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PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN AZERBAIJAN REPUBLIC: FACTS AND REALITY

Beginning from the middle of the 1990s, Azerbaijan gradually started to revive and take confident steps towards resolving fateful issues under the leadership of the great leader Heydar Aliyev. First of all, the sustainability of Azerbaijan's state independence was ensured and political stability was established inside the country.

The formation of a democratic society and transparent public relations in Azerbaijan in the years of independence formed the main basis of state policy. Political pluralism in the country became the necessary basis of public progress in the country. Currently, there are appropriate legal and democratic political conditions for the free activities of political parties in the country. Today, 55 political parties are registered in Azerbaijan, and 11 of them are represented in the parliament. Political parties are closely involved in the public political life of the country and are represented in elected and other government bodies.

Additional opportunities have been created to strengthen the material-technical base of political parties and increase their role in the country's political system and in the development of civil society.

We can say with full confidence that the transitional period has already ended in Azerbaijan. A new socio-economic system, which is based on free market relations and political pluralism and has its own rules, has been established. The formation of the appropriate infrastructure for the functioning of an effective economy is nearing the

end. A reliable system of social security has been established for the population, and this system is currently improving.

The President of the Azerbaijan Republic issued an instruction on the preparation of the Development Concept “Azerbaijan – 2020: Look into the Future”. The need to prepare such a concept is due to the fact that Azerbaijan has stepped into a new stage of development. The achievements that have been gained allow Azerbaijan to set even higher goals and determine the tasks that stem from these goals.

If we talk today about elections I need to inform you that 1,000 polling stations out of a total of 5,000 are equipped with cameras that will make it easier for “anyone in the world to observe how the voting and counting is conducted” in next month's presidential elections. Hundreds of foreign election observers have been invited to Azerbaijan and that institutions like the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) have already established observation missions.

We are creating full conditions for open and transparent elections, we are decisive. The elections will determine the future of the Azerbaijani people and that the government is interested in holding these elections democratically. I think no government would take action that would only invite criticism.

There are around 300 daily newspapers and most of them are not pro-government. There are hundreds of Internet sites, both pro-government and pro-opposition; each side can express their own views. The Internet creates the conditions for freedom of thought

I want to mention to the poll held by The European Centre for Survey Research of UK. The poll was held as part of the project “Democratic values , political and electoral behavior of the population of Azerbaijan: A Sociological Analysis”.

The survey polled 1,550 adult residents of 42 houses.

The survey was conducted face to face at the place of residence of respondents on the basis of standardized questionnaires.

The multi-stage random selection, based on which the survey was conducted, adequately reflected the social and demographic structure of the population. The relative error of the survey is about 3 %.

The results show that the concept of "democracy" for the citizens of Azerbaijan means the diversity of views (48.0 %), free and fair elections (36.6%), protection of human rights and freedoms (30.3 %).

The most important elements of democracy in Azerbaijan are the equality of all before the law, freedom of speech and press, competitive and fair elections.

In general, the democratic situation in Azerbaijan was rated as positive. About two-thirds of the population of Azerbaijan recognizes the current state of democracy in the country. They answered 'yes, it does' or 'it is satisfactory in general'. The respondents believe that over the last 10 years, the situation has improved in the area of democracy, freedom of press has been assessed as sufficiently high.

An interesting fact is that the majority of respondents (63.4 %) perceive participation in social and political life as communicating with friends or loved ones about politics or watching the news on television. That is, it rather points to spending spare time.

Of course, such an approach to policy is the result of a skeptical attitude to the existing parties. An opinion poll showed that 65.6 % of the population, in general, do not consider themselves belonging to any party.

The survey determined that the potential involvement of the respondents in the upcoming elections is quite high (over 82 %). However, experience shows that the number of people who declare to participate in the election differ from the actual number of voters.

According to the survey, the majority of votes will be given for present President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev. A considerable number of respondents (11.8 %) do not intend to participate in the elections , 3.3 % - undecided , 7.9% - found it difficult to answer this question (which is natural, since the survey campaign has just been launched)

It is also interesting that 2.9 % of respondents said they would not vote for any of the candidates.

The survey showed that 88.7% of the respondents intending to participate in the elections will vote for President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev. It is expected that the representative of the National Council of Democratic Forces Jamil Gasanly will get 0.6%, independent candidate Zahid Oruj and chairman of "Umid" Iqbal Aghazadeh - 0.3% each, Gudrat Hasanguliev (Popular Front Party of Unified Azerbaijan), and Ilyas Ismailov ("Adalat") - 0.2% each, Faraj Guliyev (Party of National Revival) and Araz Alizadeh (Social Democratic Party) will get 0.1% each.

In other words, the chances of President Ilham Aliyev are much higher than of other candidates.