



EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

Civil Society Forum

Brussels, April 29 2013

Elkhan Suleymanov

Chairman of the Azerbaijani Delegation to the Euronest PA

President of the Association for Civil Society Development in Azerbaijan (ACDSA)

Dear Mr Suleymanov

Thank you very much for your letter dated April 9 2013 written in response to my statement at the Euronest Committee on Social Affairs, Education, Culture and Civil Society meeting in the European Parliament on March 19 of this year.

Unfortunately our exchange shows that we are talking at cross purposes. I expressed my concern that independent civil society organizations in Azerbaijan are coming under growing pressure to conform to the wishes of the authorities before the presidential election next October. Also that detentions and other kinds of pressure on journalists as well police action against demonstrators are curtailing basic freedoms.

On your part, you argue that these freedoms are respected by the authorities and that they are merely seeking to enforce the law.

Unfortunately, despite your statement that “we are working hard to insure transparency and freedom in the upcoming, and any other elections, and we assure you that our elections will be nothing but the democratic and free expression of the will of the Azeri people” the image which the actions of the authorities project is of an increasingly authoritarian regime which is seeking to contain dissent because it feels it is losing the support of its own population.

Sometimes it is a relatively small action which shows the true intentions of the authorities. In the case of Azerbaijan it is the proposal made suddenly at the beginning of this year to downgrade the representative office of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Baku to a project management unit. It is clear that the office, thanks to its present status, plays “an important role in helping Azerbaijan to develop its democratic institutions” as the representative of the United States Mission to the OSCE said in Vienna on March 14 this year. The down grade Azerbaijan has proposed would make this impossible. Thus even though you write that democracy is safe in Azerbaijan the actions of your authorities suggest that the opposite is true.

Should the authorities to decide to change the increasingly negative image they currently enjoy they could simply drop accusations against people like Ilgar Mammadov, the head of the Baku School of Political Studies, and others recently detained on spurious charges. Such a move would make your declarations about democracy in Azerbaijan more credible.

In your letter you were kind enough to refer to the fact that the Steering Committee (SC) of the Civil Society Forum has yet to issue its assessment of the recent election in Armenia. I can assure you that we are working on such a statement based on election observation by our local NGOs. In the meantime, let me say that my report on the election to the SC written soon after the election said:



EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

Civil Society Forum

*“The recent presidential election in Armenia exhibited many features common to an authoritarian post communist state in transition to a more democratic form of government. The election begs the question of whether the transition to a functioning democracy will be successful in Armenia or if democratic institutions will become a pure façade. If the latter happens then society will either have to rebel if it wants to replace its rulers or chose to acquiesce in rule by a government which lacks democratic legitimacy”.*

The same looks likely to turn out to be true of the election in Azerbaijan. Were you to match your concern for the health of democracy in Armenia with a similar concern for the health of democracy in Azerbaijan you would do a great service to society in both countries.

Yours sincerely

Krzysztof Bobinski

Co-chair, Steering Committee, Civil Society Forum