



United States Mission to the OSCE

Amendments to Azerbaijan's NGO Legislation

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 20, 2014

The United States joins others in noting with grave concern the adoption of recent amendments to several laws in Azerbaijan affecting NGO registration, fines, and funding. These amendments further restrict the space for a free and independent civil society and run counter to Azerbaijan's OSCE commitments. We urge the Azerbaijani authorities to engage in sustained discussions with civil society, the OSCE Project Coordinator, and international experts in a joint effort to ensure government policy and practices conform with international law and OSCE commitments.

These troubling amendments come as pressure on civil society and opposition activists continues. We continue to closely monitor the investigation of Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center Chairman Anar Mammadli and the International Cooperation of Volunteers Public Union for alleged illegal business activities and tax evasion. We noted previously in the Permanent Council our concerns that Mr. Mammadli's detention was related to his organization's election monitoring and reporting activities. We also continue to closely monitor and urge Azerbaijan to observe fair trial guarantees in the trials of Republican Alternative Movement Chairman Ilgar Mammadov and Musavat Party Deputy Chairman Tofiq Yagublu, who were arrested for allegedly inciting the residents of Ismayilli to violent protest, as well as the trials of activists of the N!DA youth movement, who were arrested in connection with protests against non-combat deaths in the military. As we recently noted at the Permanent Council, we are also concerned about the arrest and subsequent conviction of Yadigar Sadiqov, a political activist with the Musavat party who was arrested on charges of alleged hooliganism earlier this year.

We reiterate our calls to President Aliyev to request ODIHR and United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association Maina Kiai to identify opportunities to ensure the amendments are in line with OSCE commitments and Azerbaijan's international obligations. We encourage all OSCE participating States to reject restrictive laws that unduly limit the activities of their citizens and undermine their OSCE commitments.

The foundation of a democratic state is respect for the rule of law, human rights, and fundamental freedoms, including the freedoms of association, peaceful assembly, and expression. My government encourages the Government of Azerbaijan to collaborate with civil society and to engage with the OSCE to address Azerbaijan's challenges and implement its OSCE commitments. We will look to the Government of Azerbaijan to ensure a continued robust OSCE field presence that works in all three dimensions throughout the country and engages with the full spectrum of Azerbaijani society, as provided for in the mandate of the Project Coordinator.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.