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Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen!

I am Ahmad Shahidov, represent the Azerbaijan Institute for Democracy and Human Rights.

First of all, I do express my deepest thanks to the ODIHR that every year, as well as today, holds such a magnificent international event. Having gathered in Warsaw every year, we discuss the processes taking place in the OSCE region, investigate the problems and look for solutions.

Our first session is dedicated to democracy and elections, and it shows that the OSCE attaches great importance to democracy. A number of important elections have been held in the OSCE region in 2018. For example, parliamentary elections in Italy, presidential elections in Russia, presidential elections in Azerbaijan, early presidential and parliamentary elections in Turkey and so on.

I want to continue my today's speech on April 11 presidential elections in Azerbaijan. In fact, according to the Constitution of Azerbaijan, presidential elections were to be held in October this year. However, the President of Azerbaijan made a decision to hold early elections, using the authority granted him by the Constitution. It is a complete normal decision and widely spread in world practice.

In the presidential election, eight candidates competed and current President Ilham Aliyev had seven rivals. The peculiarity of these elections was that the candidate of the New Azerbaijan Party, Ilham Aliyev, won the other competitors with great advantage and this victory was very easy. There are several reasons for this. I have to point out that some parties that have called themselves as the main opposition have refused to participate in the elections. It may seem strange to you, but it has some subjective reasons. These parties have officially declared that the decision to hold early elections is sudden and they are not ready for the elections. Imagine?! This is a very ridiculous reason. The forces that are the country's main opposition are not ready for the elections. In fact, this fact is to confess their predicament. That is why the Azerbaijani

voters did not forgive this irresponsible decision of those parties.

Ilham Aliyev won his rivals in the election very easily. Our organization was observing elections in 25 constituencies throughout Azerbaijan. As a human rights defender, I was watching the voting process on election day. Nearly 1,000 international observers were watching the election. Frankly, the 11 April elections were the most democratic and transparent elections in Azerbaijan so far.

These elections also laid the foundation for a new political era in Azerbaijan. For 30 years, the forces acting as traditional opposition have already been replaced by new political parties. It is no coincidence that the political activist Ilgar Mammadov, who was released last month, laid the foundations for a new political party and announced his platform for domestic and foreign policy. Ilgar Mammadov's release also indicates that new political relations have begun in Azerbaijan and democratic reforms are rapidly going on in our country.

I would like to briefly speak about the parliamentary elections in Armenia as well. Thus, Serzh Sargsyan's government has caused serious protests in Armenia and the democratic revolution has taken place. Today Serzh Sargsyan does not have power in Armenia. For decades, a regime that has drawn the Armenian people into an unnecessary war, infecting Armenia with misery and corruption has collapsed. Armenia's new government seems to be more democratic and pragmatic. I believe that the government of the Nikol Pashinyan will try to make Armenia truly independent and will pursue a constructive negotiation with the neighbors in order to achieve peace and reconciliation in the region and will respect the international law norms.