

Baku, Azerbaijan
Press-Release

October 11, 2012

EMDS held Public forum on Political Freedoms

On October 11th, with financial support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Democratic Institute, Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center (EMDS) held a Public Forum on Situation of Political Freedoms in Azerbaijan who participates in European Union's Eastern Partnership Program.

In his speech, EMDS chairman Anar Mammadli emphasized necessity for holding human rights and democratization reforms, mentioning that 3 years ago, Azerbaijan was invited to attend EU's Eastern Partnership Program together with 5 post-Soviet countries (Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, Moldova, and Ukraine): "*Next year presidential elections will be held in Azerbaijan who is participating in Eastern Partnership Program; it is important to make evaluations on situation of political freedoms in Azerbaijan in terms of European integration*"- he said.

During the first part of the forum, where Gubad Ibadoghlu, chairman of Center for Social Initiatives, was the forum moderator, participants discussed **EU's Eastern Partnership Policy priorities on provision of political freedoms** emphasizing significance of the so-called program. Ibadoghlu mentioned that as one of the initiatives on EU's Eastern Partnership Program, 45 NGOs from Azerbaijan became members of EU Civil Society Forum.

Head of Political Section of EU Delegation to Azerbaijan, Toralf Pilz spoke about priorities of Eastern Partnership Program saying that the above-mentioned 6 countries should make efforts to become member of World Trade Organization (WTO) and make an integration in Europe: "*Eastern Partnership promotes democracy, political freedoms and human rights. The members states should carry out obligations regarding these issues. European Parliament has adopted resolutions on Azerbaijan. These resolutions contain issues such as corruption, property rights, political freedoms, and other issues. Launching Eastern Partnership Program, Europe showed that to keep fundamental values in the countries, they should make cooperations with partners. I also want to note that NGOs in Azerbaijan are actively participating in civil society platform*", -he said.

During the forum, EMDS chairman Anar Mammadli said that since Azerbaijan joined this program, 2 elections- 23 December 2009 municipal and 7 November 2010 elections were held in Azerbaijan: "*Before, OSCE and Council of Europe institutions prepared reports on elections in Azerbaijan. From 2009, when Azerbaijan joined this program, EU institutions also have opportunities to evaluate elections in our country*", he added. Mammadli also said that the upcoming 16 October 2013 election will show situation in Azerbaijan in terms of Euro-Atlantic integration. EMDS Chairman said that so far, from 6 states who were invited to attend Eastern Partnership Program, only presidents of Azerbaijan and Belarus have revealed no intentions for EU membership. According to him, instead of making reforms, Azerbaijani government is making imitations. Speaking about European Parliament's resolutions on Azerbaijan, Mammadli said that socialists, liberals, and the greens play big role in preparing these resolutions: "*Unfortunately, political parties in Azerbaijan failed to build strong relations with these fractions. Despite of anti-Europe rhetoric coming from the Azerbaijani government, we must try to expand relations with these fractions and build regional and political networks*"-he said.

Azerbaijan Popular Front Party (APFP) chairman Ali Karimli emphasized the importance of Eastern Partnership for Azerbaijan: ***"Azerbaijan society have more confidence in European Union. However, since Azerbaijan joined Eastern Partnership Program, nothing have changed for better. Elections are worsening the situaton in Azerbaijan, too. 2010 parliamentary elections was the most non-democratic election happened during the last 18 years. Pressures against media are continuing, make imitation of fights against corruption, there are political prisoners in the country, and the problem is still remaining unsolved. Azerbaijani government wants to be a part of European Union with its standards. The government is too wealthy and created a lobby in European institutions"***-he said. Karimli said that it would be nice to make influence on the Azerbaijani government's will rather than making proposals.

Open Society Party chairman Sulhaddin Akbar said that after joining Eastern Partnership Program, Azerbaijan lags behing in terms of development of democracy: ***"If we want democracy in Azerbaijan, as well as to cooperate with European Union, we should consider elections into consideration"***-he said.

During the second part of the forum, when chairman of Legal Education Society Intigam Aliyev was moderator, participants discussed **Expected impacts of 16 October 2013 presidential elections on relations between Azerbaijan and Europe: opportunities for improving election practice.** Aliyev noted that there are expectations regarding Azerbaijan and Azerbaijani government should agree with this.

Regarding the topic, head of East-West Research Center Arastun Orujlu told his opinion about critisizm against international organizations: ***"In this forum, international organizations were critisized. We should also critisize ourselves."*** He emphasized that it is not right to critisize international organizations: ***"The current regime in the country is in crisis. A number of things can be shown as an example. We have expectations from Europe. If Europe wants to see Azerbaijan as a partner, it should pay attention to Azerbaijan"***-he said.

Head of Law and Development Public Union Hafiz Hasanov said that there is a poor legal framework for elections in Azerbaijan: ***"With the current laws on election, it is impossible to hold democratic election. European Court has made decisions on election violations. However, those who made law violations in election commissions in Azerbaijan have not been punished yet, and they are being represented in these commissions. We must solve this problem"***.

During discussions, head of Democracy Learning Public Union Mirali Huseynov said that EU, Council of Europe, and OSCE are the hunters of the modern world: ***"In the Modern world there are rules of the game. Those societies who cleverly use these rules, they can derive benefits. In the modern world there is no any good institution other than the above-mentioned ones. Those institutions should be more principal"***-he said".

Moreover, chairman of Youth Club Public Union Zaur Akbar reproached government representatives who failed to attend such kind of forums. He also said that the video-material about the former MP is a good evidence for local and international organizations.

Chairman of Youth Organization of Musavat Party Tural Abbasli said that Eastern Partnership is also important for security in Europe, adding that oppositional parties in Azerbaijan carry out activities for which they are responsible: ***"In that video material, Gular Ahmadova mentioned the names of OSCE and Council of Europe. These institutions should tell their opinions about this issue"***.

Chairman of Azerbaijan National Independence Party Yusif Bagirzada said that the government must have willing for holding democratic elections in Azerbaijan: ***"Election legislation is in bad situation. Pressures and prosecutions against oppositionists are continuing. International***

organizations offices in Baku are not active. The oppositionists must unite to build democracy in Azerbaijan", -he said.

To note, EU Delegation, OSCE, Embassy of Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Austria, Great Britain, US Embassy, Norwegian Embassy, and Embassy of Romania, even local and international organizations attended the forum.

EMDS Media and Public Relations Department