



**Statement by the Delegation of Azerbaijan
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Reformation of the judiciary is one of the top priorities of Azerbaijan. Judicial and legal reforms which are now underway have a number of goals, including, *inter alia*, increasing efficiency and access to justice, strengthening the independence of judges and creating user-friendly judicial system; expanding public confidence in the judiciary.

Among the guarantees of the judicial independence is de-politicization, life tenure of judges, as previously judges were appointed for 5 or 10 years depending on the jurisdiction. The legislation also provides for the immunity of judges for the duration of their terms of office, the inadmissibility of restrictions on and interference with the judiciary, ensuring personal security of judges, provision of material and social guarantees as to their respective positions, abolition of the prosecutorial or any other supervision.

The Judicial Legal Council established in 2005, which is an independent body of judicial self-government, holds a special place in ensuring the independence of the judiciary. The Council is formed entirely on the basis of the representatives of the three branches of power, as well as both sides to the trial: advocate and prosecutor. The Council, which is the guarantor of the independence of the judiciary, deals with all issues related to the judicial system.

Reforms aimed at further strengthening the independence of the judiciary and expanding self-governing powers are underway. The law was adopted stipulating additional mechanisms to secure judges from external interference with their activities and strengthening their financial independence.

In close cooperation with the Council of Europe, Azerbaijan has developed the most transparent system of selection of judges. The Judges' Selection Committee, an independent body, was created especially for selection of judges. Selection procedure is multi-stage, which includes tests, written and oral examinations, long-term training and internships in courts. All of the candidates take exam in a single audience. They are being watched by numerous local and international observers and media representatives. The selection of questions is carried out by a computer program randomly from the questions database. In order to ensure maximum transparency, examinations are broadcasted online. The comprehensive report, by the group of experts of the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) noted the conformity of the activity of the institutional bodies and the selection of judges in Azerbaijan to the advanced European standards, mentioned that the process was distinguished with its outstanding transparency, fairness and purity. Selection of judges in Azerbaijan is recognized by CEPEJ as an interesting model of best practice.

In order to improve public's access to justice up to 20 regional courts, including five courts of appeal were established throughout the country. In previous years, there used to be a single Court of Appeal, located in the capital – Baku, that dealt with appeals from all cities and districts of the country, which among other things, used to put an extra financial burden on the parties and participants of the process.

This problem was particularly acute in regard to the inhabitants of the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic, which is under blockade and has no direct link with the mainland but the air due to the aggression of the neighboring Armenia against Azerbaijan and the occupation of 20% of our lands. Now there is no need to come to the capital.

From the beginning of 2011 for the first time in the history of the country the system of administrative justice has been launched. It should be noted that the administrative courts have jurisdiction over a region, but not a single district. That was done in order to avoid any interference by local authorities. It has been 5 years that these courts are functioning and we already see positive results. Thus, 80% of the complaints are satisfied by the administrative courts. This is a substantive development in the course of the reforms as these judgments are delivered against state agencies in favor of people.

As part of our joint project with the World Bank, which has already been considered as the most successful project, new administrative buildings of courts equipped with modern ICT were opened for use, a single Internet portal (www.courts.az) of the judicial system has been launched. Moreover, the recently created 'e-court' information database serves to ensure the transparency, effective protection of the individuals' human rights and freedoms and speeding up the application of modern information technologies in administration of justice. Along with that, the practice of SMS notification of the parties to the court proceedings has been launched.

The improvement of support provided to judges is also in the focus of attention and in comparison with year 2000 their salary was increased up to 30 times. One of the factors that affect the quality of justice is the workload of judges. In this regard, the number of judges has been significantly increased.

It should be noted that in the framework of the Council of Europe 2014-2016 Action Plan for Azerbaijan the project "Application of European Convention of Human Rights and case-law of the European Court of Human Rights" has been developed and is being currently implemented.