



Statement of Azerbaijan National Platform of the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership Programme of the European Union on increasing pressure against civil society in Azerbaijan

Pressure against civil society in the Republic of Azerbaijan has increased amid the 9 October 2013 Presidential Elections. Domestic and international organizations monitoring situation of fundamental human rights face aggressive reaction of the government. Country's television uses insulting and threatening language against international organizations, which stated that the election failed short of transparency and fairness, particularly the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. The first repression wave of the government also targeted domestic election observation organizations, which released critical reports reflecting numerous cases of election violations.

Number of activists, journalists, human rights defenders and politicians faced intimidation and harassment prior and during the election, while some were arrested based on politically motivated grounds such as possession of illegal substances or firearms.

After the election, Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center and International Cooperation of Volunteers Public Union, domestic organizations jointly conducted country-wide election observation were under serious pressure and faced intimidation by the authorities. On 27 October, the Major Crimes Department of the Prosecutor General's Office launched investigation into these organizations summoning their senior staff for questioning. On 31 October, search was conducted in the offices of organizations and various documents, including financial and programme files, along with two computers were confiscated.

Moreover, the government undertook measures to restrict functioning of "Azadliq" and "Yeni Musavat" newspapers, vocal critics of its policies. The Ministry of Taxes conducted search in "Ganun" publishing company, one of very few companies agreeing to print election materials of opposition parties, and confiscated equipment and computers of the company, which was accompanied by violation of due process of law.

In addition, proposal about new amendments to the law on NGOs are voiced among senior officials of the government in order to further restrict functioning of independent NGOs. According to

various sources, proposal on more restrictive amendments to the law are being prepared and will be presented to the parliament shortly.

Being participant of the Eastern Partnership Programme, Azerbaijan claims to promote integration to the European Union, stability, good governance and economic development. Despite the country's commitments to ensure rule of law, human rights and freedoms, market economy and sustainable growth, Azerbaijani civil society faces increasing restrictions and pressure in its daily work. Serious restrictions of freedom of expression, assembly and association, discrimination and harassments against critical views, interference of law enforcement bodies into private lives of activists, politically motivated arrests, continuing cases of torture, serious violation of property rights, actions against freedom of religion and increasing pressure against civil society by the government remains cause for serious concern. As of today, tens of journalists, human rights defenders and other critics of the government are in jail, while 18 of them are recognized as political prisoners by the Amnesty International.

Such pressure and harassment against civil society threatens Azerbaijan's perspective of European integration. We believe that increasing political repressions and massive violation of human rights and freedoms are in deep contradiction with the Eastern Partnership's principles on good governance and economic growth, democracy, rule of law, as well as promoting market economy and sustainable development.

Therefore, the National Platform of Azerbaijan calls the United Nations, the European Union, the OSCE and the Council of Europe to closely follow the situation in the country and to demand Azerbaijan to live up to its international commitments with regard to human rights. The National Platform also hopes that Azerbaijani government will be called to address the above-mentioned issues, particularly pressure against media and civil society during the Third Eastern Partnership Summit to be held in Vilnius on 28-29 November.

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