S T A T E M E N T

WITH

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND RESULTS

S U M M A R Y

The Civil Initiative for Free and Democratic Elections (GISDI) observed the Presidential Elections in Republic of Azerbaijan on 11 April 2018. The election observation mission was composed of 90 observers. They are MPs, former MPs, university professors, lawyers, journalists and election experts from 21 European countries – West and Central Europe, Scandinavia and Baltic states, Balkan Peninsula, and from Bulgaria.

This Statement reflects our overall preliminary assessments based on our observations on electoral campaign, election day and results of Early Presidential Elections in the Republic of Azerbaijan on 11 April 2018.

Our observations of the pre-election campaign and on election-day are giving us ground to re-confirm our basic conclusions and findings, formulated in our **Interim report** which we announced on 29 March, 2018.

The voting process on election day was well organized. We have not observed cases of tension or intimidation of voters. There were no cases of public demonstrations against the election managing bodies or election commissions – CEC and PEC.

As from our Preliminary Findings and Results, we concluded the following:

- On election day, all GISDI observers could access polling stations without any problem or limitation.
- At the opening of polling stations, no violations regarding ballot box sealing were noted.
- The polling booths met international standards and standards set out in the national legislation, and conditions were met to guarantee secret voting.
- Voting process was normal and transparent overall. ID cards of voters were properly verified and voting outside the polling booths was not observed in any of the 465 polling stations observed.

- No ballot stuffing or attempts by a voter to vote for several voters was observed.
- No pressure on voters by polling station staff members or other officials, to vote for any candidate, was noted and no campaigning in or nearby the polling station in favor of any candidate was observed.
- Mobile voting practice, being allowed by the election code, was carried out properly, no problems or remarks were observed.
- No cases of external interference in the voting process were observed.
- During the vote counting process, observers were allowed by the staff to witness all counting procedures. A few small deficiencies were noted in the vote counting and protocol preparation process, namely in 3% of the observed polling stations, mainly due to a lack of training of some concerned staff members.
- Vote counting was however transparent and in general there were no serious violations during this process.
- In a few cases, copies of protocols were not handed to observers.

On this election we observed an essential step forward in the whole organization and conduct of election process from the perspective of the fundamental criteria for transparency:

- High number of international and local observers present
- The use of on-line webcam monitoring of election process
- Exit Polls and Pre-election Surveys

Based on the results of observations carried out in 465 polling stations, GISDI concludes that overall the voting and counting process was transparent, and no violations possibly affecting the outcome of the election were observed.

Generally, there are no empirical grounds for arguing that fundamental democratic principles were not preserved on these presidential elections. The opportunity was given to the people of Azerbaijan to make freely their political choice and to vote in a calm atmosphere.

Thus, GISDI concludes that all of the fundamental conditions for free and fair, and democratic election are successfully fulfilled.

Taking into account various considerations and opinions of its observers, GISDI concludes that the early presidential elections on 11 April 2018 was held in accordance with international standards, and the result of this election expresses the will of the people of Azerbaijan.

Baku, 12 April 2018

Mihail Mirchev, Dr.Sc.

Head of the GISDI Election Observation Mission

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Baku, 12 April 2018

The Civil Initiative for Free and Democratic Elections (GISDI) observed the Presidential Elections in Republic of Azerbaijan on 11 April 2018. The election observation mission was composed of 90 MPs, former MPs, university professors, lawyers, journalists and election experts from 21 European countries – West and Central Europe, Scandinavia and Baltic states, Balkan Peninsula, and from Bulgaria.

This Statement reflects our overall preliminary assessments based on our observations on electoral campaign, election day and results of Presidential Elections in Republic of Azerbaijan on 11 April 2018.

GISDI has observed the conduct of election campaign by electoral administration, candidates and political parties as well as participation of civil society and media.

On election day, the GISDI observers were deployed in pairs in the capital Baku and surrounding regions and observed election procedures – opening, voting, counting, in 450 polling stations. All observations were carried out and recorded in the GISDI Report Form for Polling Station Observation in accordance with international election observation standards.

GISDI has assessed the Presidential elections in Republic of Azerbaijan to determine the extent to which they comply with the international standards on democracy and fair and free elections. The Statement is delivered on the day after e-day.

The final assessment of the electoral process and socio-political context in the country as its background will be provided in our Final Report. That final report will include also recommendations for further improvement of electoral process in Republic of Azerbaijan.

Preliminary conclusions

The results of GISDI overall observation of Republic of Azerbaijan Presidential Elections, held on 11 April 2018 show that they were conducted in accordance with the principles of free and fair democratic elections, thus expressing the free will of people and protecting their political and civil rights. The organization and conduct of the Presidential elections were in conformity with the fundamental freedoms:

- freedom of expression and media – all candidates had equal free or payed access to media. The media is free to decide the forms of their participation in election campaign. We have not observed cases of violation of the right of voters to express freely their will;
- freedom of assembly – the electoral legislative frame allows free conduct of pre-election rallies and other events; list of approved venues is published on CEC`s website;
- freedom of association – there are approximately 60 political parties, more than 4,500 non-governmental organizations and more than 5,000 mass media outlets; the political parties are allowed to run in elections independently or in blocs of parties;
- freedom of movement – voters have the right to vote in a different PEC than their home registration using the mechanism of de-registration cards;
- freedom from discrimination – of the base of race, nationality, religion and cultural tradition of communities.

The legal electoral framework of Republic of Azerbaijan complies with most international standards for free and fair elections and reflects the national context. This election showed the high efficiency of the Electoral Code in practice and other related laws and regulations.

Election managing bodies and electoral administration have made every effort to raise the level of transparency of electoral process; to set up clear and feasible requirements for candidates' nomination and registration; to educate and empower voters to exercise their voting rights. They managed to administer the campaign in full compliance with the national electoral legislation and international standards of democracy, providing all candidates with opportunities for public expression of their political platforms (free air time and space in media was allocated for all, venues for public agitation materials and pre-election events were approved and provided).

All above-mentioned concrete forms are additional steps towards pluralistic democracy. They are evidence of realisation of political and civil rights of the citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan and as rule of law.

Election Day

The election day has passed smoothly. The voting process on election day was well organized. We have not observed cases of tension or intimidation of voters. There were no cases of public demonstrations against the election managing bodies or election commissions at lower level – ConEC and PEC.

- To our knowledge at this moment, no complaints and appeals have been filed so far. The candidates from boycotting parties also did not file complaints or appeals.
- Our observers have not registered any crowds of voters in or outside the polling stations throughout the e-day, including in the end of the day just before 19.00 o`clock.

We have not observed any threat to the free exercise of the people's voting rights and the organization of the electoral process. On the contrary, the electoral managing bodies in conformity

with the Election Code have taken measures to ease voting of voters who by any reason were straitened to vote.

- There were mobile voting stations in hospitals and other places; Voting at home of voters who have informed the PEC about having health problems was also provided.
- Mobile ramps have been installed in 1455 polling stations; stencils in Braille were available;
- Voters who must travel more than an hour from home to polling station to vote were provided with free transportation;

With a few exceptions PECs have been working in their full staff throughout the e-day – from opening through voting in the morning and afternoon hours to closing and counting. All required election materials were present: PS seals for protocols and boxes, polling booth/s, enough ballot papers, voter lists, ballot boxes, protocols and PEC record books. Our observers found PECs in a good arrangement. We have not indicated the presence of unauthorized people and officials in PS intervening the voting and the decisions of PECs members.

The overall average evaluation of e-day at the observed polling stations, according to the data gathered by our STOs, tends to be “good” or “very good”, the final tabulation is attached to this report. Only very few polling stations were evaluated by our observers with “average” or “bad”. The counting process was positively assessed by our observers. They have not indicated any serious problems, including intervention by unauthorized people.

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Based on the results of observations carried out in 450 polling stations, GISDI NGO concludes that overall the voting and counting process was transparent, and no violations possibly affecting the outcome of the election were observed.

Generally, there are no empirical grounds for arguing that fundamental democratic principles were not preserved on these presidential elections. The opportunity was given to the people of Azerbaijan to make freely their political choice and to vote in a calm atmosphere.

Thus, GISDI concludes that all of the fundamental conditions for free and fair, and democratic election are successfully fulfilled.

Taking into account various considerations and opinions of its observers, GISDI NGO concludes that the early presidential election of April 11, 2018 was held in accordance with international standards, and the result of this election expresses the will of the people of Azerbaijan.

Election Results

The preliminary election results have already been announced by CEC. Percentages and electoral results are not unexpected.

This is apparent from the ratings, registered in pre-election surveys, as well as from the four Exit Polls on election day. The four Exit Polls on the e-day also predicted the victory of Ilham Aliyev with 82-87%. The final election result is likely to be about 86%.

These are the figures. In that sense the electoral result is not unexpected. There is an impressive steadiness of the electoral quotas from the elections 2003 up to date.

Ilham Aliyev wins decisively in these elections as in the previous three. However, this time with higher voter turnout (74,5%).

The number of the invalid ballot papers is the statistical range of normal for such type of elections.

The other 7 candidates also gained electoral results, that were accurately predicted.

Year	Candidates	% of valid votes
2003	1st : Ilham Heydar Aliyev	76,84
	2nd : Isa Gambar	13,97
	3rd : Lala Shovket Hadjiyeva	3,62
	Others (5 contestants)	5,57
2008	1st : Ilham Heydar Aliyev	88,73
	2nd : Iqbal Agha-Zade	2,86
	3rd : Fazil Gazanfar Mustafayev	2,47
	Others (4 contestants)	5,94
2013	1st : Ilham Heydar Aliyev	84,54
	2nd : Jamil Hasanli	5,53
	3rd : Iqbal Agha-Zade	2,40
	Others (5 contestants)	7,53
2018	1st : Ilham Heydar Aliyev New Azerbaijan Party	86% 82-87% (Exit Polls)
	2nd : Zahid Maharram Oruc Own Initiative	3,11% 3.0-4.0% (Exit Polls)
	3rd : Gudrad Muzaffar Hasanguliyev Whole Azerbaijan Popular Party	3,04% 3.0-4,2% (Exit Polls)
	3rd : Sardar Calal Mammadov Azerbaijan Democrat Party	3,02% 2,0-3,0% (Exit Polls)
	Others (4 contestants)	4,73%

Baku, 12 April 2018

Mihail Mirchev, Dr.Sc.

Head of the Election Observation Mission of Civil Initiative for Free and Democratic Elections (GISDI) on the observation of the Early Presidential Election in the Republic of Azerbaijan held on 11April 2018.

The English version of this Statement
is the only official document.