

REPORT OF THE CENTRAL ELECTION COMMISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

August, 2008

Pursuant to Election Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the following Presidential Elections will be conducted in the country on October 15, 2008. While elections approach, CEC much further reinforces its activity. From this point of view, August is more considerable for wide-ranging and intensive activity of the CEC. CEC held 8 sessions within a month after the declaration of Presidential Elections of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 51 decisions and 9 recent legal-normative acts were adopted by the Commission after being expertized and relevant amendments were made in several other documents. Commission implemented the activities implied for August by Calendar Plan for basic activities and measures on the preparation and conduct of the forthcoming Presidential Elections. Pursuant to Election Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Working Group consisting of the specialists of relevant bodies was established in order to check the accuracy of the information included in signature sheets and documents attached to them by candidates and Expert Group was formed on the investigation of applies and complaints in August. After the declaration of elections, political parties nominated 16 candidates, voters' initiative groups nominated a candidate and 13 citizens were nominated on their own initiatives. New Azerbaijani Party nominated the candidacy of Mr. Ilham Aliyev, signatures were collected at the necessary number and submitted to the CEC together with other documents and his candidacy was registered on August 16, 2008. After checking submitted signatures and documents, candidacy of Mr. Iqbal Aghazade, nominated by "Umid" Party was registered on August 30, 2008. During this time, authorized representatives appointed by political parties and candidates were registered by the CEC and provided with relevant badges. 115 citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan applied for specific permissions on conducting observation within the whole republic and following sessions held by election commissions were accredited as well and they were provided with cards for an observer. Furthermore, CEC also conducted various trainings, seminars and conferences related to the education. Professional dealing with the works by the participants during elections is one of the most important elements causing refinement of the process. By taking this into account, CEC realized many projects with the aim of education. In August such activities were also continued. One of the essential projects implemented by CEC related to election since 2002 is training program held for Constituency and Precinct Election Commissions (Con.ECs and PECs). Unlike previous years, this year CEC together with the Council of Europe trained two trainers for each constituency, instructed them about the voting process, procedures related to this, skills of presentation and some necessary issues. CEC Training Group prepared relevant project for Con.EC s and PECs on constituencies. In conformity with the project, CEC Training Group prepared special supplementary slides reflecting necessary information for training of members of lower election commissions and submitted them in discs to training groups on constituencies. Since August 14, members of CEC Training Group were deployed to regions. In August 15-16, they conducted trainings for members of training groups on constituencies and instructed them about the training program to be realized by them, themes on this and other issues. According to the tabulation submitted by CEC Training Group, training groups on constituencies initiated training in the form of small groups of lower election commissions by using visual aids since August 17 and this process lasted till August 30. In the frame of trainings, members of lower election commissions were thoroughly informed on election process. Members of CEC Training Group joined the training process without having informed beforehand in different regions for which they are responsible, observed performance of the process and recommended domestic trainers when needed. However, during this training, each PEC member was submitted "Guideline for Election Day" booklet, samples of protocol on the voting results and samples of other documents. Generally, more than 26000 commissioners and officials of Con.EC Secretariat took part in these trainings.

Training on “Consideration of applies and complains” which is the integral part of education project implemented in the aim of preparation of elections was realized in Baku on August 21-22 and 25-26. In this training held jointly by CEC and Venice Commission of the Council of Europe and International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES), representatives of 125 Con.ECs responsible for considering applies and complains took part. At the training, experts of CEC, Venice Commission and IFES gave detailed information to the participants on CEC instruction on the consideration of applies and complains, composition and activity of Expert Group established at Con.ECs in this aim, international practice on methods and strategies of considering applies and complains, decision samples and their substantiation and cases encountered during practical courses and measures to be taken were discussed. At the activity, representatives of international and non-government organizations also took part. In August, CEC continued its close cooperation with international organizations. So, CEC held more than 10 meetings with delegations of international organizations visited republic during August, foreign (international) institutions in Baku and representatives of embassies, foreign mass media. During these meetings, visitors were informed about the preparation of elections and pre-election atmosphere, views were changed on the issues of mutual interest. However, according the formed tradition, representatives of international (foreign) organizations were invited to CEC sessions, and they took part. CEC representatives participated in the international conference held on the theme “Azerbaijanis and Americans: How we see each other”, organized by Azerbaijan Diplomacy Academy on August 13. At this activity held with the aim of making close acquaintance of these two publicities and getting information on the ongoing processes there, interesting views were changed on election process of both two countries. The conference joined by representatives of Azerbaijani government, influential mass media of the USA and Azerbaijan and domestic NGOs was very efficient. Another activity participated by CEC representatives was conference on the topic “Media and elections: Democratic obligation of Media” organized by Azerbaijan office of the Council of Europe on August 26. At the conference joined by the representatives of media, many interesting discussions were held. In August 26, CEC representative also took part in round table held on the theme “opinions and suggestions on the recommendations by Venice Commission of the Council of Europe and OSCE/ODIHR related to the appendices and amendments made to Election Code”, organized by Joint Working Group on Realization of International Standards for Human Rights in Azerbaijan. Many activities were taken in the aim of arrangement of elections in conformity with Election Code and CEC instructions. Pursuant to Article 112.1 of Election Code and relevant instruction adopted by CEC, Expert Groups consisting of 3 persons were established in each constituency for investigating applies and complains concerning violation of citizens’ suffrage. Like in previous months, increase dynamics of voters was looked through and according to Article 35.3.1 of Election Code, 166 new precincts were formed in 65 constituencies having precincts where the number of voters exceeds 1500. Information provided by the voters included in voters’ lists on newly established precincts were included in data base of voters, their addresses and other information were located on web page of CEC. CEC discussed the issue on formation of lower election commissions in full composition and according to procedure rules implied by Election Code, appointment of members to vacant seats at Con.ECs was initiated. Technical supply of Con.ECs and PECs was also considered once more. Con.ECs were provided with projectors, screens and other necessary equipment for use during arrangement of trainings and other education courses for PEC members. Needs of PECs were also examined, suitability of ballot boxes, voting rooms and other election equipment was checked and relevant measures were taken in altering the spoilt equipment with new ones. During August election-related education of voters and agitation for the voting has been under attention. Participation of CEC officials or Con.EC members in the meetings with the voters to vote for the first time, held by the Ministry for the Youth and Sport was recommended by CEC. During these meetings, voters were comprehensively informed about the voting procedure and exclusive cases that are allowable. CEC published posters which invite voters to participate in elections, call for looking for their names in the voters’ lists, inform about the web page of CEC and Calendar Plan for the preparation and conduct of the forthcoming Presidential Elections in large format (A1),

submitted them to Con.ECs and in their turn, Con.ECs demonstrated these materials in densely populated areas and PECs. The role of legal-methodical means is essential in education of the members of lower election commissions. By considering all these, CEC publishes the adopted instructions, comments and rules in the form of booklets. In August, 6 volumes of these booklets, Calendar Plan and booklet "Guideline for Election Day" were published and a copy for each Con.EC and PEC member, as well as supplementary copies for preserving in information board of the constituency and precinct were distributed. Specification of voters' lists has been continued during August. Intensive campaign was lasted in electron mass media for voters to check their names in the lists. Con.ECs made necessary amendments in the voters' lists due to the actions of voters on the constituency under the cooperation with local organizations in regions and regularly informed CEC on this. On August 12, Mr. Mazahir Panahov, addressed via mass media to the heads of offices, institutions, organizations, firms and other bodies functioning in the country and recommended them to ensure their officials to check their names in the voters' lists. Online hot line # 115 received nearly 1800 election-related applies during August, so that 1604 of them were identified as grounded and relevant measures were taken. While elections approach, education of the publicity causes more importance to CEC. By considering this, CEC cooperated with mass media during August, too and regularly informed them on the preparation of elections. In the aim of ensuring transparency in the activity of the Commission, CEC sessions were open to mass media and they were informed on the time of sessions beforehand. More than 35 speeches, interviews and comments on different topics by CEC commissioners and officials were elucidated in electron mass media. Like in previous months, on August 21 CEC Chairman conducted briefing for the representatives of mass media. At the briefing, Chairman reported on the latest activities implemented by CEC, actions performed in the direction of preparation of elections and replied to the questions of great interest to journalists. Broad information about CEC activity was provided in the press, press releases, comments and articles on sessions, organized activities were published. As well as, decisions and normative acts adopted by the Commission pursuant to Election Code were published in official press body "Azerbaijan" newspaper. Nearly 400 materials related to CEC activity were published in newspapers. Furthermore, CEC representative participated in "Exo – Forum" organized by "Exo" paper and replied to the questions asked via internet. Cooperation in the direction of voter education related to Presidential Elections dated on October 15, 2008 is ongoing. CEC locates election-related information on its web page for voters to easy obtain and regularly renews the information. Information on the approval and registration process of candidates which lasted during August, CEC decisions, normative-legal acts, Calendar Plan, document samples and press releases related to the activity were operatively located on the web page in Azerbaijani and English languages. As well as, photos of new administrative buildings of Con.ECs and amendments made in the composition of the commissions were also located on the page. Voters direct their applies, suggestions and opinions to the CEC via e-mail on the web page. CEC continues its activity under conditions of free, just conduct of elections, increase of professionalism of lower election commissioners, specification of voters' lists, transparency in the work of the Commission, election-related education of publicity, cooperation with international organizations and in the direction of all these mentioned. CEC reports in Azerbaijani and English are located on the web page of the Commission and directed to domestic and international (foreign) organizations via e-mail every month.