

## **Statement by the delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan**

**Tuesday, 23 September 2014.**

**Working session 2: Fundamental freedom, including freedom of expression and address by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of Media.**

**Delivered by Gulsel Safarova, adviser,  
Presidential Administration of the Republic of Azerbaijan**

After re-gaining independency Azerbaijan was enshrined right and freedom of speech, access to information and its dissemination in accepted Constitution. In 1998 the abolition of censorship ensured development of Mass Media, the international rights of citizens and freedom of speech, information and expressions that is determined in Constitution. As a continuation of this policy in 2000 Ministry of Press and Information was abolished and was refused controlling function of state on press. Azerbaijani government has collaborated closely with Council of Europe in this direction as well. In 1999 there was accepted law on Mass Media according to international standards within cooperation of Council of Europe.

To realize completely freedom of information of journalist there was accepted law on "Access to information". Journalist organizations and experts of Council of Europe were involved in preparation of this law. Besides regarding signed decree by the President Mass Media was exempted from value added taxes, liquidated custom costs of papers and presented long term credits to the newspapers.

Today quantitatively of Mass Media, Republic of Azerbaijan takes one of the leading stands among the CIS countries and Eastern Europe. About 5 000 Mass media registered in Azerbaijan. Mass Media state registration process was extremely simplified. Nowadays only submission of documents to the Ministry of Justice is required for publications of newspapers and magazines or foundation of news agency. After the following 7 days it is possible to start printed publications. One might say that at present in Azerbaijan we have one of the most liberal and democratic laws regards to Mass Media. Established Mass Media is belong to various political, social organizations, private companies and individuals. About 30 organizations are qualified on development freedom of speech and information, protection of journalists right and etc. In 2009 there was created Mass Media State Support Fund. Fund is independent organization. Main objective is to develop Mass Media, to finance projects and programs of Mass Media. Since 2009, there were financed projects more than 18 million eu. Government takes care of social problems of the journalists. In 2013 156 apartments that were build up regarding state budget were handed over to journalists. Next year new apartment for journalists will be finished. These apartments were given to journalists regardless of idea and political views.

Azerbaijan is included one of the 10 the most dynamic developing countries. Opportunities of internet has been broadening due to speed development of Information-communication technology in Azerbaijan. In our country it contains 20 computers in every 100 persons. The number of internet providers reached about 40. Last years the number of broadband internet users reached to 55 percent that it is 2 times high in worldwide average indicator. In internet users in the regions increased 12-15 times. According to report World Economic Forum nowadays internet users contains 70 percent of the people in the country. In the country where is 9 milyon citizens live there are 2 milyon users in social networks, as well as 1, 2 milyon facebook users. Approximately 300 news and analytical sites take an activity. Access to internet and to get information through internet is provided totally in Azerbaijan.

The role of NGOs is very essential in protection of human rights, development of civil society, to provide social control. Taking into consideration this after longterm discussions based to experience of leading European countries a new mechanism was found out among government and civil society and the concept of State support to NGOs was approved, followingly The council of State Support to NGO-s under the President of The Republic of Azerbaijan was created in 2007. Generally, during its activity the Council financed approximately 20 million euro for project and programs, it is 2300 programs and projects. At the same time Council financed 30 foreign NGOs which work for development of civil society in Europe and other foreign countries. This year there will be financed 19 foreign organizations again.

Youth organizations have important role in the development of civil society in Azerbaijan. Therefore, There was created Youth Foundation under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Since 2011 1500 projects were financed. Foundation gives material and technical support, too. Taking into consideration time, this facts prove that Azerbaijani state provided citizens of the country comprehensive opportunity in direction of development of civil society, as well as freedom of expression, Mass media, access to information and dissemination. For us development of civil society is priority. There is not any obstacles for NGO-s which get grants from foreign donors. Main principle is to adapt demand of law and transparency of activities.

But I should say surely that some journalists or chairs of NGO is not involved for their profession and political activity as claimed by some international organizations. Declared charges determined based on test materials and proofs presented to Ministry of Taxes and Ministry of Finance based on the decision of court. They are charged on criminal code's article swindle, illegal business, evasion from payment of taxes, fake of official documents, great deal bribery and other articles. Criminal does not recognize a profession. Generally, within the process of investigation or decision to require exemption them by some international organization, it can be valued as pressure on law-enforcement bodies of Azerbaijan

I would like to tell in short about amendments on legislation concerning NGO-s in Azerbaijan. The accepted laws are in the frame of commitment that Azerbaijan made

under international organization. Azerbaijan was based on experience of leading countries in some changes in legislation. I would like to mention that there was held discussion with experts working on human rights, democracy and other fields, chairs of organizations, representatives from Parliament and Ministry of Justice concerning on changes in NGO legislation in Azerbaijan..

In general changes on NGO legislation will provide NGOs to be transparent and responsible towards their work. For example, NGO-s hold neither annual meeting, nor report activity. Law demands to do it open and transparent. Amendments on legislation addressed to increase quantity the mechanisms. Another issue: how non registered NGO-s could be financed? They have no bank account. Then, how do money transfer? where are their reports? How does NGO finance if it has not any grant agreement with donor?

Therefore, amendments on NGO legislation serve to enhance transparent activity of NGO-s, social control, accountability, increasing of responsibility and efficiency.

This year in January Parliament accepted law on "Public participation". According to this law in all state bodies there will be created public councils that will consist of different experts from civil society, journalist organizations, private sectors.

At the same time in State Support Council was created law and monitoring group with initiative of NGOs and their participations in order to learn supposed influence of laws.

For Republic of Azerbaijan freedom of speech, expressions and information is one of the democratic achievements. Azerbaijani government is determined to implement further commitments concerning development of democracy.

Thank you.

