



press release

Friday, February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2024

*Azerbaijan*

## « The Baku Connection »

*« Don't think that they can stop these investigations by arresting us one by one. »*

A collective investigation coordinated by Forbidden Stories\* with RFI and France 24

From Thursday February 1<sup>st</sup>



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[Watch to the trailer HERE](#)

In November 2023, several journalists and a member of the administrative team from [Abzas](#), an online investigative media focusing on human rights in Azerbaijan, were arrested by the country's authorities.

A few days later, the international consortium of investigative journalists, Forbidden Stories, announced that it was continuing Abzas's work on several investigations. As part of a consortium of French and international media, RFI and France 24 are pursuing the

investigations of the imprisoned journalists, published since Thursday, February, 1<sup>st</sup> by fifteen partner media\*.

International activities around a gold mine, acts of torture in the country's prisons, presidential election under international tension... For a month, the members of the consortium worked on several investigations and lift the veil on several cases embarrassing to Azerbaijani authorities.

### To be aired on RFI and France 24



#### « The Baku Connection »

#### **Torture continues in Azerbaijan's jails, but so does European cooperation**

In the run-up to Azerbaijan's February 7 presidential election, the repression of President Ilham Aliiev's opponents, as well as NGOs and independent journalists still active in the country, has intensified. **Daniel Vallot**, **Karina Chabour** and **Roméo Langlois** investigate the practice of torture in Azerbaijani detention centres. The journalists also examine the continuing cooperation between European institutions and the country's judicial and prison systems.

Daniel Vallot, a journalist with RFI's international service, and France 24's reporters **Karina Chabour** and **Roméo Langlois** conducted this investigation aired on RFI from **Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> February** and on [france24.com](https://france24.com)

Laurent Richard, co-founder of Forbidden Stories spoke to **Fabien Albert** on RFI on **Friday, February 2<sup>nd</sup>** and the investigation can be found on [rfi.fr](https://rfi.fr) and on [France 24 YouTube channel](#).

On **Saturday February 10<sup>th</sup> at 9.10 PM\*** the investigation will be broadcast on "[Reporters](#)" presented by Mark Owen and available in French, Arabic and Spanish.

#### **Western Azerbaijan's Gedabek gold mine**

The Gedabek gold mine, which has been operated by a British company since 2012, is a source of great tension in Azerbaijan. In June 2023, residents of Söyüdlü, in the western part of the country, held protests against plans to create a second lake to store waste from the mine. They believe that the first lake, located 400 metres from their village, is polluting the soil and water, and say that cyanide vapours are causing respiratory illnesses in the area. **Corentin Bainier** collected the testimonies of activists and residents and interviewed experts to shed light on the risks caused by this operation.

**By Corentin Bainier** from [The Observers](#). The investigation can also be watch on **Observer's social media** and on [france24.com](https://france24.com) on Friday February 2<sup>nd</sup> and will be aired on Saturday February 3<sup>rd</sup> at 10.15 am\*\* in "[The Observers](#)".

On Friday February 2<sup>nd</sup> **Corentin Bainier** spoke to **Juliette Rengeval** in "[Accents d'Europe](#)" on RFI.

On [france24.com](https://france24.com), **Sebastian Seibt** provides a story to be found after the presidential election in Azerbaijan on Wednesday, February 7<sup>th</sup>.

\*Including: OCCRP (International), The Guardian (United Kingdom), Le Monde and Radio France (France), RTS (Switzerland), IRPI (Italy), Knack and Le Soir (Belgium), NRC (Netherlands), ZDF et Paper Trail Media (Germany), Der Standard (Austria)

\*\* Paris Time

# **forbidden** stories

Forbidden Stories is a network of journalists whose mission is to protect, pursue and publish the work of other journalists facing threats, prison, or murder. Since its creation in 2017, more than 150 journalists and 60 media outlets have participated in collaborative investigations coordinated by Forbidden Stories, including “The Rafael Project”, Story Killers, or “The Pegasus Project”.

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**Press Contacts:**

Monica Ramses, Press Relations Manager  
+33 1 84 22 95 22 • + 33 7 60 15 57 27 • monica.ramses@francemm.com

Estelle Torgue, Press Relations Officer  
+33 1 84 22 95 21 • +33 6 72 04 68 61 • estelle.torgue@france24.com

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