



Hügelgasse 2, A-1130 Vienna Tel: +43 (1) 403 13 22 Fax: +43 (1) 403 13 23 E-mail: vienna@mission.mfa.gov.az

STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

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*OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission (NAM) report
on presidential elections in Azerbaijan*

Mr. Chairperson,

On June 17-21, 2013 OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission (NAM) conducted its visit to Azerbaijan, in order to assess pre-election environment and preparation for the elections. As a result of the mission, Report on presidential elections in the Republic of Azerbaijan was distributed on July 12, 2013.

The Government of Azerbaijan honoring its OSCE commitments accepted the ODIHR's NAM and assisted in arranging its visit and meetings with representatives of Azerbaijani authorities, including elections administration, political parties, media, civil society and diplomatic corps accredited in Baku. However, after analyzing the outcome of the visit and the report we could not register the same level of comprehensiveness, balance and objectivity from the ODIHR side.

For instance the report misinterprets the number of population living in Azerbaijan and registered by the state Statistics Committee and number of voters recorded by the Central Elections Committee, despite the fact that this issue was extensively discussed and exhaustive explanations were given by the CEC to the ODIHR experts.

CEC provided clear answer in this regard stating that number of citizens of Azerbaijan over the age of 18 is 6,454,600 as of June 1, 2013, including around 100,000 of Armenians living in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. Out of this figure 1,468,300 persons are not living in Azerbaijan for the last six months and thus were not included by the CEC into registered voter lists. Nevertheless, these Azerbaijani citizens can realize their right to vote in the respective diplomatic missions of Azerbaijan abroad. Therefore, CEC provided the ODIHR experts with a number of registered voters living in Azerbaijan equaling to 4,968,300. This figure appeared in accordance with the current legislation of Azerbaijan that requires registering to voters list only those citizens who resides in Azerbaijan.

I reiterate that these clarifications were provided to ODIHR experts in Baku and it is strange that they were not included purposefully into the report. Such approach casts doubt on the objectivity of the experts and assessment they made in the report.

A number of additional points and clarification made by the CEC to ODIHR experts related to candidate registration, campaign of candidates and freedom of assembly were also not included in the report.

Conclusions made by ODIHR on pre-election situation in Azerbaijan only reflect the position of the interlocutors of the opposition and civil society representatives and do not contain the comments made by all interlocutors whom they met. Although exhaustive information was provided by relevant state structures, this information was not reflected in the report.

At the same time, while comparing this report with similar documents produced by ODIHR NAM in neighboring countries we found that more balanced coverage was provided while assessing the pre-election situation.

We are extremely disappointed that such report is a product of the OSCE institution, which has been mandated by the OSCE Ministerial Council to perform its functions in a credible, effective and professional manner. We regret that the assessment made in the report undermine impartiality, independence and trust to ODIHR that is absolutely necessary to carry out OSCE election observation mission.

Such report, which is based only on one-sided information and provides inaccurate assessment of the situation in Azerbaijan, casts doubts on ODIHR's capacity to conduct impartial, independent and objective election observations mission in October in Azerbaijan.

As an equal participating State of the OSCE we expected a fair treatment and objective assessment of the pre-election environment and election preparations. Azerbaijan, reaffirming its OSCE commitments, requests the OSCE Chairman-in-Office and ODIHR to undertake urgent steps to rectify the situation created as a result of the publication of such non-objective report of the ODIHR NAM of July 12, 2013.

Given limited timeframe remaining until October elections, the Azerbaijani Delegation in Vienna and also authorities in Baku are ready for consultations on this matter.

Thank you.