



INTERNATIONAL ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION

PRESS RELEASE

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN AZERBAIJAN MARK PROGRESS, THOUGH FALLING SHORT OF INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

Baku, 6 November 2000 – The parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan mark progress over previous elections, though falling short of international standards, concluded the International Election Observation Mission in a joint statement of preliminary findings and conclusions (attached). The International Election Observation Mission is a joint effort by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR).

The international observers noted that progress was made in particular with regard to enhancing political pluralism. The parties and candidates had better opportunities to conduct their campaign, although an increasing number of obstacles were observed in the last few days. In contrast to previous elections, all political parties were eventually able to register for the proportional ballot, although the late registration of eight of them did affect their ability to conduct a full campaign. The newly-amended election legislation provided for multi-party election commissions at all levels. The media provided for a diversity of political views, although the state-owned media clearly spoke in favour of the incumbents. The elections took place within an improved legislative framework that incorporated recommendations by the Council of Europe's Venice Commission and the OSCE/ODIHR.

However, serious deficiencies were noted in regard to the implementation of the election legislation. The registration of candidates for the single mandate constituencies was substantially flawed and effectively barred approximately half of the candidates from running. This limited both voters' choice and the right to be elected. In many instances the election commissions were subject to interference and pressure from the local executive authorities. The new provisions on domestic non-partisan observers are less liberal and a step back from the previous presidential election.

On election day, observers reported that voting was conducted in a generally calm atmosphere, but in contrast to the official figures the voter turnout was reported to be very low. The elections were marred by numerous instances of serious irregularities, in particular a completely flawed counting process. Observers reported ballot stuffing, manipulated turnout results, pre-marked ballots, and production of either false protocols or no protocols at all. Additionally, party proxies frequently suffered intimidation, harassment and sometimes even arrest whilst carrying out their legitimate activities. Unauthorized local officials often controlled the process and sought to influence voters. In several instances, international observers were denied access to polling stations and were frequently expelled from election commission premises.

The international observers express their concern of what seems to be a clear manipulation of electoral procedures. They appeal to the authorities to urgently investigate in an open and transparent manner all irregularities and to take appropriate action immediately.

Over the last decade Azerbaijan has emerged from a period of turbulences and war. Azerbaijan's application to join the Council of Europe is now being considered. An invitation to join the Council of Europe is not a gesture of blind trust in a country's political leadership. It is a stretched-out hand to the people of that country. It is an invitation to the people to join in the difficult task of promoting tolerance and human rights, of establishing democracy and stability.

MISSION INFORMATION

Ms. Paula Kokkonen, the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office's Special Representative for the Elections in Azerbaijan leads the OSCE Election Observation Mission. Mr. Nikolai Vulchanov heads the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission.

Mr. Andreas Gross leads the delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission was established on 4 October in Baku with 17 international experts and long-term observers, covering all 99 constituencies throughout Azerbaijan. On election day, the International Election Observation Mission deployed more than 200 short-term observers, including 27 parliamentarians from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and 20 from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Observers visited more than 700 polling stations out of 5,000 across Azerbaijan.

The OSCE/ODIHR will issue a comprehensive final report on these elections approximately one month after the completion of the process.

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