

General Elections in Azerbaijan, 7th November 2010

4, 829, 000 Azerbaijanis are being called to ballot on 7th November next to renew the 125 members of their parliament, Milli Majlis. The election is of primary importance for the future of the Central Asian republic governed for the last 17 years by the Aliyev dynasty. The President of the Republic, Ilham Aliyev, is the son of Heydar who was Head of State from 1993 to 2003.

During the previous general elections on 6th November 2005 the opposition forces and international observers who were responsible for monitoring the election condemned the lack of transparency and the numerous infringements which took place. "The shortcomings we saw, particularly on the day of the election, led us to the conclusion that they were not in line with Azerbaijan's international commitments," declared the head of the OSCE mission, Alcee Hastings. On 30th September last, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) condemned Azerbaijan for having arbitrarily invalidated the victory of Flora Alakbar Gizi Kerimova, Azadliq's (A) candidate in the general elections in November 2005.

10 seats were cancelled and a by-election took place in May 2006.

The last presidential election dates back to 15th October 2008 – the opposition forces then refused to take part and this was also marked by infringements. "The election does not reflect the principles of a truly pluralist, democratic election," read a press release published by the OSCE.

The electoral campaign for the vote on 7th November started on 4th September. 1438 candidates on 125 election districts have been confirmed on 9th October. 490 people have been registered so far.

The Political System

The Milli Majlis, the only Chamber in Parliament comprises 125 members elected every five years in a majority, one round election.

5 political parties are represented:

- the New Azerbaijan Party (YAP), that has dominated the country for the last 17 years and which President Ilham Aliyev belongs to, has 61 seats;
- Azadliq (A) (Freedom), an opposition party has 5 MPs;
- the Civil Solidarity Party (VHP), led by Iqbal Agazade, has 3 seats;
- the Homeland Party (AV) has 2 MPs
- the Popular Front Party (AXCP), an opposition party led by Ali Karimli has one MP.

There are 46 independents and 7 "others".

Any person who has been living in Azerbaijan for at

least five years is allowed to vote in the general elections. The candidates must be aged 25 minimum and collate the signatures of at least 450 voters in their constituency in order to be able to stand.

Each candidate standing in the elections has an electoral fund of 500,000 manats (454,000€) which have to be found by the candidate in person. The political parties (and electoral blocs) can give up to 150,000 manats to a candidate, 50,000 to legal entities and not more than 3,000 to private individuals (2,725€).

Some opposition parties believe that the amendments made this year to the electoral law which prohibit candidates from using public funds to finance their electoral campaign are discriminatory.

The Electoral Stakes

In the face of the Aliyev clan the opposition is powerless. In the election on 7th November next five oppo-

sition electoral blocs have been registered with the Electoral Commission: Karabakh (Qarabag), For the Good of the People (Insan Namine), Democracy (Demokratiya), Reform (Islahat) and the bloc formed by the Popular Front and Musavat.

The Karabakh coalition chaired by Taliyat Aliyev, brings together Umid (Hope) led by Igbal Agazade and the Democratic Party (ADP) led by Serdar Jalaloglu. *"Our name shows what we believe to be a priority issue,"* says Taliyat Aliyev, adding *"We have worked a great deal to come to a consensus and after long discussions we came to the conclusion that we could join forces with Umid."*

Nagorno-Karabakh is a territory that is being argued over by Armenia and Azerbaijan and it declared its independence, which was not acknowledged by the international community after a 6 year war (1988-1994) that led to the deaths of 30,000. Over the last few months conflict between the Armenian and Azerbaijani forces increased. Around 20 soldiers have been killed on either side since January last. One Armenian soldier Manvel Saribekian, captured near Nagorno-Karabakh, was found dead on 5th October in a detention centre near Baku. The Armenians are accusing the Azerbaijani authorities of having beaten and tortured the soldier. The OSCE announced at the end of September that it was deploying a new mission to the Nagorno-Karabakh borders.

The *"For the Good of the People"* alliance rallies the Green Party led by Mayis Gulaliyev, the Liberal Party (ALP) led by Avez Temirkhan since 12th September last and the Citizens and Development Party led by Ali Aliyev.

"Democracy" comprises the Democratic Reform Party (PDR) led by Asim Mollazade and the Civil Solidarity Party (VHP) led by Rustamkhanli. *"Azerbaijan has to have a political force that can give it the strength to achieve the democratic values we have been fighting for so long,"* declared the latter who said that both parties would continue their alliance after the election on 7th November next.

On 8th September last Isa Gambar, the Musavat leader chose to join forces with the People's Front to *"ensure that the elections were free and fair and to chase the New Azerbaijan Party led by President of the Republic Ilham Aliyev."* *"The representatives of authority are not telling the truth. Everyone knows that the authorities will falsify the elections again. Even during the football matches, on TV there is propaganda for the ruling party, there is not really a proper electoral campaign,"* stressed Musavat which is the oldest political party in Azerbaijan (founded in 1911) but which is also losing ground and hopes to recover the electorate's favour by allying itself with the People's Front.

"Reform" rallies the United People's Front, Aadalyat (Justice), Takamul (Evolution) and the Grand Establishment Party led by Fazil Mustafa who also chairs the electoral coalition. *"Reform"* would like to create a *"new opposition"* against President Aliyev and is standing against the electoral bloc that rallies the People's Front and Musavat. *"The AXCP-Musavat coalition is not a serious one and is not really a political force in Azerbaijani society. This is increasingly clear with each election,"* declared Fazil Mustafa. *"Trying to win votes based on Azerbaijani society's discontent is not enough to reach power,"* he added saying that his main rival on 7th November was the New Azerbaijan Party.

Ali Aliyev of the Citizens and Development Party and Isa Gambar of Musavat, both candidates standing for the opposition are the symbol – if ever one was needed – of the disunion between the opposition forces, fighting over the constituency of Yasamal.

As for the ruling party the New Azerbaijan Party (YAP) is pointing to the fact that in this general election, it has privileged young people and intellectuals (working in the areas of education and healthcare etc.) 24 women and 15 young people under 40 are standing for YAP. 48 outgoing MPs are standing. In YAP has put 114 candidates forward. In eleven other constituencies it will support people from *"small"* parties or independent candidates who joined forces with it.

The Council of Europe recently indicated that it gave great importance to the democratic running of these general elections on 7th November in Azerbaijan. *"The*

Council of Europe hopes that everyone will be able to make a real choice via his/her vote. This election is very important for the future of the country," declared Veronika Koteck, representative of the European Institute in Baku.

"The Azerbaijan authorities are ready to do everything necessary to guarantee identical conditions for all candidates during the electoral campaign and during democratic elections. The authorities will not use the administration to limit the use of the media in electoral propaganda. The Azerbaijani government has an interest for the electoral campaign to be transparent and fair," said Ali Gassanov, the head of the socio-political administration of the President of the Republic.

The OSCE will send a mission comprising 30 long stay observers and 450 short stay observers to monitor the election.

"The general elections will be different from those of 2005 because Azerbaijan in 2010 is not that of 2005. The country's economy is flourishing, living standards and the way people think have developed in the last five years," declared Ali Ahmedov, head of the YAP group in Parliament.

Just one month before the election however no one in Azerbaijan or elsewhere imagines that President Aliyev's party could be defeated on 7th November next.

Reminder of the General Election Results on 6th November 2005 in Azerbaijan

Turnout: 42.2%

Partis politiques	Nombre de voix recueillies	Pourcentage des suffrages exprimés	Nombre de sièges
New Azerbaijan Party (YAP)	177 481	19.56	61
Azadliq (A)	151 595	16.71	6
Civil Solidarity Party (VHP)	130 887	14.42	3
Homeland Party (AV)	88 738	11,92	2
Popular Front Party (AXCP)	77 869	8.58	1
Independents	62 989	6.94	46
Others	54 684	6.03	7

Source : Cour constitutionnelle d'Azerbaïdjan

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