



19 October 2013

Azerbaijan: Civic Solidarity Platform statement on the 9 October 2013 presidential election

According to the official results, the presidential election held in Azerbaijan on 9 October 2013 resulted in a landslide victory for incumbent president Ilham Aliyev, with 85% of the vote. We, the undersigned members of the Civic Solidarity Platform, a coalition of over 50 human rights NGOs from across Europe, the former Soviet Union and North America supports the conclusions of international observers, not considering the election free, fair and transparent for the following major reasons:

- Incumbent president Aliyev did not face any serious competition. Ilgar Mammadov, head of Republican Alternative (REAL) Movement a main opponent of Aliyev whose participation could have helped ensure a more viable electoral process, was prevented from running in the elections. He has been held in detention since February 2013 on politically motivated charges. In addition, the Central Election Commission refused to register his candidacy because he had allegedly failed to collect the required number of valid signatures.
- There was no level playing field because of serious limitations for Aliyev's competitors to conduct their campaigns, as well as widespread restrictions on freedom of expression, association and assembly. All available administrative resources were mobilized to ensure Aliyev's re-election, and all television channels, radio stations and state-funded newspapers operating in the country ran campaigns in favor of him both during and beyond the election campaign period. Internet content filtering, obstruction of social media activism and cases of direct interference with the work of journalists were also [reported](#) by organizations such as the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety. Moreover, the election took place in the context of a widening crackdown on government critics, with new restrictive legislation having been enacted and numerous political opposition members, journalists, human rights defenders, civic and youth activists (such as leaders and members of the NIDA civic movement), and religious believers having been arrested and convicted on trumped-up and politically motivated charges since the beginning of the year (see a [list](#) of political prisoners published by the Human Rights Club on the eve of the elections). Freedom of assembly was restricted during the election campaign in particular by the fact that only one venue was assigned for election rallies in each election district and these venues were not suitable for the purpose, while they were located far outside city centers and in remote areas.
- On election day, serious irregularities were observed, such as so-called "carousel" voting, multiple voting by pre-instructed voters and outright ballot stuffing in favor of Aliyev. Election violations were observed and documented (filmed or photographed) by the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission, the observation missions of local NGOs like the Election

Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center and the "Learning Democracy" Public Union, as well as individuals who observed the election in private capacity.

In view of the above, our organizations regret the standpoint taken by the 32-member observer delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and the 7-member observer mission of the European Parliament (EP), which stated that they “observed a free, fair and transparent electoral process” around election day. This conclusion is in stark contrast to the assessments made by the OSCE/ODIHR mission and local observers, who highlighted an array of violations marring the whole election process, including on election day. We believe that this conclusion undermines the credibility of election monitoring undertaken by PACE and EP missions and reflects badly on the reputation of the two organizations as a whole. By failing to give due account to the repressive political environment in which the election was held, as well as the extensive violations documented on election day, the PACE and EP missions bestowed undeserved legitimacy on the elections and played into the hands of the Aliyev administration, allowing it to call into question and downplay more accurate monitoring findings. This has already been seen in statements made by government officials on the OSCE/ODIHR report. We urge the Council of Europe and European Parliament to look into the work of their respective monitoring missions and the criteria applied by them when assessing the elections, in view of applicable standards and principles for international election monitoring.

We, the undersigned Civic Solidarity Platform members consider that the manner in which the 9 October presidential election was held seriously jeopardizes Azerbaijan democratization process and its prospects for integration into Europe. We call on the authorities of the country to identify and punish those responsible for the election fraud and to take swift and effective measures to implement OSCE/ODIHR recommendations for how to improve the election process and ensure compliance with international standards. We also wish to reiterate recommendations made in a [joint statement](#) by members of the International Partnership Group for Azerbaijan and the Civic Solidarity Platform on the eve of the elections to immediately release all those detained and imprisoned on politically motivated grounds in Azerbaijan; to review and revise legislation in force that restrict freedom of expression, association and assembly as guaranteed by international human rights law; and to ensure respect for these rights in practice.

Signed by:

Human Rights Club (Azerbaijan)
Center for International and National Studies (Azerbaijan)
Institute for Reporters’ Freedom and Safety (Azerbaijan)
International Partnership for Human Rights (Belgium)
Center for Civil Liberties
Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law
KRF Public Alternative (Ukraine)
Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Poland)
Moscow Helsinki Group
Belarusian Helsinki Committee
KRF Public Alternative (Ukraine)
'No Borders Project' (Ukraine)
People in Need (Czech Republic)
Netherlands Helsinki Committee
Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association
Center for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights (Russia)

Freedom Files

The Public Verdict Foundation (Russia)

Human Rights House Foundation

UNITED for Intercultural Action (Netherland)

Crude Accountability

Helsinki Citizens' Assembly - Vanadzor