

Statement by the delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan
Working Session 12:
Democratic elections and election observation – sharing best practices

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October 9, 2013 is the day of the Presidential elections in the Republic of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan pays great attention to the issue of elections. Elections are test for democracy. Since its independence, Azerbaijan has passed significant democratic developments and reforms, and the level of conduct of elections, both parliamentary and presidential, have increasingly improved. But we, of course, should not slow down but on the contrary improve and work together with out international partners, first of all, the OSCE/ODIHR.

The Government of Azerbaijan puts all necessary steps for the conduct of free and fair elections. This year upon invitation from the Government, the OSCE has deployed long and short term observers in Azerbaijan, and the co-operation with the OSCE/ODIHR observers is taking place at the high level.

The Central Election Commission (CEC) has carried out many projects since the end of 2012 in compliance with the OSCE recommendations, as well as recommendations and observations of other international organisations, such as the Council of Europe and EU.

It should be noted that most of the recommendations given by ODIHR in 2010 were taken into consideration.

It is well known that a legal basis is of great importance in the conduct of democratic, fair and transparent elections. In the light of the amendments to the Election Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan by laws of 2012 and 2013, the CEC has finalised the formation of normative-legal framework on elections and taken purposeful measures in this field. Many normative acts – instructions, orders and regulations were developed. As a result, 49 normative-legal acts were adopted and distributed to more than 32 thousand members of election commissions. A new version of the Election Code with the latest amendments was prepared in Azerbaijan, English and Russian and published in large circulation, as well as, posted on the CEC official website.

One of the important phases of election process is a pre-election campaign. After ending the registration of candidates (there are 10 president candidates), the CEC has put many steps aimed at ensuring pre-election campaign on equal terms for candidates. Media play important role in guaranteeing equal facilities for all candidates and fair competition between them. Thus, the CEC allocated free airtime on Public TV and Radio and space of publication in local newspapers for all registered candidates at the expense of the state budget.

Meanwhile, more than 1000 boards – 2 within each election precinct were installed for campaign materials of candidates. Relevant measures have been taken for the allocation of open and closed venues by local executive authorities for meetings and gatherings of candidates with voters in residences within the country. This is an important integral part of a pre-election campaign. Having informed the Election Commission, candidates are allowed to use these places free of charge. In general, candidates have been provided all necessary facilities to meet with voters and convey their election-related signals to them. There are public debates on TV and Radio, in printing media, Internet and there are also public meetings and gatherings in support of this or that particular candidate. It is vitally important to ensure the freedom of assembly and freedom of expression at all times and that journalists carry out their duties without interference and pressure. At the eve and during elections, this requirement becomes even more important. And the Azerbaijani Government is doing its best so that these rights are duly upheld.

Transparency of the process plays significant role in the conduct of free and fair elections. In total, 24425 domestic observers and 512 international observers were accredited to observe the Presidential Elections in Azerbaijan. There are 19 international organisations, including the OSCE and PACE and individual observers from 77 countries. Both domestic and international observers have been accredited and provided with badges. "Guide for Observers" and "Election Day Guide" were prepared for observers and relevant measures have been taken for providing international observers with the Election Code in English, informational CDs about Azerbaijan, map of the country and other necessary materials.

The CEC sessions are open to mass media representatives and observers. Media representatives, as well as, the representatives of foreign embassies and diplomatic consular offices, international organizations and diplomatic delegates are informed in advance and invited to every session. The documents adopted by the Commission are published in "Azerbaijan" newspaper and posted on CEC web-site in Azerbaijan and English after the sessions.

The practice of web-cameras applied since 2008 in the election history of Azerbaijan will also be carried out in these elections for watching the voting process live through internet outside of the election precincts. Apart from all other means for ensuring transparency in elections, the number of the polling stations with web cameras has increased from 500 up to 1000. Internet users are allowed to watch the voting process, vote count and determination of results live and incessantly through the web-cameras by the access to the CEC website without any registration either in the country or abroad.

One of the main activity aspects of the Central Election Commission is cooperation with international and foreign organizations. Different projects and meetings have been implemented in the frame of this cooperation. Thus, the CEC has cooperated and conducted meetings with the OSCE Baku office, European Union delegation to Azerbaijan, as well as, foreign embassies and many other organizations regularly relating to the upcoming elections.

One of the projects implemented together with international organizations is informational sessions conducted jointly with OSCE Baku office. Informational sessions on "Non-interference in election process" organized by the Administration of President of the Republic of Azerbaijan,

Central Election Commission and OSCE Baku office were conducted for the heads of the executive authorities and chairpersons of Constituency Election Commissions of Baku and surrounding regions. Similar sessions were conducted for the heads of executive authorities and election commissions chairpersons.

Awareness raising of voters has always been in the focus of the Government. The CEC has conducted an intensive campaign for the voters to check their entries in the voters' lists and closely cooperated in this field with mass media. Thousands of posters in 34 titles aimed at awareness raising and calling to elections. Furthermore, different video clips on these subjects are broadcasted via the TV channels functioning within the republic. 2 educational video clips on the voters' lists prepared by the CEC are regularly broadcasted via the TV channels.

The Government of Azerbaijan ensures and will ensure that all necessary steps are taken for holding free, fair and transparent elections in compliance with national legislation and international standards. Azerbaijan stands ready to further cooperate with international partners in the field of elections, including the OSCE/ODIHR observation mission.