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**FIFTH EASTERN PARTNERSHIP
FACILITY SEMINAR
ON ELECTION OBSERVATION
AND CENTRAL ELECTORAL COMMISSIONS**

**Council of Europe
Meeting Room No. 8**

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PRESENTATION ON ELECTION OBSERVATION

by Mr Shahin ASADLI
Chief advisor, International Relations Department
Central Election Commission of the Republic of Azerbaijan

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1. First of all, on behalf of Central Election Commission of the Republic of Azerbaijan I would like to thank the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe for organizing such an event which is important for exchange of views of electoral management bodies and sharing experiences on election observation in different countries.
2. Transparency is one of the important issues in elections. It is the main task of electoral management bodies to ensure it. For managing this issue, the electoral body should have supporting legal background and relevant tools.
3. The Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan considers the right of citizens to elect and be elected to state bodies. Implementation of this right accurately is the main duty for state authority.
4. To conduct free and fair elections is up to the range of certain factors. We can mention long list of those factors. But ensuring transparency in elections and providing observers with independent and full facilities are also from more important issues. Election observation is among more important issues. Azerbaijan has demonstrated strong political will by taking relevant steps for conducting free and fair elections.
5. The Election Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan adopted in 2003 which had been prepared jointly with OSCE/ODIHR and Venice Commission of the Council of Europe unambiguously determines that the activity of the election commissions shall be open for voters and other election actors and implies that the persons having observer status, as well as, media representatives shall have the right to monitor the election process.
6. Citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan possessing active suffrage, as well as, foreign citizens coming in a defined manner and on the basis of the relevant invitation and who have been accredited by CEC may function as observers. The media representatives who play an important role in ensuring transparency of the election process shall feel fully free to monitor the elections conducted in the Republic of Azerbaijan. Domestic media representatives shall monitor all pre and post-election period, including voting day processes freely without any requirement to be registered. Foreign media representatives may join the observation process of the elections after being provided with the relevant badge by CEC.
7. According the Election Code, invitations for observation shall be sent by the Milli Majlis (Parliament), relevant executive authorities or the Central Election Commission after a decision on the appointment of the elections is officially published. Foreign observers shall be accredited by CEC upon sending the relevant application form and shall be provided with the relevant badges. The term of authority of the international observers shall commence on the day of their registration by the Central Election Commission, and expire on the day of the official publication of the returns of the elections.
8. While conducting observation the election process should not be influenced in the interest of a candidate or political party, all circumstances and facts related to the activities to be observed should be taken into consideration, observation should be open, results of the observation should be based on facts.
9. According to the Election Code, international and domestic observers shall have the same rights and undertake the same duties. Observers are provided with sufficient rights and duties by legislation. Saving my time for speech, I'd like to express my opinion in a sentence that observers are fully independent to observe all the processes freely before, on and after Election Day.

10. Domestic and international publicity have always focused on the elections conducted in Azerbaijan and the observers visiting the country for the observation of elections have been fully facilitated. 1295 international observers representing 50 international organizations including Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, European Parliament, OSCE, CIS Parliamentary Assembly and 100 countries joined the Presidential Elections of 9 October, 2013.

11. At the same time, the elections was monitored by nearly 52000 domestic observers either on their own initiatives or by political parties and non-governmental organizations. 102 international mass media representatives were provided with the relevant badges by CEC and were entitled to publicize the elections freely.

12. Awareness-raising of different election actors has always been one of the priority issues to CEC. Trainings, seminars and other different activities are implemented for the members of lower election commissions, observers, voters, mass media, police officials and educational materials are prepared and delivered on destinations during elections.

13. "Guide for Observers" was published for awareness-raising of observers during the Presidential Elections. The guidebook contains principles of observation, as well as, rights and duties of observers. The booklet thoroughly informed observers on the matters to comply with and prohibited by law. The guidebook was published in Azerbaijan, English and Russian on the basis of the Election Code and normative acts approved by the CEC and these booklets were delivered to domestic and international observers.

14. CEC prepared and distributed "Election Day Guide" in Azerbaijan and English languages with detailed information on the Presidential Elections Day procedures – preparation and opening of the polling station, roles and duties of the members of Precinct Election Commissions and observers, as well as, their responsibilities, status, activities and exceptional cases during the voting hours, classification of ballot papers, vote count and filling out the official protocol on the voting results and other issues for educating all other election actors including lower election commission members. "Election Day Guide" was submitted to Con.ECs, political parties, other applied organizations and observers.

15. Mass media plays an important role in ensuring transparency in elections. With the aim of awareness-raising of media representatives regarding the Presidential elections, conference on "the basis of the activity, rights, duties and responsibilities of mass media representatives in the election process" was conducted jointly with the Fund of State Support for the Development of Mass Media under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan (FSSDMM) and Central Election Commission. The conference was attended by the officials of the leading mass media – newspapers, information agencies and TV channels.

16. Along with the participation of domestic and international observers, other means are also of great importance for ensuring transparency in elections. The usage practice of web cameras which had been applied since 2008 in election history of Azerbaijan and allowed to live follow the voting process through internet outside of the election precincts had also been carried on in these elections. Apart from all other means for ensuring transparency in elections, the number of the polling stations within the republic with web cameras installed in previous elections was increased from 500 up to 1000 (approximately to 20 %), technical preparations of web cameras had been finalized, after considering this issue at the CEC session relevant decision was adopted and the list of the polling stations where web cameras had been installed was approved. Internet users were 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 either in the country or abroad on Election Day without any registration.

17. Election observation expresses the interests of the local and international community in the achievement of democratic elections, as part of democratic development, including respect

for human rights and the rule of law. Election observation, which focuses on civil and political rights, must be conducted on the basis of the highest standards for impartiality concerning political competitors and must be free from any bilateral or multilateral considerations that could conflict with impartiality. Observation of elections shall assist improving the election process and maintaining the supremacy of law by preventing the violations and other illegal actions. Just from this point of view, submission and publicizing of fair opinions on the shortcomings, violations and other illegal actions found out by domestic and international observers carry great importance for impartial and fair observation by serving to improve the election practice.

18. Central Election Commission has defined the following issues as priority and has been successfully acted in these fields - ensuring citizens' rights to elect and be elected, application of election legislation accurately and thoroughly, developing the cooperation with international organizations, protection of important principles like transparency, fairness during the conduct of elections, enhance of legal educational activities, study and apply of international practice in this field.

19. At the end of my speech, I would like to wish success to the seminar.

20. Thank you for your attention.