

Protest against a ban on wearing the hijab in schools in Azerbaijan

On 10 December, an illegal protest by around a thousand people took place in Baku in front of the headquarters of the Ministry of Education against the *de facto* ban on wearing the *hijab* in schools. The immediate cause of the demonstration was a statement by the minister in which he recalled the obligation to wear uniforms in schools, which in practice was received as a prohibition on wearing the *hijab*. The protest demonstrates the mounting frustration of Muslims in Azerbaijan and the government's lack of complete control over this part of the public.

Formally, Azerbaijan's laws do not prohibit the wearing of the *hijab* (the decision depends on the school authorities), but in practice it is not appreciated in the capital, Baku. The size of the protest, which was organised the day after the minister's speech, was considerable by local standards. It came as a surprise for the government, as demonstrated by the fact that the police were not ready to disperse it. 16 demonstrators were arrested. It is not known who organised the demonstration; the minister of education accused "internal and external factors" of doing so. Both the conduct of the protest – blocking streets in the city centre, the police's unsuccessful attempts to neutralise the situation – and the lack of any serious consequences to its participants have laid bare the government's helplessness and concern at the escalation of tension in Muslim circles. <ola>