



Norwegian  
Helsinki Committee

**Briefing for the 2026 OSCE PA Summer Meeting:**  
**Ukrainian captives and Political Prisoners Need your support**

*Oslo 3 July 2026*

## Introduction

A political prisoner is someone detained for political reasons, including violations of fundamental rights under the European Convention on Human Rights and its Protocols (ECHR), disproportionate or discriminatory imprisonment, or unfair legal proceedings driven by political motives.<sup>1</sup>

When political prisoners are found guilty of violating codified laws, the laws or trial proceedings violate international human rights. They were often convicted of “threatening national security”, “treason”, “extremism”, or “terrorism”, or faced trumped-up criminal charges of tax evasion, possession of drugs, etc. Many governments also target lawyers representing clients in politically motivated cases or who shed light on rights abuses.

Political imprisonment is an extensive problem in the OSCE region. This brief focuses on Russia, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Türkiye.

**Russian** authorities imprison political opposition, civil society activists, journalists, religious and ethnic minorities, alleged spies, and LGBT persons in Chechnya. The number of political prisoners increased after Mr Putin returned to the Presidency in 2012 and again because of restrictive laws and practices adopted after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

The People 1st campaign, launched in January 2025 and joined by more than 80 civil society organisations, aims to place the human dimension at the centre of all negotiations related to Russia’s war against Ukraine. It calls on all stakeholders to prioritise the release of those detained in connection with the conflict, focusing on thousands of Ukrainian civilians held by Russia, as well as thousands of Ukrainian and Russian prisoners of war held by both sides.

In particular, the campaign urges the return of thousands of Ukrainian children to Ukraine. It also draws attention to hundreds of Russian political prisoners held behind bars for an anti-war stance or action.

Negotiators and, in particular, European decision-makers should make a key priority of any negotiated agreement with Russia, «the release of all captives and illegally deported children of Russia’s war against Ukraine».

As a response to the intensified persecution in Russia, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, together with Russian networks of lawyers such as the Association internationale d’avocats russes, launches the [Accountability Initiative for Russia](#) (‘AIR’). The initiative will cooperate with Russian organisations to create a vast documentation system to gather, store and analyse human rights violations and core international crimes committed on Russian

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<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Resolution 1900 (2012) (<https://pace.coe.int/en/files/19150/html>).

territories. We are seeking support from democratic governments in Europe and elsewhere to establish and run AIR,

In **Belarus**, the number of political prisoners swelled following mass arrests in the wake of the August 2020 sham re-election of Alexander Lukashenko. The human rights group Viasna currently operates with a figure of more than 800 political prisoners. There are close to 200 Belarusian political prisoners behind bars for their anti-war stance or action.

According to **Azerbaijani** human rights activists, the problem of political imprisonment in the country remains extensive. At least 70 human rights defenders, journalists, opposition activists, lawyers and other perceived critics remain imprisoned on politically motivated charges. Nine of the political prisoners are famous female journalists.

Since 2024, **Georgia** has taken significant steps backwards in human rights, including using legal charges to suppress political opposition and arrest dozens of government critics. The country is experiencing its fastest slide into authoritarianism since independence and holds more political prisoners per capita than Russia. The 12 March 2026 OSCE Moscow Mechanism report on Georgia raised concerns about the misuse of criminal and administrative proceedings against political opponents and other critics, citing cases of unfair convictions and imprisonment. 23 Participating States invoked the Mechanism.

In **Türkiye**, the growing use of politically motivated criminal investigations, prosecutions and the imprisonment of opposition figures, human rights defenders and journalists is threatening essential elements of a competitive democracy. While the number of political prisoners is unknown, these imprisonments are not solely about the rights of the individuals involved. They also relate to broader questions regarding the rule of law, judicial independence, freedom of expression, and whether citizens can participate in a political system where competing voices have a fair opportunity to be heard and to challenge those in power.

With general elections scheduled for 2028, these developments should be given greater attention by international organisations and parliamentarians.

The brief highlights some vulnerable prisoners and actions that could improve their situation or lead to their release. The fact that a political prisoner is not mentioned, however, should not be taken as an indication that they do not need support. All political prisoners do. We should constantly bring up their cases.

## How to support

Parliamentarians can support political prisoners in many ways, including helping to secure their release, improving their conditions, and supporting their families. Publicly naming political prisoners can have an impact, ensuring they're not forgotten. Signalling that those responsible for unjustly sending people to prison are being watched and risk being targeted by Magnitsky sanctions may help prevent further imprisonments. Sending letters to political prisoners, telling them that someone is acting on their behalf, can be a lifeline.

Below, we have listed ways parliamentarians can act, using their influence, legislative powers, and international networks. The list is not exhaustive, as there are many creative ways to support political prisoners. However, we hope it will serve as a good starting point.

Do not hesitate to contact the Norwegian Helsinki Committee if you need assistance supporting political prisoners. The contact information is available here:

<https://www.nhc.no/en/contact/>

### Support for release

- Consistently raise awareness of political prisoners. Show that you know their names. Ask for their release. Help attract attention from mainstream media. Use video messages, online petitions, interviews, or hashtags on social media.
- Organise hearings in national parliaments or international assemblies on human rights in countries that hold political prisoners.
  - Initiate resolutions and statements condemning political imprisonment.
  - Urge the release of political prisoners and the adoption of Magnitsky sanctions (targeted sanctions) against those responsible for imprisonment or prison abuse.
  - Propose that economic and diplomatic relations and trade be conditioned on the release of political prisoners.
- Publicly declare that you have become a guardian of specific political prisoners and commit to advocating for their release.
  - Send letters to political prisoners to boost their morale and signal to authorities that they are not forgotten.
  - Organise solidarity actions, such as demonstrations or symbolic actions, such as wearing badges about a political prisoner.
- Support prisoner exchanges with states holding political prisoners when feasible. Among the criteria for selecting political prisoners for exchange should be their health and the length of their prison term.

- Advocate for your foreign ministries to use diplomatic channels to raise the issue of political imprisonment and the situation of specific prisoners with the detaining country or in multilateral forums. Embassies should monitor the trials of those facing politically motivated charges and visit prisons and detention facilities to assess political prisoners' health and needs. For political prisoners held incommunicado, embassy staff are crucial in demanding information on their whereabouts, conditions, and health.
- Meet, engage with, and support released political prisoners, exiled activists, and human rights organisations from the detaining country.

### **Support for improved conditions**

- Ask for and, if possible, conduct visits to political prisoners.
- Support families, defence lawyers, civil society organisations, and others who contact political prisoners and can provide them with medicine, food, clothing, and other items to improve their situation.
- Propose Magnitsky sanctions (targeted sanctions) against officials responsible for the conditions in which political prisoners are held.

### **Financial support**

- Propose in your parliament that your country provide funding for political prisoners and their families, such as the [Belarus fund](#). Such funds are open to further contributions.
- Propose support schemes for defence lawyers and civil society organisations working for the release and improved conditions of political prisoners.
- Ensure that financial support for political prisoners includes psychological treatment for released prisoners, their families and their lawyers.
- Engage with the business community to encourage them to provide support.

## Russia: Minors and political prisoners with health issues

The most common laws used in Russia against people regarded by Memorial, OVD-Info, Amnesty International, or other human rights groups as political prisoners fall into several categories, such as expressing «fake news» about the military, «discrediting» the armed forces, «extremism», «terrorism», «treason», and «public justification of terrorism».

Russian authorities present these laws as necessary for national security, counter-terrorism, and wartime information protection. Human rights organisations contend that they are frequently used to suppress dissent, anti-war activism, opposition politics, independent journalism, and even speech by schoolchildren. Memorial's political prisoner [list](#) includes many people prosecuted under the articles above.

A notable trend since 2022 has been the growing number of cases related to anti-war speech, criticism of the military, alleged cooperation with Ukraine, terrorism and extremism charges against activists and prosecutions of minors.

In the current situation, minor political prisoners and those with serious health conditions should be prioritised.<sup>2</sup>

### **Minors**

There are currently around 100 political prisoners under the age of 22. Children, teenagers, and university students are being sent to penal colonies for distributing leaflets, making pacifist statements, and throwing Molotov cocktails at military recruitment offices—attacks that caused little property damage and did not harm anyone's health or cost anyone their life.

At least 23 were minors when their prosecution began, and it is still ongoing. Ten of them are now deprived of liberty.

#### **1. Egor Balazeikin**

The most notorious student-arsonist, Egor Balazeikin, born in 2006, spent 2024 coming of age in prison: he turned 18 on August 6. In April 2024, he was sentenced to 6 years of imprisonment for attempting to set fire to two military recruitment offices. In July, the young man was sent to the Arkhangelsk educational colony. Balazeikin faced psychological pressure and was tortured during the convoy. Balazeikin suffers from autoimmune hepatitis, and his health has further deteriorated in prison.

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<sup>2</sup> The information provided in this section is from the human rights organisation OVD Info, Memorial, Radio Free Europe and other sources.

## 2. **Gagik Grigoryan (NB has health problems)**

Gagik Grigoryan, born in 2006, was 17 years old at the time of his arrest and has been in custody for about a year. Only eight months after his detention, the Left Socialist Action and the Solidarity Zone managed to find him in Moscow's Pre-Trial Detention Centre No. 5 «Vodnik». In a letter, Gagik informed that he was «charged with preparing the liquidation of a lieutenant colonel of the Russian army». On 29 January 2025, Grigoryan was sentenced to 7 years' imprisonment.

## 3. **Arseny Turbin**

Arseny Turbin, born in 2008, from the Oryol region, was sentenced to 5 years in an educational colony. According to the prosecution, in June 2023, the 14-year-old Turbin messaged the Freedom of Russia Legion bot and submitted a membership application form. Later, allegedly carrying out the legion's task, he allegedly distributed leaflets in neighbours' letterboxes bearing the slogans «Do you need a president like this?». The Federal Security Service (FSB) claimed that the student shared the story about the bot and the questionnaire he had filled in during his first interrogation. However, in reality, he told the FSB the exact opposite, saying he had not sent it. Now 16, Turbin is detained in Moscow's «Butyrka» Pre-Trial Detention Centre. Recently, he told his mother that a cellmate was beating him.

## 3. **Valery Zaitsev**

In the Khabarovsk region, 15-year-old Valery Zaitsev, born in 2008, was sentenced to 4.5 years in an educational colony in 2024. He was found guilty of participating in the Azov Battalion and of receiving training in terrorist activities. The case files include a video showing teenagers throwing Molotov cocktails at the wall of an abandoned building. Zaitsev's grandmother suggests the video was shot by a provocateur who acted as a secret witness at the trial. In 2023, the boy, then 14, was taken from the dispensary where he was being treated for tuberculosis and placed in a pre-trial detention centre. He finished his ninth grade while in the isolation ward.

## 4. **Nikita Turlaev**

Nikita Yuryevich Turlayev, born in 2005, is a resident of Komsomolsk-on-Amur in Khabarovsk Krai and a student at the College of Technology and Service.

On 21 November 2024, he was sentenced under Articles 205.2, Part 2, and 205.5, Part 2, of the Russian Criminal Code to 11 years' imprisonment, with the first three years to be served in a penal colony and the remaining eight years in a maximum-security penal colony. Article 205 concerns terrorism-related offences.

He has been deprived of his liberty since 12 October 2023.

## **Political prisoners with serious health issues**

The following political prisoners are known to have serious health issues. Their imprisonment and the lack of proper medical treatment further deteriorate their conditions.

### **1. *Alexey Gorinov***

Alexei Gorinov, born in 1961, a Moscow city councillor, became the first Russian to be sentenced to seven years in prison for “discrediting” the Russian military's attack against Ukraine. Gorinov committed the offence of “knowingly spreading false information” about the military when he opposed conducting a children's drawing contest while children were dying in Ukraine. Moscow Judge Olesya Mendeleyeva sentenced Gorinov to 7 years in prison for this statement.

Aleksey Gorinov has been in jail since April 2022. He has chronic health issues. A few years ago, he underwent major lung surgery. Incarceration is adversely affecting his health. There are serious and well-founded fears that Alexey will not survive his imprisonment. Unfortunately, since December 9, 2022, Alexey has become very ill. He could not breathe normally or eat. He also did not have access to adequate medical treatment. Under public and media pressure, authorities sent Alexey to the hospital for prisoners in Vladimir. Subsequently, Alexey was returned to the prisoner camp. His health remains weak.

### **2. *Igor Baryshnikov***

Igor Baryshnikov, born in 1959, an anti-war activist, has been sentenced to 7 1/2 years in prison on charges of spreading “false” information about the Russian military in Ukraine. Diagnosed with prostatic hyperplasia before his trial, Baryshnikov has relied on a surgically inserted catheter. Despite this, the activist has been denied effective painkillers, a comprehensive cancer screening, and a procedure that would eliminate his need for a catheter.

### **3. *Zarema Musayeva***

Zarema Musayeva, born in 1969, is the mother of Ibragim, Abubakar, and Baisangur Yangulbayev, all of whom have fled the country, citing harassment by Chechen authorities for their online criticism of Kremlin-backed Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov. In January 2022, Chechen police and security officers detained Musayeva at her apartment in the Russian city of Nizhny Novgorod, some 1,800 kilometres from Chechnya, and forcibly returned her to Grozny, the capital of the North Caucasus region.

In July 2022, a court in Chechnya sentenced Musayeva to 5 1/2 years in prison on charges of fraud and assaulting a police officer, which she and her supporters have denied. In

November 2024, Russian authorities opened a new politically motivated criminal case against her. Musayeva, who suffers from chronic diabetes, was earlier hospitalised after her blood sugar reached what her lawyer described as “critical” levels. The Crew Against Torture said Musayeva faces up to five additional years in prison on charges of disrupting the work of a prison. Musayeva has denied the charges.

#### 4. **Yuri Dmitriev, born in 1956**

Yury Dmitriev, born in 1956, is a human rights activist and local historian in Karelia (Northwest Russia), specialising in locating the concealed burial grounds of Stalin’s victims. He has made efforts to turn each burial ground into a place of remembrance and commemoration.

He was first arrested on 13 December 2016. Briefly released in January 2018 and acquitted in April that year, he was again arrested in June 2018. Charged with similar offences, Dmitriev was put on trial twice more. He was convicted in July 2020 and sentenced to three years and six months imprisonment.

Two years of appeals and a new trial led to his conviction late in December 2021 to a 15-year sentence in a strict-regime labour camp.

Dmitriev’s health is far from good, and there is a suspicion of cancer.

#### 5. **Maria Ponomarenko**

Maria Ponomarenko, born in 1978, is a journalist and activist from Barnaul in Western Siberia. On 23 April 2022, she was detained for sharing a Telegram post about the bombing of the Drama Theatre in Mariupol, Ukraine. The post contained a video of the theatre recorded before the attack and a brief comment condemning civilian deaths.

On 15 February 2023, Maria was sentenced to 6 years’ imprisonment and, on her release, a 5-year ban on engaging in journalism. She was initially sent to a penal colony 900 km from her hometown, making it impossible for her to see her daughters.

Diagnosed with *histrionic personality disorder*, she had previously self-harmed in September 2022 while in pre-trial detention, citing mistreatment. After severe ill-treatment and unfair punishments, she staged a hunger strike in October 2023. She was dragged, barefoot, by guards to a disciplinary hearing. Afterwards, she was subjected to further forced psychiatric treatment.

## Belarus: Political prisoners with critical health issues

For decades, Mr Lukashenko has sought to play Russia and the EU off against each other, releasing political prisoners to win favour with leaders in Brussels and to spark a thaw in relations. That relationship ended in 2020 after he claimed victory in fraudulent presidential elections and launched waves of repression against the opposition.

Since then, Mr Lukashenko has become reliant on Mr Putin for support after Russia sent troops to help his regime as thousands of Belarusians took to the streets in mass protests.

Although prisoners are released from time to time, the problem of political imprisonment remains systemic. Scores of detainees remain unheard of, while the secret police continue to arrest others accused of undermining the regime.

There are currently more than 800 political prisoners in Belarus, many of whom are known to have health issues.

The following lists ten seriously ill political prisoners who should be prioritised for release.

### **1. *Arseny Moiseichuk (Арсеній Майсейчук)***

Arseny, born in 2002, suffers from leukaemia. He requires regular medical monitoring and an annual MRI scan; he is prohibited from many physical activities. It is unknown whether this is taken into account in the penal colony where he is serving his 6-year sentence. He was detained on 9 November 2021 as part of a criminal case involving group actions that grossly violate public order, as well as preparation for participation in mass riots.

### **2. *Yauhen Burlo (Бурло Евгений Валерьевич)***

Yauhen Burlo, born in 1991, suffered a relapse of a condition he had previously experienced: necrosis of the hip joints. He was sent to the pretrial detention facility's medical unit. His friends reported that his relatives appealed to the facility's management to ensure he received proper treatment, but they refused. He was on crutches during his sentencing; he couldn't even stand. He was sentenced to 8 years in prison. He is known to be requesting spinal surgery, which he was promised. Given the disease, not only surgery but also long postoperative rehabilitation is needed. He has been sentenced to 8 years in a penal colony. He also has cancer.

### **3. *Denis Salmanovich (Дзяніс Сальмановіч)***

Denis Salmanovich, born in 1991, has a serious kidney disease: chronic glomerulonephritis. He underwent gallbladder removal surgery in the penal colony. After the surgery, Denis spent another week in the prison's medical unit until his stitches were removed. Considering the disease, not only surgery but also long postoperative rehabilitation is needed. Cases of

denial of access to a complete examination during detention have been recorded. In 2022, he was sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment.

#### **4. Kiryl Hniazdzilau (Гнездилов Кирил Викторович)**

Kiryl Hniazdzilau, born in 1983, only has one kidney and has been diagnosed with a tumour. The tumour was discovered in 2022, after which he was arrested. He underwent surgery at the end of October in Borovlyany, then moved to the hospital. He was detained in 2023 at the border while returning from Poland to visit his wife and children.

#### **5. Stsiapan Latypau (Латыпов Степан Сергеевич)**

Stsiapan Latypau, born in 1980, has experienced severe deterioration in his health while in prison and has made repeated suicide attempts linked to torture and threats of torture against his relatives.

On 1 June 2021, he was brought to court with obvious signs of beatings, and soon afterwards, he testified during the trial about the so-called “press hut” into which the prison administration had thrown him to extract a confession. After this, he attempted to kill himself in the courtroom. While sitting in a cage, he stabbed himself in the throat with a pen.

The trial was adjourned, and he was taken to the hospital, where he underwent surgery: no damage to vital organs was found. Immediately after the surgery, on June 1-2, security forces removed Stepan from the hospital and placed him in Pretrial Detention Centre No. 1 on Volodarsky Street. In early March 2024, it became known that Stepan had contracted scurvy in prison. Scurvy is associated with a vitamin C deficiency.

#### **6. Olga Mayorova (Вольга Маёрава)**

Olga Mayorova, born in 1966, has cataracts, scars, and is at risk of total blindness. She sought help, but the prison's medical unit refused treatment. She hasn't received medications or medical packages from her family because of her status as a “terrorist”. She is also suspected of having diabetes and is in a very difficult psychological state. She has been sentenced to 21 years and 6 months of imprisonment.

#### **7. Irina Melcher (Ірына Мельхер)**

Irina Melcher, born in 1955, has suffered a hypertensive crisis and possibly has a pelvic organ prolapse, as well as experiencing heart and nerve problems. She is under strong psychological pressure. For the first month after her arrest, she could not sleep until she was prescribed sedatives. She was on a bed-rest regimen, but in the top bunk, from which she couldn't climb down on her own. She needs to urinate frequently due to kidney problems;

therefore, she needs assistance from others at night. She is deprived of visits and in a grave emotional state. In 2022, she was sentenced to 17 years in prison.

#### **8. Ruslan Slutsky (Руслан Слуцкий)**

Ruslan Slutsky, born in 1983, was arrested in January 2021 for attempting to destroy railway lines by connecting rails with metal wire, which could have caused train delays, and for an “act of terrorism” by planting homemade metal spikes on the road in front of vehicles participating in a pro-government rally, which damaged the tyres of four vehicles.

He has a benign brain tumour and severe back pain. These issues sometimes prevent him from getting out of bed. However, he was denied hospitalisation until he was hospitalised in November 2022 for pneumonia. He has been sentenced to 11 years’ imprisonment in a maximum-security penal colony.

#### **9. Vladzimir Hundar (Гундарь Владимир Тадеушевич)**

Vladzimir Hundar, born in 1960, is missing one leg and has heart disease and arterial hypertension. Despite belonging to the 2nd group of disability, he was systematically subjected to torture, reported beatings, and was regularly placed in a punishment isolation cell (SHIZO). At present, he is incommunicado. There were instances of deprivation of crutches necessary for his mobility due to the amputation of his leg, forcing him to move without them. According to the available data, a stroke cannot be excluded. He experienced complete hearing loss against a background of headache, followed by partial recovery. He was sentenced to 18 years in a maximum-security prison colony. He has frequently been placed in solitary confinement and has repeatedly gone on hunger strike.

#### **10. Boris Vitko (Барыс Вітко)**

Boris Vitko, born in 1954, has heart problems and requires constant medication. According to his cellmates, he has also suffered strokes. Despite his age, he was sentenced to 7 years and 3 months in prison in 2022.

## Azerbaijan: Political imprisonment to silence the media

Azerbaijan's ongoing repression of civil society, independent media, and political dissent continues to lead to extensive political imprisonments. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) recognised in 2024 that the human rights situation in Azerbaijan is deteriorating and repression is intensifying.

The crackdown on civil society and dissenting voices escalated over the last two years, and many were arrested based on restrictive laws on non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

In November 2023, the authorities targeted media platforms such as Abzas Media, Toplum TV, Kanal 13 and Meydan TV, arresting reporters and other staff on spurious smuggling and economic-related charges.

Among the methods the government uses are politically motivated arrests and persecution on spurious criminal charges, as well as the arbitrary enforcement of restrictive laws governing NGOs. Most of the civil society activists arrested since late 2023 have been charged with receiving Western funding.

Key cases include the following, some of whom suffer from serious health issues.

### **1. *Nine women journalists***

Azerbaijan has imprisoned nine women journalists for their work, marking an unprecedented crackdown. Never have so many women journalists been punished since independence. Some prominent journalists are facing serious health issues and need urgent medical care. Their lives are at risk due to unsafe prison conditions and difficulty in accessing adequate healthcare. In June 2025, three of them were sentenced to prison terms ranging from eight to nine years. The imprisoned journalists are:

- Sevinj Vagifgizi (37), Abzas Media; Nargiz Absalamova (28), Abzas Media; Elnara Gasimova (30), Abzas Media; Aynur Elgunash (51), Meydan TV; Aytaj Ahmadova (33), Meydan TV; Aysel Umudova (34), Meydan TV; Khayala Aghayeva (29), Meydan TV; Fatima Movlamli (26), freelance journalist; Ulviyya Ali (33), freelance journalist
- They were charged with smuggling and tax evasion; the journalists had their homes raided and belongings seized. They deny the charges, citing their critical reporting, and face up to eight years in prison if convicted.

### **2. *Shamshad Agha***

Shamshad Agha, born in 1982, chief editor of the independent news site Argument.az, was arrested in February 2025 as a suspect in a criminal case against the Germany-based

Meydan TV, with which Agha also collaborates. Six Meydan TV journalists were detained in December 2025 on charges of currency smuggling.

### **3. Afiaddin Mammadov**

Afiaddin Mammadov, born in 1995, head of the Workers' Table Trade Union, was sentenced to eight years in prison in January 2025 on bogus hooliganism charges. He has been in detention since September 2023 following a staged attack on him.

### **4. Bakhtiyar Hajiyev**

Bakhtiyar Hajiyev, born in 1982, is a prominent activist who was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment in January 2025 on bogus charges of hooliganism, illegal entrepreneurship, and smuggling charges. PACE rapporteurs had called on Azerbaijan authorities to release him.

### **5. Rail Abbasov**

Rail Abbasov, born in 1979, is an activist who was sentenced to 6.5 years in prison in January 2025 on bogus fraud charges.

### **6. Ilhamiz Guliyev**

Ilhamiz Guliyev, born in 1982, is a police whistleblower who was sentenced to 3 years' imprisonment on fabricated drug acquisition charges in December 2024.

### **7. Emin Ibrahimov**

Emin Ibrahimov, born in 1981, is a former diplomat and government critic who was sentenced to 7 years' imprisonment in April 2025 on bogus charges of inflicting serious physical harm.

### **8. Azar Gasimli**

Azar Gasimli, born in 1975, is a prominent opposition figure and director of the Institute of Political Management, who was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment in March 2026 on bogus extortion charges.

### **9. Rufat Safarov**

**Rufat Safarov**, born in 1981, is a human rights defender who was arrested in December 2024 on fabricated charges of fraud and hooliganism. PACE rapporteurs were dismayed by his arrest.

### **10. Bahruz Samadov, Iqbal Abilov and Nazim Baydamirli**

In June 2025, courts convicted scholar Bahruz Samadov, born in 1995, and researcher Iqbal Abilov, born in 1989, on spurious treason charges and sentenced them in separate cases to

15 and 18 years in prison, respectively. Nazim Baydamirli, born in 1963, is a public activist and former lawmaker who was sentenced to 8 years in prison in September 2024 on bogus charges of extortion. Police arrested him shortly after he publicly supported the protests of villagers against environmental pollution and denounced the police violence in July 2023.

#### **11. Anar Mammadli**

Anar Mammadli, born in 1978, is a Václav Havel Human Rights Prize laureate who was arrested in April 2024 on bogus currency-smuggling charges, shortly after spearheading climate-justice advocacy ahead of COP29.

#### **12. Gubad Ibadoghlu**

Gubad Ibadoghlu, born in 1971, is a renowned academic and anti-corruption activist who endured 9 months of pretrial detention, where his health worsened due to inadequate care and ill-treatment. In April 2024, the authorities released Ibadoghlu on parole. He faces up to 17 years' imprisonment if convicted.

#### **13. Akif Gurbanov**

Akif Gurbanov, born in 1981, is a Václav Havel Human Rights Prize nominee and co-founder of the political movement III Republic Platform, who was arrested in March 2024 on fabricated smuggling charges in connection with the criminal case against Toplum TV and Institute of Democratic Initiatives (IDI), which he chaired.

#### **14. Tofiq Yagublu**

Tofiq Yagublu, born in 1961, is an opposition activist currently on trial for alleged fraud and forgery. He is facing severe health issues in detention, with his family fearing for his life.

#### **15. NGO Case**

In March 2025, prosecutors launched investigations into several human rights NGOs for “illegal entrepreneurship” and “tax evasion,” leading to the arrests of activists Bashir Suleymanli, born in 1980, Mammad Mammadzade, Asaf Ahmadov, and Zamin Zaki, born in 1997. They remain in pretrial detention.

In total, since November 2023, authorities have detained at least 20 independent journalists and media workers and remanded them to pretrial detention on bogus criminal charges. Among those arrested are investigative journalist Hafiz Babali, born in 1971, and media expert Alasgar Mammadli, born in 1968, who have serious health problems, as well as Abzas media director Ulvi Hasanli, born in 1987.

These cases are examples of the scores of human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists, opposition politicians, and activists who have been arrested and require urgent attention. Many others have faced travel bans and intimidation.

The crackdown threatens to eradicate dissent and human rights work in the country, underscoring the need for decisive international intervention.

## Georgia: Political imprisonment as a response to protests

Georgia holds several political prisoners and has enacted laws that restrict freedom of expression, assembly and association. In November 2024, the ruling Georgian Dream party suspended EU accession talks until 2028, sparking nationwide peaceful protests. The government cracked down on protesters, detaining hundreds on administrative or criminal charges. Many detainees reported being beaten and ill-treated in police custody.

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee, along with many other human rights organisations, has urged Norway and like-minded Council of Europe member states to submit an [inter-state complaint](#) to the European Court of Human Rights against the Georgian government for systematic and widespread human rights violations, particularly the targeting of human rights defenders and organisations and the growing number of political prisoners.

According to [the Human Rights Centre of Georgia](#), there are at least 55 political prisoners, of whom the following cases are particularly emblematic of the ongoing repression.

### **1. Mzia Amaglobeli**

Mzia Amaglobeli, born in 1975, is the founder of the independent media outlet Batumelebi/Netgazeti. She was insulted and threatened by Batumi's Chief of Police, Irakli Dgebuadze, after which she slapped him and was arrested on 12 January 2025. Her lawyers say Dgebuadze spat in her face and insulted her again during her arrest. Amaglobeli faces severe criminal charges that could result in 7 years' imprisonment. Her case illustrates how the police, the Prosecutor's Office, and the courts pursue opponents of the government while tacitly approving attacks on such opponents.

Mzia Amaglobeli has been on a hunger strike for several weeks in protest against her arrest.

### **2. Andro Chichinadze**

Andro Chichinadze, born in 1996, is an actor who was arrested on 5 December 2024. The Prosecutor's Office has charged him with participation in a violent group, a crime defined under Article 225 (2) of the Criminal Code of Georgia. Prosecutors claim that Chichinadze was present at a protest rally on 29 November 2024 near the Parliament, where he allegedly took part in the group's actions. They assert that he threw a stick at law enforcement officers, thereby endangering the lives and health of law enforcement personnel and others.

Human rights groups, however, assess that Chichinadze has been charged for political purposes in response to non-violent actions. The legal proceedings against him were unfair and breached the fair trial standards set out in the European Convention on Human Rights.

### **3. Zviad Tsetskhladze**

Zviad Tsetskhladze, born in 2005, is a student and head of the peaceful youth group “Dapioni” who was arrested on 4 December 2024. He is accused of organising and leading group violence. He faces sentences of 6 to 9 years in prison.

### **4. Onise Tsetskhladze**

Onise Tsetskhladze, born in 1997, is a comedian and stand-up artist who was arrested on 5 December 2024. The Prosecutor's Office has charged him with participation in a violent group. Prosecutors claim that Tsetskhladze was present at a protest rally on 29 November 2024 near the Parliament, where he took part in the group's actions.

### **5. Guram Mirtskhulava**

Guram Mirtskhulava, born in 1990, is a 34-year-old translator and copywriter who was arrested on 5 December 2024. The Prosecutor's Office charged him with participation in a violent group. The prosecutors claim that Mirtskhulava was present at a protest rally on 1 December 2024, near the Parliament, where he participated in the group's actions.

## Türkiye: Political imprisonments part of broader system

Political imprisonment in Türkiye is not limited to a few high-profile cases. It is part of a broader system in which legal tools – especially anti-terrorism laws – are used to suppress political opposition, media freedom, and civil society. Human rights organisations consistently report that prosecutions of members of these groups are often politically motivated and lack credible evidence, thereby undermining the rule of law.

The failed coup attempt of 15 July 2016 marked a turning point, resulting in over 228,000 arrests. Hundreds of thousands were investigated or prosecuted, and tens of thousands were convicted on terrorism-related charges. The European Court of Human Rights Grand Chamber found violations of the right to a fair trial in both [Yalçınkaya v. Türkiye](#) and [Yasak v. Türkiye](#), based on arrests and convictions for membership of an armed terrorist organisation. Domestic courts failed to establish the *mens rea* required under domestic law through an individualised, contextual assessment of criminal liability, strictly limited to the temporal framework of the offence. Convictions relied on alleged affiliations with the Gülen movement, indirect evidence such as bank accounts, employment, associations, and social media software and accounts, and on actions that were not considered illegal at the time they occurred.

As of 2026, Türkiye has one of the largest prison populations in Europe, with [400,000–420,000](#) people in custody. This figure includes a significant number of pre-trial detainees and individuals accused of political or security-related offences.

Opposition politicians behind bars include many from the main opposition party, the Republican People’s Party (CHP), as well as from the Kurdish opposition. Since the 2024 local elections, at least 31 mayors have been [removed](#) and 13 replaced by government appointees (‘kayyum’).

Türkiye has long been among the world’s worst jailers of journalists. Arrests and prosecutions often follow investigative reporting or criticism of the government. Authorities also shut down media outlets, block websites, and censor online content.

Human rights defenders and other activists are frequently charged with “terrorism”, “propaganda”, or “attempting to overthrow the state”. The best-known case is that of Osman Kavala, who has been imprisoned since 2017 despite European Court of Human Rights rulings finding his detention unlawful. Civil society organisations report a pattern of criminalising legitimate activism.

However, ordinary citizens may also face arrest, pre-trial detention, and criminal charges, including “insulting the president” under Article 299 of Türkiye’s Criminal Code. Hundreds were detained during the 2025 protests following the detention of Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu. Journalists covering the protests and lawyers supporting protesters were prosecuted alongside demonstrators.

Some of the key cases fall into three categories: (1) opposition politicians, (2) civil society figures linked to the [Gezi Park protests](#), and (3) journalists and activists.

Below, we present some of the better-known political prisoners.

### **1. Osman Kavala**

[Osman Kavala](#), born in 1957, is a businessman, philanthropist and civil society leader who has been detained since 2017. He is serving a life sentence without parole after being convicted of organising the 2013 Gezi Park protests. He is widely regarded as politically imprisoned, and in 2019, the European Court of Human Rights [ruled](#) that his detention was intended to silence him and deter civil society.

### **2. Selahattin Demirtaş**

[Selahattin Demirtaş](#), born in 1973, is the former co-chair of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) and a presidential candidate. He has been detained since 2016, serving a 42-year sentence imposed in 2024. The conviction concerns alleged links to terrorism and participation in protests. However, the European Court of Human Rights [ruled](#) that his detention was intended to suppress political pluralism and debate.

### **3. Figen Yüksekdağ**

[Figen Yüksekdağ](#), born in 1971, is a former HDP co-chair, serving a long-term prison sentence, referring to similar terrorism related charges like Demirtaş.

### **4. Şerafettin Can Atalay**

[Şerafettin Can Atalay](#), born in 1976, is a lawyer and opposition Member of Parliament. He has represented clients in numerous high-profile cases, including the Soma mine disaster, the Ermenek mine accident, the 2016 Adana student dormitory fire, the Çorlu train derailment, and freedom-of-thought cases involving journalists and writers. He has been detained since 2022, and his criminal conviction is linked to participation in the Gezi protests. His case is widely criticised for violating parliamentary immunity and the rule of law.

### **5. Tayfun Kahraman**

[Tayfun Kahraman](#), born in 1981, is an urban planner, academic and Istanbul municipal official. He served as president of the Istanbul Branch of the Chamber of Urban Planners from 2010 to 2019. He was one of the spokespersons for Taksim Solidarity during the Gezi Park events in 2013. He was sentenced to 18 years' imprisonment and is widely regarded as part of the Gezi political trials, alongside Kavala.

### **6. Çiğdem Mater**

[Çiğdem Mater](#), born in 1978, is a film producer, journalist and civil society figure. She was among 13 civil society figures arrested by the government in November 2018 in connection

with the crackdown on people and organisations linked to philanthropist Osman Kavala and the 2013 Gezi Park protests.

### **7. Mine Özerden**

[Mine Özerden](#), born in 1965, is a filmmaker and documentarian engaged in human rights work. She took part in the Taksim Platform, formed in 2012 to oppose the pedestrianisation of Taksim Square. She has been sentenced to 18 years' imprisonment.

### **8. Leyla Güven**

[Leyla Güven](#), born in 1964, is a Kurdish politician and former Member of Parliament for the HDP. She served as mayor of the municipality of Viranşehir in the Şanlıurfa Province of Southeast Anatolia, Turkey, where she represented the former Democratic Society Party (DTP). She is known for her activism in support of Kurdish rights and has been repeatedly detained.

### **9. Adnan Selçuk Mızraklı**

[Adnan Selçuk Mızraklı](#), born in 1963, is a Kurdish politician with the HDP, a former Member of Parliament, and the mayor of Diyarbakır. On 9 March 2020, he was sentenced to 9 years and 4 months' imprisonment for membership of a terrorist organisation.

11. Ekrem İmamoğlu, born in 1971, mayor of the Greater Istanbul Municipality and presidential candidate of the main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (CHP). He was taken into custody on 19 March 2025 and is charged with leading a criminal organisation and espionage.

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Political imprisonment in Türkiye also severely affects the media and the right to information, with dozens of journalists either in prison or facing prosecution at any given time. The Turkish Journalists Union [reported](#) that 13 journalists were in prison as of July 2026. However, countless journalists are detained and then released while judicial proceedings continue. Judicial harassment of journalists has become widespread and is intended to have a chilling effect on journalists. Examples include Merdan Yanardağ, born in 1961, a TV anchor detained in 2025; Mehmet Baransu, born in 1977, an investigative journalist detained since 2015; and Yıldız Tar, born in 1990, a Kurdish and LGBTIQ+ journalist from Kaos-GL, detained in 2026.