

# Investigative Journalist Khadija Ismayilova Freed by Azeri Court

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Journalist Khadija Ismayilova

An Azeri investigative journalist jailed last year after writing on corruption in the country has been freed, Radio Free Europe reported Wednesday.

Khadija Ismayilova, an award-winning reporter for U.S. media company Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), was imprisoned after she linked the family of Azeri president Ilham Aliyev to corruption.

She spent 537 days in jail on charges of misappropriation of property, abuse of position, illegal entrepreneurship and tax evasion.

Ismayilova appealed to Azerbaijan's Supreme Court, which overturned the first two charges and cut her 7 1/2-year prison term to a suspended sentence of 3 1/2 years.

"This is a great day for Khadija, for all journalists and for free speech everywhere," RFE/RL quoted their editor-in-chief Nenad Pejic as saying. "We are overjoyed for Khadija and her

family and can't wait for her to get back to work."

Ismayilova is expected to leave prison later on Wednesday. During her stint in jail, the 39-year-old became a cause celebre, with Amnesty International and Amal Clooney among those campaigning for her release.

Oil-rich Azerbaijan has a dismal record on press freedom, ranking 189 of the 199 countries included on Freedom House's 2016 Freedom of the Press survey.

The Aliyev family has dominated the country's politics since 1993, when Ilham's father, Heydar, became president. A number of investigative reporting, including Ismayilova's work, has shown that the family has used its position to gain control of a web of assets in Azerbaijan and overseas.

Before she was arrested in December 2014, Ismayilova was subject to threats and intimidation. On one occasion, she was mailed an unsigned letter that contained images taken by a camera planted in her bedroom. It said the images would be published if she did not "behave."

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