

**REPORT ON AZERBEIJAN'S
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS
NOVEMBER 2000-JANUARY 2001**



**A Report Prepared by the Staff of the
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

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The OSCE is engaged in standard setting in fields including military security, economic and environmental cooperation, and human rights and humanitarian concerns. In addition, it undertakes a variety of preventive diplomacy initiatives designed to prevent, manage and resolve conflict within and among the participating States.

The OSCE has its main office in Vienna, Austria, where weekly meetings of permanent representatives are held. In addition, specialized seminars and meetings are convened in various locations and periodic consultations among Senior Officials, Ministers and Heads of State or Government are held.

ABOUT THE COMMISSION (CSCE)

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), also known as the Helsinki Commission, is a U.S. Government agency created in 1976 to monitor and encourage compliance with the agreements of the OSCE.

The Commission consists of nine members from the U.S. House of Representatives, nine members from the U.S. Senate, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense and Commerce. The positions of Chair and Co-Chair are shared by the House and Senate and rotate every two years, when a new Congress convenes. A professional staff assists the Commissioners in their work.

To fulfill its mandate, the Commission gathers and disseminates information on Helsinki-related topics both to the U.S. Congress and the public by convening hearings, issuing reports reflecting the views of the Commission and/or its staff, and providing information about the activities of the Helsinki process and events in OSCE participating States.

At the same time, the Commission contributes its views to the general formulation of U.S. policy on the OSCE and takes part in its execution, including through Member and staff participation on U.S. Delegations to OSCE meetings as well as on certain OSCE bodies. Members of the Commission have regular contact with parliamentarians, government officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and private individuals from OSCE participating States.

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AZERBAIJAN'S PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION NOVEMBER 2000–JANUARY 2001

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- On November 5, 2000, Azerbaijan held its second parliamentary election since gaining independence. The Central Election Commission [CEC] reported that turnout was 68.8 percent. In the proportional voting for 25 of the parliament's 125 seats, President Heydar Aliev's party—Yeni [New] Azerbaijan—came in first, with 62.5 percent. Only three other parties passed the six-percent threshold: the Azerbaijan Popular Front “Reformers,” with 10.8 percent; the Civic Solidarity Party (6.3 percent); and the Communist Party (6.28 percent). Yeni Azerbaijan, along with nominally independent, pro-presidential candidates, also took most of the 100 seats decided in single-mandate districts, giving Aliev's party about 90 percent control of parliament.
- The victory of Yeni Azerbaijan [YAP] was a foregone conclusion. Chaired by President Aliev—who rules Azerbaijan in strongman fashion, while tolerating some dissent—YAP's continued grip on parliament is essential to Aliev's plan to install his son, Ilham, as successor. If he is successful, Azerbaijan would be the first post-Soviet state to establish a family dynasty.
- During the registration period, the CEC excluded two opposition parties, Musavat and the Azerbaijan Democratic Party [ADP], for allegedly not having 50,000 valid signatures. The ruling was criticized inside and outside Azerbaijan, especially by the U.S. Government and the OSCE's Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights [ODIHR]. Hoping to ease Azerbaijan's entry into the Council of Europe, President Aliev “appealed” to the CEC to allow all opposition parties to take part. Though there was no clear constitutional or legal basis for such an appeal or for overturning a CEC decision—however controversial or suspect—the CEC agreed. The resulting participation of all opposition parties gave the electorate the broadest possible choice, but the manner of their inclusion demonstrated President Aliev's control of the election process. Tellingly, he made no analogous appeal for over 400 individuals barred on dubious grounds from contesting the 100 single-mandate seats.
- International observation missions judged that Azerbaijan's elections in 1995 (parliamentary), 1998 (presidential) and 1999 (local) all failed to meet international norms. ODIHR's assessment of the November 2000 election continued established patterns: despite some progress in terms of opposition participation and representation on the CEC and lower level election commissions, the election did not correspond to OSCE standards. More instructive, however, was the damning verbal appraisal of the Director of ODIHR at a post-election press conference, who described what had transpired as “primitive falsification.” The head of the Council of Europe's observer delegation concurred, concluding: “we've never seen anything like it.”
- All Azerbaijani opposition parties have denounced the election as rigged. That, plus the ODIHR's assessment, severely undercut parliament's legitimacy inside and outside the country. An embarrassed international community, seeking to salvage the legislature and justify Azerbaijan's admission to the Council of Europe, laid its hopes on the election's second round. Baku promised improved performance in the January 7, 2001 repeat elections in 11 districts where the first round results had been invalidated because of serious infractions. Thus mollified, the Council of Europe and foreign capitals pressed opposition leaders to participate and urged opposition parties which won representation in the first round to accept their legislative mandates.

- Most opposition parties, however, refused to take part in the January 7 repeat elections. The ODIHR observation mission, which monitored the proceedings, noted some advances but concluded “the majority of complaints arising from the 5 November ballot were not addressed transparently and in accordance with the rule of law.” Consequently, the election “did not meet a number of international standards for democratic elections.”
- After negative judgements by international observers of four elections since 1995, it is fair to say that Azerbaijan has made no real progress in conducting elections that allow voters to determine who governs them. Nor is there any reason, considering the record, to expect any substantive advances under the current regime.
- Despite some improvements on January 7, the election’s outcome was decided in November through massive falsification, which has left government-opposition relations at a low point. Opposition parties which fielded candidates in the second round won a few more seats, but their overall representation in parliament is minuscule. The CEC’s claim that only one major opposition party mustered six percent in November indicates President Aliev’s determination to keep out of parliament leaders who could in the next few years challenge Ilham Aliev. Moreover, it is clear that Aliev has no interest in any coalition or even understanding with the opposition, unless it is totally compliant. From the perspective of most opposition parties, while participating in elections may offer some benefits, it is unrealistic to expect the chance to contend for power on an equal basis, and strategy will focus on preparing for the post-Aliev era.
- At the same time, the opposition is more fractured than ever. Its leaders were unable or unwilling before the November 5 first round to present President Aliev and Yeni Azerbaijan with a united front and party list. In the aftermath of the election, those parties which did not win—i.e., were not given—seats in parliament, especially Musavat and the ADP, have adopted a rejectionist line. The Popular Front “Reformers,” by contrast, has ignored accusations of collusion with the authorities and is pursuing within parliament general opposition goals and its own partisan interests.
- The ruling party has its own problems. Judging by the sheer scale of the vote fraud, YAP enjoys little popularity. Moreover, like several opposition parties, fissures are evident within Yeni Azerbaijan. These divisions appear to include not only power struggles among various individuals and factions, but also supporters of Ilham Aliev and those who worry about his ability to guarantee their interests.
- During the U.S. presidential campaign, President Aliev complained about Washington’s criticism of Azerbaijan’s record on democratization and human rights. He may now be hoping for less censure on such issues and more attention to geo-strategic and economic concerns. Aliev presumably also expects more initiative in abolishing Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act, which limits U.S. Government-to-Government assistance to Azerbaijan.

BACKGROUND

In 1988-89, as the USSR began collapsing and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan escalated, a democratic, nationalist opposition movement arose in Soviet Azerbaijan. Eventually coalescing into the Popular Front under the leadership of a charismatic scholar, Abulfaz Elchibey, it toppled the Communist Party in 1992. In June of that year, Elchibey was elected president and his ally,

Musavat Party leader Isa Gambar, became Speaker of Parliament. Their victory made Azerbaijan the only nominally Muslim country in the former Soviet Union where a coalition of anti-communist opposition forces came to power.

The experiment lasted one year: in June 1993, a rebellion mounted by a warlord led to the downfall of the Popular Front government. Into the breach stepped Heydar Aliev, who had long headed Azerbaijan's Communist Party and KGB before leaving for Moscow in 1982 to join the USSR's ruling Politburo. Ousted by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987, Aliev went back to his native region of Nakhichevan. In June 1993, he returned to Baku at the request of Elchibey (who then left for his home village, also in Nakhichevan) to handle the crisis of state. The former Communist Party boss quickly transformed himself into a nationalist, post-Soviet leader, and consolidated power. The ousted Popular Front and Musavat never formally recognized Aliev as president, viewing him as a usurper; he, in turn, saw them as inexperienced and incompetent, and presumably, as enemies. Nevertheless, Aliev's political system permits dissent and opposition politics, within strictly defined limits that do not impinge on his own power or prerogatives to run the country as he sees fit. He has not banned opposition parties but never lets them feel secure enough to exclude the possibility.

In the 1995 parliamentary election, the Aliev-controlled Central Election Commission [CEC] excluded Musavat on blatantly implausible grounds: government experts asserted, after a purely visual examination, that signatures on Musavat's nominating lists were forged, fraudulent or otherwise invalid. On the same basis, local election commissions barred hundreds of opposition and independent candidates in single-mandate districts. Eventually, as expected, President Aliev's Yeni [New] Azerbaijan Party [YAP] won an overwhelming majority in parliament. To mollify the international community and burnish his democratic credentials, Aliev gave the Popular Front and the moderate opposition National Independence Party a few seats in party list voting and the opposition "won" several more in single-mandate districts.

An international observation mission from the OSCE's Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights [ODIHR] and the United Nations concluded that the 1995 election had not met international standards. Since then, Azerbaijani authorities have regularly consulted and negotiated with the ODIHR and the Council of Europe about the legislative and administrative modalities of conducting elections. Nevertheless, the presidential (1998) and local (1999) elections also did not correspond to OSCE standards, establishing a record of falsified elections and deepening the opposition's mistrust of President Aliev.

Competition among opposition leaders has always allowed Aliev to play them against each other and to increase or diminish pressure on them all and individually. The dynamics of government-opposition relations, as well as intra-opposition relations, changed in 1997, when Rasul Guliev, a former Aliev ally and Speaker of Parliament, split with Aliev and later joined the opposition, as co-chairman of the Azerbaijan Democratic Party. His backers left the ruling party, raising the number of opposition deputies to about 20. Guliev's status as a former insider with considerable resources broadened the spectrum of Azerbaijani politics beyond the confrontation between Aliev and parties that had emerged in the romantic, Popular Front era, and Aliev seems to view Guliev as a particularly serious contender and threat.

While opposition leaders jostled each other for dominance, President Aliev signed major oil deals with Western firms and pursued close ties with Western capitals. His main weak points were the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which left Azerbaijan with hundreds of thousands of refugees; economic decline and deeply depressed living standards; widespread anger at the corruption of the country's elite, many of whom were from Nakhichevan; and, his age. In January 1999, the 76-year-old Aliev fell ill and required treatment in Turkey. Four months later, while visiting the United States for NATO's 50th anniversary, he had a quadruple bypass operation in Cleveland. Aliev's health problems brought home dramatically to Azerbaijanis and interested outsiders that succession might be on the agenda in the near term, if not imminently. These concerns were magnified in September 2000, when Aliev, again in the United States and undergoing medical exams, had to remain in Cleveland far longer than scheduled, dramatizing his growing frailty and making the need for a stable transfer of power even more acute.¹

Considering Aliev's apparently failing health and his increasingly obvious intention that his son Ilham succeed him, the November 2000 election took on vital importance for all of Azerbaijan's political players. If the president dies or cannot discharge his duties, the country's constitution stipulates that the speaker of parliament becomes acting president and charges him with organizing presidential elections. Aliev wanted to ensure that the legislature emerging from the election would back Ilham, and that supporters of opposition figures, particularly Rasul Guliev, would lose their seats. At the same time, Aliev wanted to hold an election that, if not judged fully in compliance with OSCE standards, would at least be seen as "progress," compared to previous elections.

That assessment was critical to Azerbaijan's hopes of joining the Council of Europe, which was considering Baku's application. In fact, the politics of Azerbaijan's admission to the Council colored the entire 2000 election. While there are different views about admitting countries with shaky or poor human rights records, most Western capitals have argued that Azerbaijan and Armenia should enter together, for the sake of promoting a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The Council's Parliamentary Assembly voted on June 28 to recommend Azerbaijan's accession but asked Baku to ensure that the November elections were free and impartial, to release or re-try political prisoners, and guarantee freedom of expression and media independence.

The implied threat that another flawed election could prevent Azerbaijan's acceptance by the Council of Europe—which virtually all opposition parties favor, however critical of their country's human rights performance—offered the opposition a card to play. Azerbaijan's opposition parties, which have little leverage on Aliev and his state apparatus, have traditionally sought to employ three forms of pressure: the threat to boycott elections, thus depriving Aliev or legislative bodies of legitimacy; soliciting the intercession of foreign capitals and international organizations, especially the OSCE and the Council of Europe; and trying to organize street rallies of their supporters. In spring and summer 2000, while discussing whether to boycott or participate in the upcoming election, the opposition resorted to all three tactics, hoping to wrest from Aliev the most advantageous conditions and the most far-reaching concessions on the election law and the composition of the CEC. Throughout this period, ODIHR representatives negotiated with both sides and offered suggestions to bring the legislation into line with OSCE standards.²

¹Other than acknowledging a serious case of flu, official Azerbaijani sources made assurances but provided little information about his health. One Russian newspaper even claimed that Aliev had died.

²In this connection, the U.S. Helsinki Commission held congressional hearings on May 25, 2000, at which government spokesmen and opposition leaders testified.

In August, intra-opposition politics and government-opposition relations changed again, when Abulfaz Elchibey died. Azerbaijan's first post-communist president had returned from Nakhichevan in November 1997 to Baku, where he resumed his political activity as Chairman of the Popular Front and became *primus inter pares* among opposition leaders. During his long absence, however, his first deputy Ali Kerimov, a Member of Parliament, had de facto become a leader in his own right, recognized as a rising star and treated as such by the international diplomatic community in Baku. Within the Popular Front, there arose two distinct groupings around Elchibey and Kerimov. As long as Elchibey was alive, the tension between them remained manageable, and had Elchibey survived, he might have been able to agree on terms with Musavat Party leader Isa Gambar to put forward a united opposition party list for the upcoming election. Elchibey's death, however, precipitated a definitive, irrevocable split in September within the Popular Front and the opposition generally. Kerimov's faction of the Popular Front became known as the "Reformers;" the other faction, headed by Mirmakhmud Fattaev, the "Classics." Each claimed to be the legitimate Popular Front. In October, Isa Gambar, who had previously agreed with Ali Kerimov to field a joint party list, recognized the Classics. His unexpected decision, naturally, angered Kerimov, with whom he had hitherto maintained an uneasy collaboration and doomed any prospects of a united opposition front.

In repressive political systems, intra-opposition politics often revolve around mutual allegations of collusion with the authorities. Azerbaijani President Aliev is a past master of this game, and the authorities moved quickly to exploit their opportunity to sunder the fractious opposition further. After first hinting that the Central Election Commission might not register Kerimov's faction to field a party list, the CEC announced on August 31 that it recognized the Reformers as the legitimate Popular Front. For the Classics and other opposition parties suspicious of Kerimov and his alleged willingness to negotiate with President Aliev, the authorities' gesture seemed to provide all the proof needed to accuse him of collaboration.

In this atmosphere, the opposition approached the November election. Given Azerbaijan's poor record of holding elections, opposition parties were dismissive of Aliev's pledges to hold a fair contest and divided about the wisdom of taking part, given the unsatisfactory legislative framework [see below]. Nevertheless, by late August they opted to run, viewing the election as a chance to retain or gain representation in a parliament that could play a key role in the eventual transfer of power. At the very least, they figured, they would get a rare opportunity to address the voters on state TV.

Their decision, though welcome to Aliev, who wanted opposition participation to legitimize the planned YAP landslide, did not spare them from a series of government attacks. The authorities resorted to various alleged infractions to intimidate or close opposition publications or independent media outlets.³ Musavat attracted particular attention: On August 22, police arrested Rauf Arifoglu, editor of the party's daily *Yeni Musavat* and a candidate for parliament. He was subsequently accused of conspiracy to commit an airplane hijacking, calling for a coup d'état, and illegal possession of a firearm.⁴ State media accused Musavat of being a terrorist organization. In typical Soviet fashion, "workers collectives" passed "spontaneous" declarations condemning the party and calling for its de-registration. At the same time, the authorities moved to take over the headquarters of the National Independence Party, claiming they needed the

³ Among those targeted were: *Monitor Weekly*, the newspapers *Uch Nogta* and *Avropa* and the Azerbaijan Broadcasting Agency.

⁴ Arifoglu was released on October 5, but the charges remain in force.

surrounding land for a park. Moreover, prosecutors began a trial of former government officials associated with Rasul Guliev, accusing them—and Guliev, in absentia—of embezzlement and trying to stage a coup.

President Aliev also attacked the opposition by trying to link them to Armenians, when the U.S. House of Representatives debated in September and October a resolution that would have recognized as genocide the slaughter of over one million Armenians in the Ottoman Empire during and after World War I. The resolution, which evoked anger in Turkey and Azerbaijan, was first considered in the House International Relations Committee's Sub-Committee on International Operations and Human Rights, which, by happenstance, was chaired by Helsinki Commission Chairman Rep. Christopher Smith. In an October 1 interview, Aliev said Smith was “enemy No. 1 of Azerbaijan and Turkey” and “Azerbaijani opposition representatives go there [Washington] and meet him...they compete there to prove that there is no democracy in Azerbaijan and that there is a dictatorship.”

As voting day approached, it was obvious that Yeni Azerbaijan would win an overwhelming majority, at least according to official results. The more interesting questions were how many seats opposition parties would get, whether Musavat would pass the six-percent threshold,⁵ returning its leader Isa Gambar to parliament for the first time since 1993, and whether Ilham Aliev would become Speaker of Parliament after the election.

ELECTION LEGISLATION

Prodded by ODIHR, parliament passed on June 9 a CEC law that, if not entirely acceptable to all opposition parties, ODIHR considered in line with international standards. The law called for YAP, opposition parties and independents to each choose six of the CEC's 18 members, thus giving the opposition—if it could unite—a chance to block the ruling party's monopoly control of the CEC, which required a two-thirds majority to make decisions.

However, subsequent bargaining over the election law, passed July 5, was less fruitful. ODIHR suggested amendments to address concerns about: the likely exclusion of an opposition party (Guliev's ADP) because of its relatively recent registration; the absence of provisions for domestic election monitors; and YAP's domination of election commissions. An August 28 decision by Azerbaijan's Constitutional Court—undoubtedly at President Aliev's behest—settled the issue of the ADP, allowing it to participate.⁶ But Baku declined to go farther and incorporate all of ODIHR's proposed changes to the law. The refusal to accredit non-partisan, domestic election monitors actually marked regression from previous practice, considering that their activity was sanctioned in the 1998 presidential election.⁷ From the beginning, therefore, the election could not have met OSCE standards, as ODIHR made plain in several statements: its July 7 press release, for example, “deplored” shortcomings in the election law.

⁵It was always obvious, given the particular animosity between Aliev and Rasul Guliev, that Guliev's ADP would not be allowed into parliament.

⁶Another concession was the replacement of CEC Chairman Jafar Veliev, who had overseen three flawed elections, by Mezhahir Panakhov.

⁷The Washington-based National Democratic Institute (NDI), which has worked in numerous countries all over the world, has not encountered such a restrictive law on domestic observers anywhere else. See the statement of the NDI International Observer Delegation to Azerbaijan's November 5, 2000 Parliamentary Election, November 7, 2000.

Moreover, when the opposition boycotted the CEC's first three sessions to protest the passage of the election law in its unmodified form, parliament on July 21 amended the CEC law, so as to deprive the opposition of the opportunity to block a quorum on the CEC and lower level commissions. Thenceforth, the ruling party was in a position to control the election process.

REGISTRATION

Official pressure on the opposition continued throughout the registration period. The ADP reported that authorities threatened people who signed the party's nominating lists with dismissals from their jobs or arrest. In September, the CEC ruled that Musavat—as in 1995—and the ADP had failed to produce the necessary 50,000 valid signatures and neither would be registered to field a party list. The exclusion of two leading opposition parties drew strong criticism, both inside and outside the country, including the OSCE and the U.S. Government.⁸ On October 6, apparently responding to international concern, President Aliev “appealed” to the CEC to register the excluded opposition parties. Some CEC members objected, arguing there was no constitutional basis for such a presidential appeal or a changed CEC ruling, but the Commission moved on October 8 to include opposition parties. Though their participation certainly broadened the choice available to voters, the manner of their inclusion demonstrated conclusively that President Aliev controlled the entire election process. In an October 10 statement, ODIHR welcomed the decision by the CEC.

The law required candidates in single-mandate districts to present 2000 signatures. Claiming invalid signatures and other violations, election commissions barred over 400 individuals—about half of those who tried to run. ODIHR urged a reconsideration of their exclusion as well. But the CEC demurred and ultimately, in single mandate races, only 408 candidates out of 817 applicants were registered.

Of the 408 candidates, 140 represented Yeni Azerbaijan, while the three main opposition parties combined registered 90: 22 for Musavat, 28 for the Azerbaijan National Independence Party, and 40 for the Popular Front “Reformers.” In addition, 147 so-called independent candidates were registered. Notably, the ADP, headed by Rasul Guliev, managed to register only four candidates.

CAMPAIGN

As Number One on Yeni Azerbaijan's party list, Ilham Aliev toured the country and made campaign spots on television. In his standard stump speech, he portrayed the situation in the country as improving, thanks to the leadership and policies of his father, and promised that living standards would get better. Aliev blamed any problems on the opposition, which he accused of treason and incompetence.

Posters of Ilham Aliev were plastered all over Baku, and presumably, the rest of the country, with the caption “A new future with the New Azerbaijan Party.” The gold-medal win in the Sydney Olympic games by an Azerbaijani wrestler (over an American) also served the campaign of Ilham Aliev, who is chairman of Azerbaijan's Olympic Committee. State TV ran frequent broadcasts of Aliev in Sydney, with testimonials by athletes to his contributions to their success.

⁸During the passage of election legislation and the campaign, Washington pressed Baku not to exclude opposition parties and to create conditions that would allow them to participate on an equal basis.

Though coverage of the campaign on state media heavily favored the ruling party, opposition leaders were also able to address voters on state television. They used the opportunity—which they had not enjoyed for years—to criticize President Aliev and offer an alternative vision of governing the country. The opposition’s equal access to the media marked progress with respect to previous elections.⁹

In their TV spots, Isa Gambar, Rasul Guliev, Ali Kerimov and Etibar Mamedov criticized President Aliev and his rule, focusing on the dramatic drop in living standards and corruption, as well as the lack of prospects for improvements if the current leadership remained in place. Opposition party posters, while far fewer than those of Ilham Aliev, were numerous in Baku, though ADP representatives claimed many of their posters had been torn off the walls and replaced with those for Yeni Azerbaijan.

Some opposition leaders, particularly Ali Kerimov and Isa Gambar, also traveled around the country for meetings with voters. They reported to Helsinki Commission staff that local authorities, for the most part, did not interfere with these events, though they were not necessarily cooperative. Spokesmen for the ADP, by contrast, claimed that local authorities consistently impeded the party’s attempts to meet the public.

Towards the end of the campaign period, government harassment intensified; there were cases of beatings of opposition backers and the authorities compelled opposition parties to change the site and times of their rallies.

VOTING AND VOTE COUNT

Helsinki Commission staff observed the November 5 voting in various precincts in Baku, populated largely by refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh and neighboring occupied territories. Most striking was the small number of voters in polling stations, regardless of the time of day, and how few people had signed the voters list.

If the voting was relatively orderly, the vote count that evening was abysmal. Election commission officials combined two polling stations into one, and initially tried to keep international monitors and the numerous local party and candidate observers from watching the proceedings, claiming there was insufficient space in the small room they inexplicably picked for the count. For a while, they actually blocked observers from entering or even getting a good view of what commission members were doing with the ballots, assuring everyone they were merely dividing them into separate piles. Eventually, the officials yielded to protests by observers, who crammed into the room, where, by then, anything could have happened without being seen.

Once the count began, Yeni Azerbaijan handily won the proportional ballot, with the Popular Front “Reformers” second in one precinct, Musavat in the other. But at the end of the evening, when officials had to compile election protocols, the numbers did not add up. Obviously worried about the discrepancies,

⁹This was subsequently noted in the ODIHR’s election report and the assessment by the European Institute for the Media, which monitored coverage of the campaign.

and under the eyes of observers, commission members simply fiddled with the totals, taking some votes from some parties, including Yeni Azerbaijan, and arbitrarily assigning them to others. There is no reason to believe that the tallies compiled by the election commission necessarily reflected how voters cast ballots in those two polling stations.

RESULTS

According to the CEC, turnout was 68.8 percent and only four parties passed the six-percent threshold. The big winner was YAP, with 62.5 percent, or 16 of the 25 seats allocated to proportional voting. Next came the opposition Popular Front “Reformers,” with 10.8 percent, or four seats, and the allied Civil Solidarity followed with 6.3 percent (three seats), followed up by the Communist Party, which won 6.28 percent (two seats).

In the single mandate voting, 56 seats went to YAP; two to the opposition Musavat Party; one apiece for the Popular Front “Reformers” and the National Independence Party, as well as the pro-government Ana Vatan party. The Social Rifah Party also won one seat. The remainder of the seats went to 26 nominal independents

INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS’ ASSESSMENT

Three international observer groups issued a joint statement on the election: according to the ODIHR’s election observation mission, a delegation of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and monitors from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the election “failed to meet OSCE standards.” The November 6 statement noted “progress over previous elections, in particular in enhancing political pluralism.” However, the election “fell short of international standards and significant improvements will have to be achieved in order to meet such standards for democratic elections.”

By “progress” the statement had in mind “an improved legislative framework,” specifically a CEC law that “provided multi-party election commissions at all levels, in contrast with past practices. Furthermore, political parties were finally able to register” for the proportional voting, and “parties and candidates had generally better opportunities to conduct their campaign.”

However, “The elections were marred by numerous instances of serious irregularities,” especially relating “to the registration of candidates. Approximately half of the candidates were barred from running in the single mandate constituency races on the basis of invalid or deficient collection of signatures. Election Commissions failed to establish a credible procedure to verify voter signatures.... In addition, the rejected candidates were not given an opportunity to redress even minor errors...[and] the appeal process did not redress this situation.”

On election day, the statement continued, “observers reported that voting was conducted in a generally calm atmosphere, but in contrast to the official figures, voter turnout was reported to be very low.” Furthermore, “The elections were marred by numerous instances of serious irregularities, in particular a completely flawed counting process. Observers reported ballot stuffing, manipulated turnout results, pre-marked ballots and producing either false protocols or no protocols at all. Additionally, party proxies frequently suffered intimidation, harassment and sometimes even arrest whilst carrying out their legitimate activities. Unauthorised local officials often controlled the process and sought to influence voters. In several instances, international observers were denied access to polling stations and were frequently expelled from election commission premises.”

Even much more striking and damning, however, were the words used in a post-election press conference by two key international observers: Ambassador Gerard Stoudman, the Director of ODIHR, who generally employs measured, diplomatic language, said he had not expected to witness “a crash course in various types of manipulation” and actually used the phrase “primitive falsification” to describe what he had seen. Andreas Gross, the head of the observer delegation of the Council of Europe—which is not particularly known for hard-hitting assessments of election shenanigans—amplified: “Despite the positive changes observed in Azerbaijan in recent years, the scale of the infringements doesn’t fit into any framework. We’ve never seen anything like it.”

In her statement, Paula Kekkonen, head of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly’s observer delegation, agreed with her colleagues and raised the international implications: she warned that Council of Europe membership was not “automatic.”

JANUARY 7, 2001 REPEAT ELECTIONS

President Aliev was presumably stung by the strong international criticism of the November 5 first round. Anxious to bolster Azerbaijan’s damaged chances to join the Council of Europe, he was motivated to put on a better performance in the repeat elections. Though opposition parties claimed that fraud was countrywide, the CEC and the Constitutional Court invalidated the results only in 11 districts and scheduled repeat voting for January 7.¹⁰ President Aliev dismissed three governors for interfering in the election process and the CEC replaced the election commission chairmen of those districts. But voters in those 11 districts got the chance only to choose among individual candidates—the government did not repeat the voting for the 25 seats determined by party list.

President Aliev and Azerbaijani officialdom assured the OSCE and the Council of Europe that the second round would mark significant improvement. Unlike the OSCE and the Council of Europe, however, the opposition was neither reassured nor appeased: after the first round, opposition parties had won—i.e., were given—only 10 seats. Major parties like Musavat, the National Independence Party and the ADP, according to the official results, had allegedly not even managed to garner six percent, whereas the small Civil Solidarity Party and the Communist Party supposedly had exceeded the barrier. Opposition parties immediately denounced the official results; on November 14, they agreed to boycott the parliament

¹⁰The first round results cited above do not include these 11 seats.

and demanded new elections. A few days later, demonstrations took place in several cities, including Baku and Sheki. While socio-economic concerns, such as the lack of electricity, featured prominently in the participants' complaints, they also condemned the election, in some cases clearly voicing support for individual opposition leaders or parties.

The authorities put down these protests, arresting numerous opposition activists, and ignored calls for new elections. On November 22, the Constitutional Court validated the first round's official results. Gradually, the demonstrations petered out.

Between the rounds, opposition parties conferred on their stance towards the second round. Strained relations within the opposition—especially between the Popular Front “Reformers” and Musavat—ultimately broke the solidarity voiced on November 14, when the Popular Front “Reformers” decided to contest the January 7 repeat elections (as did the allied Party of Civic Solidarity). They justified their participation by the need to help Azerbaijan join the Council of Europe. The other major opposition parties, however, spurned the pleas of the Council of Europe, the ODIHR and numerous Western capitals to take part, and maintained their boycott.

RESULTS OF JANUARY 7 POLLING

Of the 147 individuals who tried to run, the CEC registered 76: 22 from Yeni Azerbaijan Party, 10 from the opposition parties (four of whom represented the Popular Front “Reformers”) and 38 independents, as well as one candidate apiece from six small parties. In addition, the opposition National Independence Party got 9 candidates on the ballot, but they subsequently withdrew when the party reversed course and decided on January 2 not to participate.

The law required 25 percent of eligible voters to participate for the election to be valid. Turnout, according to the CEC, was almost 50 percent. The results gave YAP five more seats, and one apiece to: the Popular Front “Reformers,” Ana Vatan, the Alliance for the Sake of Azerbaijan, Yurdash, Civic Unity, and an independent candidate.

INTERNATIONAL ASSESSMENT

The ODIHR and the Council of Europe sent a small observation mission to monitor the second round. Their January 8 joint statement concluded that while the repeat balloting had

“marked some improvement compared to the 5 November 2000 ballot, [it] still did not meet a number of international standards for democratic elections.” The measures undertaken by the authorities “to address the significant shortcomings of the 5 November ballot...were insufficient to restore full confidence in the electoral process. Thus the repeat elections took place in an atmosphere of mistrust and were marked by the boycott of several opposition parties.”

The observation mission praised the authorities for annulling the results in 11 districts and noted more flexibility by the CEC during the registration of candidates and handling of complaints. However, “serious concerns remain in particular with regard to the independence of local election commissions, which again

were in some cases subject to interference, pressure and intimidation from the local authorities.” While voting took place “in a calm and orderly manner...observers again noted a number of irregularities, including some cases of ballot stuffing and a flawed counting and tabulation process.”

Finally, the mission’s statement criticized the decision to hold repeat balloting “only for the single-mandate contests... but not for the nationwide proportional ballot. Consequently, the votes from only 88 of the 99 constituencies were taken into consideration for the allocation of the 25 seats in Parliament reserved for the proportional ballot. Thus, 480,000 voters in the 11 constituencies where results were annulled, representing according to official figures 16% of those who cast ballots on 5 November, were disenfranchised as far as the proportional ballot was concerned.”

CONCLUSIONS AND PROJECTIONS

Democratization: Azerbaijani officials have naturally seized on the word “progress” in the November 6 ODIHR statement to claim that the election was a step forward. But the failure of the fourth election under Heydar Aliev’s rule to meet OSCE standards and the strikingly harsh criticism after the first round by the head of ODIHR and the Council of Europe observers undercut any claims of progress towards fair elections in Azerbaijan. President Aliev has frequently pledged to foster the development of democracy.¹¹ The record, however, indicates that he has no intention of granting opposition parties equal conditions or the chance to threaten his hold on power. As 100 of parliament’s 125 seats were determined in single-mandate districts, where local authorities exercise considerable power and can generally arrange their candidate’s victory, the rejection of over 400 individuals signaled the government’s determination to decide the outcome of the vote in advance. Aliev is willing to continue negotiating with ODIHR, which makes Baku vulnerable to international pressure on peripheral matters, but not enough to compel good-faith implementation of commitments if the result might give opposition parties more seats than Aliev is willing to grant.

Concluding that the election “failed to meet OSCE standards” is the standard ODIHR formulation to characterize an election that was not fair—i.e, the conditions for the participants were not equal—and in which the official results are not reliable or credible. But the candid public assessments on November 6 by ODIHR Director Stoudmann and CoE observer Andreas Gross, given the usual lexicon of international election observation, was stunning. Representatives of ODIHR or the Council of Europe have probably never before openly expressed themselves in such terms about an election that they decided to monitor, perhaps a reflection of their disappointment: Azerbaijan’s authorities had promised to conduct a free and fair contest and had long negotiated with the ODIHR and the Council of Europe about the legal framework and administrative modalities. In the end, however, they held an election that can only be described as an embarrassment to all concerned.

¹¹At the same time, however, he has also emphasized that Azerbaijan will develop according to its own traditions and timetable, and admonished Western countries, especially the United States, against trying to export democracy. In a September 2000 talk in Washington, he actually compared Washington’s propagation of democracy to Moscow’s export of communist ideology during the Soviet era, and condemned both. Turan, September 12, 2000.

Council of Europe: Obviously, the international condemnation of the first round damaged Azerbaijan's prospects—which supposedly were contingent, *inter alia*, on improvements in human rights, the release of political prisoners and the conduct of the November election—for admission to the Council of Europe. The refusal of opposition parties after the first round to take those few parliamentary seats they were given further complicated the situation: the Council dearly wanted to accept Baku but was loath to admit a country without opposition representation in parliament. With the Council's final decision on Azerbaijan's membership delayed until January 17, CoE and ODIHR representatives negotiated with the authorities and opposition leaders, urging the former to hold reasonable repeat elections in early January and publicly calling on the latter to participate, and to enter parliament. While official Baku naturally offered the requisite assurances of good intentions, opposition leaders either refused to play along or refused to commit themselves.

Nevertheless, it was clear that the Council of Europe would bend over backwards to find some progress in the second round to justify admitting Azerbaijan. On November 9, despite the November 6 censure of the election by the Council of Europe's Andreas Gross, the CoE's Committee of Ministers invited Azerbaijan to join, stipulating that Baku respond to the international assessment of the first round and take measures to correct vote fraud.

The political insignificance of the second round in electoral terms helped Baku and the international community get what they wanted: to save face while admitting Azerbaijan to the Council of Europe. With YAP's control of parliament guaranteed by the falsified first round results, government spokesmen assured NDI that Baku essentially did not care who won seats in the repeat elections and had warned local officials not to interfere in the voting. It appears that most of the fraud in this second round was intended to comply with turnout requirements, not to guarantee the victory of individuals.¹²

The January 8 joint statement by ODIHR and the CoE, while concluding that the repeat elections had not met OSCE standards, nevertheless contained the key phrase "marked some improvement." With that cover, as anticipated, the Council's of Europe's Committee of Ministers voted unanimously on January 17 for the simultaneous admission of Armenia and Azerbaijan. The two countries' flags were hoisted by the Council in a January 25 ceremony in Strasbourg, with both Presidents Aliiev and Kocharian in attendance.

Unfortunately, the hope that Council of Europe membership would have a salutary effect on Azerbaijan's observance of human rights commitments has not been borne out so far. In fact, in January 2001, independent media came under severe pressure. DMR TV in Balakan ceased broadcasting on January 8, after the local police warned it did not have a government license. On January 25, 2001—the day Azerbaijan joined the Council—a regional independent station, Mingechevir TV, also stopped broadcasting under pressure from local police.

Independent newspapers have protested steep recent tax increases on imported paper, which could lead to their closing. Attacks on independent journalism are not only financial: on January 9, Azerbaijani Prosecutor-General Zakir Qaralov declared that charges against Rauf Arifoglu, chief editor of *Yeni Musavat*, would not be dropped, because he "participated in organizing a terrorist act." On January 18, Zamin Haji, affiliated with the opposition newspaper *Azadlig*, was assaulted. The next day, Etibar Mansuroglu, editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Etimad*, was also attacked.

¹²See NDI's *Final Report on the 2000-2001 Parliamentary Elections in Azerbaijan*, p. 15.

President Aliev: As expected, the rigged election gave President Aliev the pro-Ilham parliament he wanted. Future developments are harder to forecast.

Aliev and Azerbaijani officials routinely reply, when asked about Heydar Aliev's health and political future, that he will serve until 2003 and then win another five-year term.¹³ In these optimistic scenarios, only in 2008 will Azerbaijan face the issue of succession.

Nevertheless, inside and outside Azerbaijan, interested political players are planning for a transfer of power sooner. Whatever the timetable, nobody doubts that Heydar Aliev hopes to engineer his son's succession (although some analysts wonder whether his son really wants the job.) Despite widespread expectation that Ilham Aliev would become Speaker of Parliament after the first round, Murtuz Aleskerov retained that post, indicating that President Aliev is not yet ready to place his son in the position most see as critical in the succession process. Two broad scenarios dominate discussion of Aliev's most likely strategy in the near and mid-term: the 77-year old president, in questionable health, could step down in favor of a designated heir, a la Russian President Boris Yeltsin; or, he could remain in power and prepare institutional and personal support by key players for Ilham. Of course, whether any or all such arrangements would survive Aliev himself remains to be seen, especially considering deepening splits within the ruling party.

Government-Opposition Relations: During the campaign and after the first round, the authorities—seeking to pressure opposition parties into entering parliament, while preparing a scapegoat just in case—warned that they would bear the blame if the Council of Europe admitted Armenia but not Azerbaijan. The opposition dismissed these charges, pinning all responsibility for Baku's damaged prospects for CoE entry on President Aliev and his conduct of the elections.

In the aftermath of the election, government-opposition relations have reached a low point. The official election results clearly demonstrate that President Aliev was determined to ensure that parliament is supportive of his heir apparent and to keep out opposition leaders who could challenge him. Prognoses of possible accommodation with the opposition, or perhaps even some power sharing arrangements, to facilitate a smooth and peaceful eventual transfer of power have proved unfounded.

Indeed, Aliev has deprived opposition parties of the possibility to contend for power through parliamentary means. The record of the last seven years, especially the four elections, has persuaded opposition leaders that while participating in elections held under Heydar Aliev may be worthwhile—especially to gain access to state television during campaigns to reach voters—they have no hope of fair and equal treatment. Considering Aliev's age and health, and given the uncertainties about Ilham Aliev's prospects for remaining in power should he become president, opposition planning focuses more on post-Aliev scenarios

In this connection, the demonstrations after the first round were noteworthy, especially those involving persons displaced by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Azerbaijan's refugees and IDPs—who number about 700,000, according to UN figures—have been remarkably inert politically, despite horrendous living conditions since 1993.¹⁴ Analysts often attribute their quiescence to traditional Soviet or Azerbaijani

¹³See, for example, *Kommersant-Vlast*, September 11, 2000.

¹⁴In Georgia, by contrast, some 250,000 refugees from the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia have organizations, political leadership (if fractious) and supportive parliamentarians.

passivity, compounded over the years by disillusionment and lack of faith in the prospect of improved circumstances. But to the extent that they have abstained from protesting out of fear of President Aliev and his well-deserved reputation for an iron hand, that could change once he leaves the scene. The combination of opposition politicians with no stake in Aliev's political system and possibly restive masses could move the post-Aliev political process from the struggle for parliament to the streets. In any event, the virtually total rupture between government and opposition, reflected in the election's official results, will make it more difficult for Azerbaijan to craft a "soft landing" when the succession eventually comes.

Intra-Opposition Relations: The November-January election may have also sounded the death knell for whatever slim hopes remained for a unified opposition. With official results barring Musavat and the ADP—headed by Isa Gambar and Rasul Guliev, both former Speakers of Parliament whom President Aliev would not allow into parliament—neither party has any reason to cooperate with the authorities. Their leaders, however, have different priorities and strategies.

Isa Gambar, after the death of Abulfaz Elchibey, is the country's senior opposition figure and has claimed that Musavat won the election. Various Western news agencies also reported that Musavat had won more votes than anyone else.¹⁵ Whatever the actual tallies, Musavat's implausible exclusion from parliament for the second consecutive time bolsters Gambar's claims that his party is the most threatening to Aliev and the most viable alternative to the regime. Gambar rebuffed entreaties from the OSCE and Council of Europe to participate in repeat elections or to allow Musavat members to take the seats they won in single mandate districts.¹⁶ He appears to believe that his prospects are best served by refusing to recognize the government and parliament, which he considers to be illegitimate and unpopular, and maintaining a hardline opposition stance while positioning himself for the post-Aliev period as the most popular and authoritative politician.

The official results gave Rasul Guliev's ADP only 1.1 percent, a gesture apparently designed to prove that he has no support in the country. Even more telling, ADP members did not win any single mandate seats, which clearly indicates Aliev's resolve to purge the legislature of any overt or covert backers of Guliev. Nevertheless, the election outcome offered pluses and minuses to Guliev, who, given his relations with Aliev, could not have hoped to win any seats. He has lost his backers in parliament, but like Gambar, Guliev can argue that the CEC's treatment of the ADP demonstrates Heydar Aliev's fear of a serious rival. Moreover, he can take comfort in the international community's intercession with Baku to register the ADP and the opportunity to address voters on TV. Still, while Aliev is in power, Guliev cannot realistically expect to return to Azerbaijan, which encourages him to adopt the most hardline approach. He continues to press other opposition leaders to boycott parliament and emphasizes the need for demonstrations.¹⁷

President Aliev, apparently hoping both to legitimize the election results and deepen the splits among the opposition, let the Popular Front "Reformers" enter parliament. Their leader Ali Kerimov, though widely considered a promising politician, is still too young to harbor presidential ambitions in the near term

¹⁵For example, *The Economist*, November 11, 2000.

¹⁶One Musavat member who insisted on taking his seat was kicked out of the party.

¹⁷Guliev's ADP has also split, with former co-chairman Ilyas Ismailov leaving to head his own party.

and Aliev may have deemed it safer to let him into parliament than other opposition figures. Between the two election rounds, Popular Front “Reformers” party members called for accepting the seats they were given after November 5; there was no opposition unity to break, they argued, especially in view of Isa Gambar’s recognition of the rival wing of the Popular Front, and participation in parliament would provide a forum to criticize the Aliev regime, pursue general opposition goals and advance the Reformers’ specific interests. Kerimov heatedly denied the allegations by other opposition leaders that he had struck a deal with Aliev and initially held fast to the November 14 agreement to boycott parliament. But in December, he said members of his party would contest the January 7 repeat elections. Kerimov announced on January 14 that the Reformers would indeed take up their legislative mandates. He explained the decision by the desire to help Azerbaijan join the Council of Europe, the lack of unity within the opposition and the reality that the international community was not shunning a legislature elected so fraudulently. The Reformers, after the two rounds of voting, have six seats. Along with deputies affiliated with other parties, they have formed an opposition group of 10 members.

Etibar Mamedov, leader of the National Independence Party, has since 1993 been—and been considered—a more moderate opposition force.¹⁸ For him, the election was a severe, and probably unexpected, blow. The failure of his party, according to official results, to pass the six-percent threshold was perhaps punishment for Mamedov’s strong criticism of Heydar Aliev during the 1998 presidential and the 2000 parliamentary elections. No longer a parliamentarian, Mamedov has lost his legislator’s forum and the measure of safety it provided, while rival Isa Gambar’s stature has risen. Mamedov has signed a cooperation agreement with the APF’s Ali Kerimov; together, they have taken the position of moderate opposition leaders. On December 20, Mamedov announced that while he would not run, his party would contest seats in the January 7 repeat election to improve Azerbaijan’s chances to enter the Council of Europe. The decision undoubtedly pleased the ODIHR and the Council, as well as President Aliev.¹⁹ But on January 2, the National Independence Party opted not to take part, accusing the Aliev regime of not implementing pledges to the Council of Europe to address vote fraud and release political prisoners.

The discord among Azerbaijan’s opposition parties has taken organizational forms as well. Except for the National Independence Party, ten leading parties had been members of the Democratic Congress since 1994. But the pressures of the pre- and post-election periods split that body on October 11, leading to the creation of two competing Democratic Congresses, one headed by Isa Gambar, the other by Ali Kerimov. The election, in sum, and the subsequent issue of boycotting parliament has exacerbated the longstanding fractiousness among opposition parties. Their disunity lessens the chances that they might be able to act cooperatively to influence the eventual transfer of power.

Yeni Azerbaijan: The ruling party, for its part, is also split. On October 6, for example, Rafael Allakhverdiev, the former Mayor of Baku and a longtime faithful associate of President Aliev, openly accused high-ranking figures within Yeni Azerbaijan of conspiring to rig the election. Allakhverdiev professed his support for Aliev and his son, but the allegation, from inside the president’s own entourage, of plans to falsify an election designed to ensure parliamentary support for Ilham must have been awkward

¹⁸Unlike the Popular Front and Musavat, Mamedov never refused to recognize Heydar Aliev as the President of Azerbaijan, and in 1998, he refused to boycott the presidential contest.

¹⁹Not surprisingly, ADP leader Rasul Guliev immediately condemned Mamedov for making an “anti-national” gesture, while a Musavat spokesman warned that Mamedov’s party would share the government’s responsibility for the election falsification. Turan, December 20, 2000.

for Aliev. Allakhverdiev also publicly criticized YAP's party list, which featured names of people he said he hardly knew, and accused Ramiz Mekhtiev, President Aliev's Chief of Staff, and Prime Minister Artur Rasizade of "discrediting" Aliev's policies.

These remarks indicate serious differences within the party's old guard, linked with Heydar Aliev, and new faces associated with Ilham and his campaign to create a younger, reformist image. It would appear that the divisions within YAP concern not only power struggles among individuals and groups but concern among some well-connected figures about Ilham Aliev's ability or willingness to ensure their interests. If the opposition parties cannot agree on a figure to lead them, it is also not clear whether the ruling elite will unite around President Aliev's designated heir.

Azerbaijan-Russian Relations: Under President Vladimir Putin, Moscow has invigorated relations with the countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia. While Russia has heavy-handedly stepped up the pressure on Georgia, Putin appears to be showing Azerbaijan a softer face. His scheduled visit to Azerbaijan in January 2001 excited conspiracy theorists. Might Heydar Aliev, aware of YAP's lack of popularity and uncertain of elite support for his son, strike a deal for Russia's backing in return for a Nagorno-Karabakh compromise that would allow the refugees to go home and devise a face-saving status for the disputed territory?²⁰

True, such an alliance would be dangerous, as Aliev, a former KGB general, knows better than anyone else: Moscow would demand a high price for such services, and its assurances of implementation would not be trustworthy. Moreover, the deal would also signal a sharp turn away from a seven-year policy course that aimed to develop close relations with Western capitals.

In the event, Putin's visit to Azerbaijan, the first by a President of Russia, produced no overt sign of any such agreement. Putin and Aliev signed the Baku Declaration, which laid out plans to expand political, economic and military relations over the next decade. But they failed to come to terms about Russia's continued use of the Gabala radar-station in Azerbaijan. Nor did Putin offer anything new or substantive on Nagorno-Karabakh. He said Russia is ready to mediate a solution "without victors or vanquished," adding that Moscow would act as a guarantor of any peace agreement reached, and calling on the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan to continue their "realistic and sensible" dialogue. In short, Putin did nothing to undercut the ongoing bilateral presidential talks or the efforts of the OSCE Minsk Group, but he gave no hint of offering Baku an advantageous short cut to settling the conflict. What else he and Aliev might have agreed in their private meetings, of course, remains private.

Azerbaijan-U.S. Relations: Since 1992, the U.S. Government has tried to support Azerbaijan's independence and sovereignty, integrate the country into Western institutions, and direct the export of Azerbaijani oil and gas away from Russian-monopolized routes. These priorities are not likely to change.

Washington has also urged President Aliev towards democratization, following the ODIHR's lead in criticizing flawed elections and pressing Baku to equalize the playing field for the opposition. Aliev, in turn, has grown increasingly annoyed by American censure: "Human rights are not violated in Azerbaijan and

²⁰ Commentators had mooted the idea long before the election. See *Zerkalo*, August 2, 2000. There were numerous other stories about such possible scenarios in the Azerbaijani opposition and independent press before and after Putin's visit.

democracy is under development. This process will further develop with regard to the national traditions of Azerbaijan and its peculiarities,” he said after returning to Azerbaijan from his long visit in the United States on September 30. “It might be,” Aliev continued, “that the rights of 5-10 persons are violated in Azerbaijan, but more important is the problem [of] over one million refugees who had to leave their homelands as a result of Armenian aggression.” Aliev complained that Section 907 of the 1992 Freedom Support Act, which imposes U.S. sanctions on Azerbaijan, remains valid despite many assurances by Washington over the last several years that it would be lifted. He also griped that Washington was doing little to advance a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, despite being one of three co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group.²¹

President Aliev presumably now expects more initiative from Washington on lifting Section 907. The legislation, which bars government-to-government assistance from the United States to Azerbaijan until “all hostilities cease and Azerbaijan lifts its blockade of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh,” has been an irritant in U.S.-Azerbaijani relations since its passage. The Clinton Administration publicly opposed Section 907 but did not otherwise try to repeal it.

Aliev may also be hoping for less criticism on democratization and human rights issues and more American emphasis on geo-strategic and economic interests. It remains to be seen whether such hopes will be met.

²¹Turan, September 30, 2000.

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