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Azerbaijan Frees Sputnik Editor After Putin Blames Deadly Plane Crash on Russian Missiles

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Igor Kartavykh. **Social media**

Azerbaijan released the local bureau chief of Russia's state-owned news outlet Sputnik following high-level negotiations with Moscow, the Kommersant business newspaper reported on Thursday, citing Kremlin foreign policy adviser Yury Ushakov.

Dmitry Kiselyov, who oversees Sputnik's parent organization, later clarified that the editor-in-chief of Sputnik Azerbaijan, Igor Kartavykh, had been moved from police detention and placed under house arrest in Baku. It was not immediately clear whether he still faced criminal charges.

Kartavykh and his deputy editor were arrested in June after Azerbaijani law enforcement authorities raided Sputnik Azerbaijan's office, accusing the state news outlet of operating through "illegal financing." Russia rejected the claims.

Ushakov told Kommersant that Russia had, in turn, freed a citizen of Azerbaijan who was arrested earlier. Citing an anonymous source, the newspaper later reported that Russian authorities released the former head of the Moscow Academic Satire Theater, Mamedali Agayev.

Both arrests came amid worsening relations between Moscow and Baku following the December 2024 downing of an Azerbaijani Airlines passenger plane. The jet was flying from Baku to Grozny in the republic of Chechnya when it disappeared from radar near Russia's Caspian Sea coast before crashing later near the Kazakh city of Aktau, killing 38 people on board.

On Thursday, President Vladimir Putin publicly admitted for the first time that Russia was to blame for the crash, telling Azerbaijan's Ilham Aliyev at a meeting in Tajikistan that two Russian anti-air missiles exploded near the plane during a Ukrainian drone attack in Grozny.

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