

Release Bahruz Samadov & Igbal Abilov!

The international student movement stands in full solidarity with Azerbaijani students and scholars who are unjustly being targeted for their academic engagement.

The situation of academia and human rights in Azerbaijan has deteriorated sharply amidst a broader societal crackdown. According to the [Academic Freedom Index](#), Azerbaijan consistently finds itself in the bottom 10 percent globally in terms of preserving academic freedom. The wrongful imprisonment of two academics over the last two years is not only another stepping stone in Azerbaijan's quick and worrisome path away from freedom and justice – it is an escalation in its longstanding fight against democratic values and civil rights. **An escalation that the student movement, that Europe, cannot ignore.**

Igbal Abilov, scholar and lecturer at the Belarusian State University in the field of history and ethnography specializing in ethnic minorities in the South Caucasus and ethnic Talysh, was first detained in July of 2024. Abilov's research on ethnic minorities was misconstrued as an act of high treason, foreign-instructed state appeals, and incitement of ethnic hatred and he was linked to Armenia's national security services – without substantial evidence to support these accusations¹. As primary evidence for his charges, his brief academic exchange with Professor Garnik Asatrian (an Armenian professor specializing in Talysh studies) was

¹<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/10/azerbaijan-un-experts-urge-release-researchers-igbal-abilov-and-bahruz>

identified, turning routine scholarly exchange into conspiracy. In May of 2025 he was found guilty of treason and sentenced to 18 years in prison.

Bahrüz Samadov, political science PhD student at the Charles University of Prague as well as researcher and freelance political analyst, was detained in August of 2024 while visiting his family in Azerbaijan on summer break on suspected illegal drug activities – an accusation that is commonly used in the task of silencing critics. The charges were soon after changed to high treason on the grounds of providing sensitive information to Armenia – an accusation that can be directly linked to Samadov’s research on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In June of 2025 Samadov was sentenced to 15 years in prison and in December of the same year was moved into a maximum security prison after demanding evidence on the court’s violations and lack of due process. The decision to move him has prompted Samadov to fear for his life, warning in an appeal shared from prison that he is concerned “the state plans to end my life”². Since February of 2026 Samadov has been on an indefinite hunger strike.

The European Students’ Union (ESU) demands the immediate and unconditional release of both Iqbal Abilov and Bahrüz Samadov. Pending this action, ESU asks to ensure their well-being and grant them access to legal counsel and contact with their families. The unjust and escalated treatment of the two scholars on the basis of their academic research and criticisms of the Azerbaijani government constitutes a direct attack on academic freedom and freedom of expression and must be condemned fully.

ESU joins the many international voices³ denouncing the sentencing of the two political prisoners as well as all other political prisoners in Azerbaijan and expressing deep concerns with the developments in the country, the treatment of dissenting political and academic views, and the misuse of national security provisions, and calls on Azerbaijan to adhere to international human rights.

² <https://oc-media.org/the-state-plans-to-end-my-life-bahrüz-samadov-calls-for-solidarity-in-prison-letter/>

³ [Resolution by the European Parliament](#) (December 16, 2025), [Scholars at Risk Letter to Azerbaijani authorities \(Bahrüz Samadov\)](#) (April 29, 2026), [Statement by the Dean of the Faculty of Social Science Charles University on the Sentencing of PhD Student Bahrüz Samadov](#) (June 23, 2025), [Press Release of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights](#) (October 15, 2025), [Joint written statement* submitted by Institute for Reporters’ Freedom and Safety, Institute for Human Rights, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status](#) (June 2, 2025)

Azerbaijan must ensure that students and scholars can follow their academic careers and research without fear of repercussions and repression, in a safe environment free from intimidation that empowers and enables discourse, a space that does not punish critical voices. Azerbaijan must strengthen instead of abolish lawful practices and human rights and must finally return back to academic freedom.

ESU emphasized that Europe also carries a responsibility to act. European countries cannot remain silent in the face of these violations. They must uphold their commitment to democratic values, human rights, and academic freedom by publicly condemning the repression in Azerbaijan and by taking concrete action to support students and scholars. **Silence and inaction will only enable further repression.**

If you want to take action against the unjust treatment of Bahruz Samadov and Iqbal Abilov, SAR is asking for letters, emails and faxes towards the Azerbaijani government for the reversal of the charges against both academics, their immediate release and the assurance of their well-being. You can send a letter for Bahruz Samadov [here](#) and a letter for Iqbal Abilov [here](#).