

Azerbaijan's presidential poll marked considerable progress, but did not meet all election commitments

Strasbourg, 16.10.2008 - Yesterday's presidential election in Azerbaijan marked considerable progress, but did not meet all of the country's international commitments, observers from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and the European Parliament (EP) concluded in a joint statement published today.

The election was conducted in a peaceful manner, but was characterized by a lack of robust competition and vibrant political discourse facilitated by the media, and thus did not reflect all principles of a meaningful and pluralistic democratic election. Regrettably, some opposition parties boycotted the election, citing longstanding obstacles. This further limited the scope for meaningful choice for the electorate.

"There were notable improvements in the conduct of this election, but additional efforts are necessary to meet crucial international commitments, especially those related to pluralism, the fairness of the campaign environment, and the media," said Ambassador Boris Frlec, Head of the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission.

"While the voting day can be generally viewed positively and described as marking considerable progress, election observation is done against a broader background of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. In this connection, the issue of freedom of the media in Azerbaijan remains a source of further concern," said Andres Herkel, Head of the PACE delegation.

"According to our observations on election day, the elections were well prepared and largely carried out smoothly. However, a lack of genuine competition, due to the boycott of major opposition parties, and the absence of a real campaign have to be deeply deplored," said Marie Anne Isler Beguin, Head of the EP delegation.

The authorities made efforts to create more equitable conditions for candidates, and the election was organized in an overall efficient manner, although shortcomings were observed on election day, in particular during the crucial phase of the vote count and tabulation. The observers noted that the campaign was generally low-key, with the incumbent not campaigning personally, and other candidates commanding little apparent public support. The Central Election Commission has reported a high turnout of 75 per cent.

The International Election Observation Mission comprises a total of some 440 observers from 43 countries, including 45 long-term and some 340 short-term observers deployed by the OSCE/ODIHR, as well as 31 parliamentarians and staff from PACE, and 10 from the EP.

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