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## AZERBAIJAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS 2003 ELECTION WATCH REPORT

Report Two, September 22, 2003

### PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES ISSUE

#### Signature Collecting for Candidates

The deadline for submitting candidate registration documents was August 6. In order to register, candidates must collect 45,000 valid signatures or pay a deposit equivalent to about US\$33,000, a high figure by local standards. Over 20 applications had been submitted to the CEC for preliminary approval, a necessary step before the collection of signatures. The nominations were sponsored either by political parties or by citizens' initiative groups. Of the nominations, 12 were approved and five denied. Interestingly, both incumbent President Heydar Aliyev and his son Ilham Aliyev have been nominated as candidates.

Although the "official" campaign period began on August 16, two months before the election, election-related political activity was already underway. Much of this activity centered around the collection of signatures in support of candidates. Several opposition party candidates asserted that they had faced interference from executive authorities and

police while trying to collect signatures, particularly outside Baku.

Under the Code, candidates must submit 45,000 valid signatures to be registered; there is no specified upper limit on the number of signatures that may be submitted. The CEC, however, decided that candidates may receive forms for collecting signatures which would provide for maximum 15% more signatures than the established legal requirement, and could therefore submit a maximum of 51,750 signatures. This decision could have been significant if large numbers of signatures were ruled invalid. Moreover, the CEC Working Group that will rule on the validity of signatures is composed entirely or overwhelmingly of experts who are civil servants beholden to the government and do not enjoy confidence from the opposition representatives at the CEC.

#### Guliyev and Mutalibov Applications

The Central Election Commission (CEC) accepted about 15 applications for candidates and rejected about 5. Among the latter, the rejection of an application by Rasul Guliyev, a

#### ***Presidential Elections 2003***

*On October 15, 2003, voters throughout Azerbaijan will go to the polls and cast their ballots to elect a president. This is the second in a series of reports on the campaign in Azerbaijan as the country approaches these critical elections. This second report focuses on the the campaign activities of the main parties. Future issues will focus on Azerbaijan non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the media, and the international community. Throughout September and October, NDI will provide regular updates leading up to election day.*

*NDI's programming in Azerbaijan is funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).*

well-known opposition party leader now in exile, is of particular concern. The CEC rejected the application citing Article 100 of the Constitution. The CEC stated in their rejection that Guliyev could not be a candidate since he is a holder of a Green Card, and has obligations to another country (USA). The case was under appeal to the Supreme Court, and on July 14 the high court upheld the CEC's decision.

Pro-government members of the CEC also asserted that another candidate, Ayaz

Mutalibov, had a criminal record and should have been denied. The CEC denied Mutalibov's application on various grounds. Echo newspaper cited Andreas Gross, PACE co-rapporteur, as stating that claims of non-registered candidates for the presidency will be heard in the European Human Rights Court in Strasbourg on October 2-3. A European Court press officer said an inquiry on reasons of refusal of Rasul Guliyev's candidature registration has been sent to the Azerbaijani government.

### Key Dates in Election Timetable

Aug. 11	Publication of preliminary voter's lists
Aug. 16	Final day to register candidates
Aug. 16	Campaign period begins
Aug. 20	Final day to appeal CEC decisions not to register candidates
Aug. 21	Final day to publish candidates' list
Aug. 31	Polling stations list published
Sept. 10	Publication of final voter's lists
Oct. 5	Final day for Candidates to Withdraw
Oct. 15	Election day
Oct. 20	Preliminary election results published
Oct. 29	CEC sends election results to Constitutional Ct. for approval
Nov. 8	Const. Ct. approves final results
March 16	Publication of results by precincts

### The List of Presidential Candidates (Listed alphabetically)

N	Name of the Candidate	Affiliation
1	Heydar Aliyev	President – Yeni Azerbaijan Party (YAP)
2	Ilham Aliyev	Prime Minister, first deputy chairman of YAP, nominated by initiative group of Nakhchivan voters
3	Yunis Aliyev	National Unity Party (Milli Vahdat)
4	Isa Gambar	Musavat (Equality) Party
5	Hafiz Hajiyev	Modern Musavat Party
6	Lala Shovket-Hajiyeva	National Unity initiative group
7	Gudrat Hasanguliyev	MP, Popular Front initiative group (not APFP)
8	Ilyas Ismayilov	Adalat (Justice) Party
9	Ali Karimli	MP, Azerbaijan Popular Front Party (APFP)
10	Etibar Mammadov	Azerbaijan National Independence Party (ANIP)
11	Sabir Rustamkhanli	Citizen Consolidation Party (CCP)
12	Abutalib Samedov	Alliance for Azerbaijan Party

## **Campaigning**

The election campaign officially began on August 16. According to the election code, all presidential candidates should have equal rights to ten minutes of free television time per week on State Television. Additionally, all candidates have rights to ten minutes of free radio time per week on State Radio. All candidates appear to be using their allotted free time each week. Pro-government candidates are also getting paid air time, but opposition candidates have not had equal access to paid media. In some instances, opposition candidates have offered to pay twice the amount requested by various television stations in order to get their messages aired. All TV channels have refused such requests allegedly because they are fearful of government reprisals if opposition messages get air time.

### *Four Opposition Parties' Trip to London*

The chairmen of the four major opposition parties (Guliyev, Gambar, Kerimli, and Mammadov of ADP, Musavat, APFP, and ANIP respectively) met in London from August 23-24 to discuss potential cooperation. While in London, they established the Democratic Stability Union, which established their agreement to work together to encourage a democratic election period, and to support a single candidate if there is a second round to the upcoming election.

### *Musavat Trip to DC*

Musavat Party leader and presidential candidate Isa Gambar traveled to Washington, DC between September 8-14 to discuss his candidacy and the upcoming elections. While in DC, Gambar held meetings with a number of US State Department officials, OSCE representatives, and international NGOs.

### *Campaign Activities in Baku & the Regions*

ANIP candidate Etibar Mammadov planned to have a rally and meet with voters in Yevlakh on

September 14. The local authorities initially refused ANIP's request to conduct this meeting, which Mammadov considered to be a violation of his rights under the election law. He went forward with the scheduled meeting and after a series of negotiations with authorities he was allowed to do so. It was reported that several thousand people turned out for his speech.

The Musavat was scheduled for a September 18 public meeting in Ismayili, but two members of candidate Gambar's local advance team were arrested by the police and sentenced to 3 and 10 days of confinement. A day before the scheduled meeting, one of Gambar's deputies traveled to the region to make sure the meeting could actually take place, and as a result the meeting did take place as planned.

On September 20, the two candidates from the ANIP-APFP coalition, Mammadov and Kerimli planned to hold rallies in both Masali and Lenkoran. Authorized rallies were held in both locations, but the local police and "provocateurs" instigated a number of fights. Eggs and stones were thrown in various attempts to disperse the crowds. It was reported that 7,000 people turned out in Masalli, and twice that amount in Lenkoran. Representatives of the USG were present to observe, and Internews caught some of the rallies and fights on camera.

On September 21, candidate Isa Gambar had two authorized meetings in two districts with voters in Baku. During both meetings fighting broke out with police. Several people were beaten during the rallies; among them were Panah Huseynov, from APFP, Novella Jafarova of OPWR, a proxy of the Musavat Party to the CEC Gulagha Aslanli, and singer Flora Kerimova. Despite the provocations both meetings took place. The US Embassy and ODIHR expressed their concern over the police actions.

## *Roundtables*

In addition to the ten minutes of free air time on State TV and Radio, the candidates were invited to participate in weekly televised roundtable discussions.

During the second televised roundtable on September 6, APFP candidate representative Fuad Mustafayev threw a glass of water at the Modern Musavat's candidate Hafiz Hajiyev. Mustafayev was responding to the continual verbal insults which Hajiyev had been using against APFP candidate Ali Kerimli. A fist fight ensued resulting in the end of that night's live roundtable.

## *Posters*

Candidate posters of Heydar Aliyev began appearing in the streets of Baku even before the official start date of the campaign. A majority of the complaints involved the tearing down of various opposition posters as well as the hanging of Heydar and Ilham Aliyev posters that did not identify their publishing source.

## **NDI in Azerbaijan**

With funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), NDI has supported democratization efforts in Azerbaijan since 1995. NDI Azerbaijan works in the areas of political party building, civil society strengthening, and elections assistance, including non-partisan election monitoring. In preparation for this election, NDI has provided training for democratically oriented political parties and NGOs throughout Azerbaijan.

During the pre-election period, NDI is helping political parties work together to develop campaign platforms which respond to the needs of citizens. These platforms can be used by individual parties or jointly by groupings or coalitions of parties. During July, NDI, through its civic partner For the Sake of Civil Society (FSCS), trained 350 political party

activists around the country in partisan pollwatching using a training-of-trainers format.

Working with another civic partner, the Organization for the Protection of Women's Rights (OPWR), NDI helped train and ready over 150 women to engage with their various political parties in the upcoming campaigns. NDI is also assisting civic partners FSCS and the Election Monitoring Center (EMC) prepare to conduct domestic monitoring efforts of 3,000 and 1,000 election-day polling station monitors respectively.

## **About NDI**

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) is a nonprofit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. Calling on a global network of volunteer experts, NDI provides practical assistance to civic and political leaders advancing democratic values, practices and institutions. NDI works with democrats in every region of the world to build political and civic organizations, safeguard elections, and promote citizen participation, openness and accountability in government.

*For more information on NDI programs in Azerbaijan, please contact David Sip at NDI's Baku office at +994-12-97 21 80 or Thomas Barry at NDI's Washington office at 202-728-5500.*



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