



EASTERN PARTNERSHIP
Civil Society Forum



STATEMENT of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum on socio-political situation in Azerbaijan on the eve of Presidential election

Following the observation of the last two stages of the presidential election to be held on October 9, 2013, the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum expresses its regret that equal opportunities for all the candidates were not provided in the pre-election period allowing them to communicate with their voters through television broadcasts and meetings. Also opposition political activists were persecuted in the election period.

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum notes with regret that, in recent years, the Azerbaijani government has failed to implement the recommendations of the Venice Commission of Council of Europe and of the OSCE/ODIHR to improve the electoral legislation and practice, but has instead restricted the current Election Code in the last 5 years. Unfortunately, the political environment for activity of international organizations was not provided, and the mandate of the OSCE Baku Office was downgraded to that of project coordinator thus de facto limiting its democracy support activities.

Even though the election preparations saw some technical improvements which have been observed by domestic election observers, the abuse of administrative resources was recorded, and there was no improvement in the general political environment. At the same time, no opportunities were provided for independent activities of local NGOs to implement election related programmes and barriers were created for the operation of civil society organizations in the regions. On the eve of the 2013 presidential election, NGO registration issues remained unsolved and the largest domestic election observation group - Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center (EMDS) was not provided with state registration.

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum regrettably notes that there was political discrimination during the nomination and registration process of presidential candidates. As a result, Ilgar Mammadov, the chairman of the Republican Alternative Movement and Rustam Ibrahimbekov, the chairman of the National Council of Democratic Forces, were not registered as candidates. During the pre-election campaign, international election standards in political pluralism in media, freedom of assembly were not implemented.

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum calls on the Azerbaijani government to release political prisoners whose number increased on the eve of the 2013 presidential election, and to conduct the democratic voting and counting process on Election Day in accord with the

standards of a free elections. We also demand that reported transgressions of election procedures be fully investigated by the relevant authorities.