stake was freedom of expression (a direct corollary of the Helsinki Agreement). Without this basic freedom, human life becomes meaningless; and once the truth of this hit me, it became part of my whole way of thinking."

Lech Walesa