

Table of Contents

- ***[The case of Azerbaijanis citizens in Iran](#)***
- ***[UN rights experts 'deeply alarmed' at continuing executions of Iran protesters](#)***
- ***[European Parliament calls for more sanctions against Iranian regime](#)***
- ***[Iranian journalists face long prison terms, lashes, and harsh restrictions over protest coverage](#)***
- ***[Iran condemned for executing two men over alleged crimes during protests](#)***

The case of Azerbaijanis citizens in Iran

By **Guest Contributor - Opinion**

The EU should take a stronger stand against the Ayatollah regime repression of Human Rights and meddling in the South Caucasus, writes Maurizio Geri.

[EU Reporter](#) (22.06.2023) - The relationship between Azerbaijan and Iran is at its worst since long time. For the [second time](#) in just months, Baku has warned its citizens against traveling to Iran. Following the [January](#) terrorist attack in the Azerbaijani embassy in Iran there has been a mutual expulsion of some diplomatic personnel and the suspension of Azerbaijan's embassy operation. In [February](#), the Azerbaijani authorities detained nearly 40 people on suspicion of spying for Iran. In [March](#) an anti-Iranian member of Parliament was wounded in Baku, with the [involvement](#) of the Islamic Republic in an attempt to kill him. Some scholars even wonder about a risk of a [war](#) between the two countries. Actually, the President of Azerbaijan is one of the few heads of state in the world willing to [call out](#) Iran's "state-sponsored terrorism". But why Iran is so interested in destabilize Azerbaijan?

Azerbaijan is in a delicate situation as it is subject of increasing interest by the West as a useful energetic hub, for the sake of the very much needed broad strategic diversification to disenfranchise Moscow. In the competitive global security landscape represented by both [Russian](#) and [Chinese](#) attempts of domination in the former Soviet stans, Azerbaijan is becoming an important geopolitical asset for the EU to link Europe to the Caspian basin and Central Asia region, and contain in these way the attempt of the two Asian empires to reinforce their spheres of influence and dominance.

Azerbaijan is also still in a state of ceasefire with Armenia, the ally of Russia and Iran that, as recently [revealed](#), play a pivotal role by serving as a central hub for supplying sanctioned goods to Russia, including military equipment helping in the aggression to Ukraine.

Furthermore, the Azeri proposal to have the Zangezur corridor to bypass Armenia and connect directly to Turkey, is strongly opposed by Armenia through Iranian backing, as Iran doesn't want to be cut out of the land connection to Armenia and so Russia. Iran's opening of its consulate in [Kapan](#) recently, clearly shows how Iran wants to increase its support for Yerevan's regional aspirations, which are de facto contrary to the West's objectives in the region. But Iran wants to expand its sphere of influence in the South Caucasus even through Azerbaijan. Actually, a significant segment of the Azerbaijani

population is Shi'a and so Iran considers Azerbaijan as its backyard for the expansion of the influence of its brand of Shi'ism in the region.

Some [scholars](#) argues that the reason of the increasing conflict is that Azerbaijan is also a strong ally of Israel, which is a guarantee to the broad Western security compact in the region but a threat to Iran. But more than this there is a deep reason of the Iranian hostility to Azerbaijan, that started already since 1991 Azerbaijani independence: almost a third of the population of Iran is comprised of ethnic Azerbaijanis, and a strong secular Azerbaijan on a Western trajectory would threaten the stability of the Ayatollah regime, as an inspiration for its own ethnic Azerbaijani community, already protesting for greater rights.

Last month actually in Berlin, I assisted to the South Azerbaijani diaspora in Germany demonstrating for Human Rights, education rights and more freedom in Iran, where the Azeri minority is repressed. Standing amid this crowd – primarily ethnic Azerbaijanis mobilized from all over Europe – I discover that the rally was formally related to the Khordad event, a national rebellion of South Azerbaijani that happened in 2006 after a racist caricature scandal in Iran. After this incident, according to claims, over 5,000 activists were detained and tortured. Around 150 of them were either murdered or went missing (by being burnt alive or thrown into Lake Urmia). Many people eventually became disabled.

South Azerbaijanis have long been subject to prejudicial treatment and ethnic discrimination by the Iranian authorities, both the pre-revolutionary Pahlavi dynasty and the incumbent theocratic regime. Typically viewed as second-class citizens, the ethnic Azerbaijanis have endured assimilation policies, demeaning stereotypes, and forced relocation for decades. There are several ways that the Southern Azerbaijani people's language, culture, and legacy are being repressed today. Although the Iranian legislation explicitly grants minorities the freedom to speak their own language, the central government actually forbids the use of Azerbaijani in schools and colleges. The continual Persianization of Southern Azerbaijani toponyms is another source of concern within this intentional cultural appropriation while Azerbaijani cultural and historical heritage is not only being ignored but, in some cases, may physically be destroyed: it was the case Tabriz's Ark Castle, which was demolished by bombing to create way for new construction.

The political dimension of the Southern Azerbaijani movement is, too, subject to the repressions of the state apparatus in Iran. International organizations, such as Amnesty International, have documented how the Iranian government frequently arrests large numbers of people during Azerbaijani demonstrations and cultural events. Numerous Azerbaijani activists are imprisoned, subjected to torture, and/or pushed into exile each year as a result of their efforts to advance the political and cultural rights of the Southern Azerbaijanis.

Things have gotten worse for this ethnic group since the flare-up of the Mahsa Amini protests in September 2022. Demonstrations against obligatory hijab laws eventually voiced political, social and economic demands as well with some demanding the abolition of the Islamic Republic (such as "Freedom, Justice, and National Government" slogans). The Iranian authorities, in their turn, mobilized all their security forces to quell the demonstrations, also in the Southern Azerbaijani provinces. The crackdown was quite brutal as reflected in a comprehensive report presented by a group of experts: according to the report, the number of detainees in Tabriz, the major city in South Azerbaijan, "was more than 1700 protestors in the first two weeks of the protests alone". Furthermore, the governmental raids between September and December 2022 led to the shooting of at least twenty-four victims by the security forces and the injury of hundreds of

demonstrators in the Azerbaijan region of Iran. At least 6 ethnic Azerbaijanis were sentenced to death.

A few specific cases are particularly momentous. In September 2022, a teenager from Zanzan Mehdi Mousavi was murdered by the law enforcement bodies. Mehdi`s family and relatives were threatened and told to remain silent about the murder. In another occasion, the target was a 22-year-old Nasim Sedghi, whose family was forced to pronounce that her passing a mischance.

UN rights experts 'deeply alarmed' at continuing executions of Iran protesters

[EUROPEAN TIMES](#) (19.05.2023) - The [Independent International Fact-Finding Mission](#) on Iran, said in a statement that the executions on Friday of Majid Kazemi, Saleh Mirhashemi and Saeed Yaghoubi, were "profoundly concerning in view of the reported involvement of these individuals in the protests that commenced in Iran on 16 September 2022, and allegations of their having been convicted and sentenced through confessions obtained under torture."

The three-person body, which is mandated to investigate all alleged violations relating to the protests, had previously asked Iranian authorities for information in relation to imposition of the death penalty on some of those exercising their right to protest.

"The Fact-Finding Mission reminds all State authorities and individuals involved in this process, that any execution following a fair trial violation would amount to arbitrary deprivation of life and a violation of international law", the statement concluded.

End 'horrific wave' of executions: Rapporteurs

In a [separate statement](#), three concerned UN independent rights experts, or Special Rapporteurs, condemned the executions of the three men, urging the Government to "halt the appalling wave of executions in Iran."

"We are alarmed by reports of unfair proceedings in the case and deeply disturbed that these men have reportedly been subjected to torture or other forms of ill-treatment to extract forced confessions," the experts said.

The three men were reportedly arrested on 21 November 2022 during protests in Esfahan city following the uprising [sparked by the death of Mahsa Amini](#) on 16 September, in police custody.

The men were accused of participating in the killing of three Iranian officials, and sentenced to death after being charged with were sentenced to death and charged with moharebeh (which translates as "enmity against God").

'Scant regard' for international law

"The executions of the three men this morning underlines our concerns that the Iranian authorities continue to have scant regard for international law," the experts said. "The death penalty has been applied following judicial proceedings that failed to meet acceptable international standards of fair trial or due process."

The three experts – Javaid Rehman, [Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Iran](#); Margaret Satterthwaite, [the expert on independence of judges and lawyers](#);

and Morris Tidball-Binz, [who investigates extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions](#) – said that reports indicated the extent of the defendants’ alleged involvement in the officers’ deaths, was highly uncertain and questionable.

The officers were allegedly killed by gunshots during protests in Isfahan Province, yet the charges against the defendants do not explicitly accuse them of “murder”.

The three men appealed the verdict on 6 May, but Iran’s Supreme Court upheld their death sentences, despite a pending request for judicial review. On 17 May, their families were called in to visit and were told by the prison authorities that this would be the final meeting.

Violation of the right to life

“The death penalty is a violation of the right to life and the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment,” the independent experts said.

At least 259 executions have reportedly been carried out since 1 January – mostly for drug-related offences and including a disproportionate number of minorities, the experts said.

“We are shocked that the authorities went ahead with the executions despite the pending judicial review,” the experts said. “We urge the Iranian Government to stop this horrific wave of executions.”

Special Rapporteurs and other rights experts are all appointed by the UN [Human Rights Council](#), are mandated to monitor and report on specific thematic issues or country situations, are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work.

European Parliament calls for more sanctions against Iranian regime

[European Parliament](#) (19.01.2023) - All those responsible for human rights violations should face EU sanctions and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps should be on the EU terrorist list, [MEPs urge](#).

The Iranian regime’s blatant disregard for human dignity and the democratic aspirations of its own citizens as well as its support to Russia “necessitate further adjustments in the EU’s position towards Iran”, says a resolution adopted on Thursday.

MEPs urge the EU to expand its sanctions list to cover all individuals and entities responsible for human rights violations and their family members, including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, President Ebrahim Raisi, Prosecutor General Mohammad Jafar Montazeri and all foundations (‘bonyads’) linked to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

They also call on the Council and the member states to add the IRGC and its subsidiary forces, including the paramilitary Basij militia and the Quds Force, to the EU terrorist list. Any country in which the IRGC deploys military, economic, or informational operations should sever and outlaw ties with this agency.

Those responsible for the killing of protesters have to be brought to justice

Parliament condemns in the strongest terms the death sentences against and executions

of peaceful protesters in Iran and calls on the Iranian authorities to end the crackdown on their own citizens. MEPs urge the authorities of the Islamic Republic to ensure the immediate and unconditional release of all protesters sentenced to death and condemn the fact that criminal proceedings and the death penalty have been weaponised by the regime to stamp out dissent and to punish people for exercising their basic rights. Those responsible for the killing of hundreds of protesters must be brought to justice, they say.

Military help to Russia and repression against diaspora

The resolution calls for “the expansion of restrictive measures” against Iran as it continues to provide unmanned aerial vehicles and plans to provide surface-to-surface missiles to Russia.

Finally, MEPs express deep concern over the structural transnational repression carried out by the authorities of the Islamic Republic, which includes espionage and assassinations, against the Iranian diaspora living in the EU. They call on the EU and the member states to protect those affected more robustly against such repression.

Iranian journalists face long prison terms, lashes, and harsh restrictions over protest coverage

Committee to Protect Journalists (11.01.1993) - <https://bit.ly/3XrzroI> - Iranian authorities must drop all charges filed against journalists in retaliation for their coverage of protests in the country and stop handing down harsh prison sentences to members of the press, the Committee to Protect Journalists said Wednesday.

Iranian authorities have arrested [at least 88 journalists](#) since September 2022, when mass protests erupted across the country following the [death of a 22-year-old woman, Mahsa Amini](#), after morality police arrested her for allegedly violating the [country's conservative dress law](#).

Authorities have charged nearly all of those journalists with “spreading propaganda against the ruling system” and “colluding and acting against national security,” according to sources familiar with their cases who spoke to CPJ on the condition of anonymity, citing fear of reprisal.

Under the Iranian penal code, convictions for that [propaganda offense](#) carry prison terms of up to one year, and the [collusion charge](#) can carry up to five years. However, at least five journalists have received sentences in excess of those legal maximums, including extra prison time, lashes from a whip, bans on working or leaving the country, or mandatory community service.

“Iranian authorities must drop all the dubious charges against journalists detained for covering protests in the country, and should free them immediately and unconditionally,” said Sherif Mansour, CPJ’s Middle East and North Africa program coordinator. “By issuing heavy sentences against journalists, in some cases in excess of what the law allows, authorities are showing the lengths they are willing to go to silence the press.”

At least the following five journalists have received sentences in excess of the legal maximums for collusion or propaganda, and are free while their appeals are pending:

- [Vida Rabbani](#), a freelance reporter and political commentator covering local news for various Tehran outlets, was sentenced to seven years and three months in prison for collusion and propaganda, according to a December [report](#) by the exile-

run Human Rights Activist News Agency (HRANA) and a [tweet](#) by her lawyer. Rabbani, who is already serving a 10-year sentence on unrelated charges, must serve a minimum of six years behind bars if that sentence is not changed on appeal, according to those sources.

- [Aria Jaffari](#), a photojournalist for the semi-official state-run Iranian Students' News Agency (ISNA), was sentenced on December 26 to seven years in prison on propaganda and collusion charges, and was also sentenced to 74 lashes and a two-year ban on leaving the country, according to [news reports](#).
- [Yalda Moaiery](#), a freelance photojournalist, was sentenced to six years in prison on both charges, and also received a two-year ban from leaving the country, a three-year ban from working as a journalist, and two-months of community service street cleaning, according to [news reports](#) from December and an [Instagram post](#) by Moaiery.
- [Ahmadreza Halabisaz](#), a photojournalist, was reported in December to have been sentenced to five years in prison on both charges, and also received a two-year ban from practicing journalism, according to an [Instagram post](#) by Halabisaz and another source familiar with the case who spoke to CPJ on the condition of anonymity, citing fear of reprisal.
- [Mehrnoosh Tafian](#), a freelance reporter, was sentenced to one year in prison for propaganda and also received a two-year ban on leaving the country, according to a December HRANA [report](#) and a source familiar with his case.

Journalists imprisoned in Iran have been frequently denied legal representation and due process, according to [CPJ research](#). At least [36 journalists](#) arrested for covering the protests have been released on bail, which local journalists speaking to CPJ on the condition of anonymity said was often set excessively high.

CPJ's email to the Iran mission to the United Nations for comment, but did not receive any response.

Iran condemned for executing two men over alleged crimes during protests

Campaigners call for greater global action after deaths of Mohammad Mahdi Karami and Seyyed Mohammad Hosseini

[The Guardian](#) (07.01.2023) - Iran drew international condemnation on Saturday after it executed two men for killing a paramilitary force member in November during protests sparked by the death in custody of a young woman.

The latest killings double the number executed so far in connection with the nationwide protests. Two men were [put to death in December](#), sparking global outrage.

They also come in defiance of a campaign by international rights groups for the lives of the two men to be spared.

"Mohammad Mahdi Karami and Seyyed Mohammad Hosseini, the main perpetrators of the crime that led to the martyrdom of Ruhollah Ajamian, were hanged this morning," judicial news agency Mizan Online reported on Saturday.

The UN human rights office decried the executions, which it said followed "unfair trials based on forced confessions".

"We urge Iran to halt all executions," it said on Twitter.

The British foreign minister, James Cleverly, condemned the executions and urged Iran to “immediately end the violence against its own people”.

“The execution of Mohammad Mahdi Karami and Seyed Mohammad Hosseini by the Iranian regime is abhorrent,” Cleverly said on Twitter. “The UK is strongly opposed to the death penalty in all circumstances.”

The US state department condemned “in the strongest terms” what it said were the “sham trials and execution” of the men.

“These executions are a key component of the regime’s effort to suppress protests,” state department spokesman Ned Price said on Twitter. “We continue to work with partners to pursue accountability for Iran’s brutal crackdown.”

Iran hanged the two men for allegedly killing a member of the security forces during nationwide protests that started after the death of 22-year-old Kurdish Iranian woman Mahsa Amini last September.

The European Union said it was “appalled” by the executions.

“This is yet another sign of the Iranian authorities’ violent repression of civilian demonstrations,” the spokesperson for the bloc’s foreign affairs chief, Josep Borrell, said, urging an immediate end to death sentences against protesters.

Iran’s court of first instance had sentenced the two men to death in early December, it said, and on Tuesday the supreme court upheld the death sentences, accusing them of killing Ajamian on 3 November.

The victim was a member of the Basij militia – linked to the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps – who died in Karaj, west of Tehran.

Prosecutors previously said the 27-year-old was stripped naked and killed by a group of mourners who had been paying tribute to a slain protester, Hadis Najafi.

Karami’s parents issued a video pleading for authorities to spare his life in December.

“I respectfully ask the judiciary, I beg you please, I ask you ... to remove the death penalty from my son’s case,” said Mashallah Karami.

He described his son as a former national karate team member and told Iranian media that a family lawyer had been unable to access his case file.

Karami was not allowed to have a final meeting with his family and had foregone food and water in protest, according to Mohamad Aghasi, whom relatives wanted to handle the case, in remarks on Twitter.

Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam, the director of Oslo-based group Iran Human Rights, said both men “were subjected to torture, sentenced after sham trials ... without the minimum standards for due process”.

Nazanin Boniadi, a British actor of Iranian origin and an ambassador for Amnesty International in the UK, said on Twitter that the “political cost of Iran executions” must increase.

Campaigners have called for stronger international action after the latest executions.

The New York-based Center for Human Rights in Iran said foreign nations must withdraw their ambassadors from Iran and call for a moratorium on executions and state violence against peaceful dissent.

"We are mourning as a nation," prominent US-based dissident Masih Alinejad said in a Twitter post. "Help us save others."

Authorities have arrested thousands people in the wave of demonstrations that began with the death in custody of Amini, who had been arrested by morality police for allegedly breaching the strict dress code for women.

Since the beginning of the protest movement, courts have sentenced 14 people to death in connection with the demonstrations, according to an Agence France-Presse count based on official information.

Among those, four have been executed, two others have had their sentences confirmed by the supreme court, six are awaiting new trials and two others can appeal.
