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DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTH CAUCASUS

Ladies and Gentlemen! Your Excellences!!!!

It's my great honor and privilege to address you on behalf of Azerbaijani Institute for Democracy and Human Rights, the organization that I represent here. I do believe that discussions and exchange of views that we will make today will further contribute to have more thriving and democratic Europe.

In my speech I would like to focus on the state of democracy and human rights that experienced in the South Caucasus. As you know, because of its geopolitical features South Caucasus plays vitally important role not only for Europe but also for the whole world. Therefore, the processes going on the region is crucial for the security of Europe in a broader term.

South Caucasus countries - Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia were under the control of Soviet Union until past 90 years and this very reason undermined democratic development in these countries. We have to admit it with our deep concern that tendencies of imperialism, avtoritarism and anti-democratisim still to be observed in these South Caucasus countries.

I would like firstly start with Armenia as democratic values have been crushed and fundamental freedoms and rights have been violated in this country for a long period of time. Armenia is the most politicized country not only in the region but in the world. Politics is observed in all sphere of life-

in taxation, juridical systems and mass media. These aspects of life are controlled by the guidance of political will that the government pursues.

Since each single social problem has a political base, all existing challenges stem from the political system. On the other hand, robust competitive environment for changing political system is not in place in the country.

Democracy in Armenia has an intrinsic feature of its kind. The notion of Democracy which is widely accepted throughout the Europe turned to be a vehicle in Armenia which serves for visual purposes. Over the 20 years that Armenia got its independence, we have witnessed considerable changes (reforms) on securing democratic values in the country. These reforms particularly found its reflection in freedom of speech, political pluralism, implementation of freed trade market mechanism and civil society. I try to keep a track on socio-political life of Armenia, follow blogs, information portals and TVs.

Based on the provided information the conclusion I reached is that the situation in Armenia is more deteriorated. Local citizens still live under the severe conduction of political system shaped during the Soviet Period. They were made to recognize dictatorship of the centralized authority which is headed by a group of people.

The constant discussions we conduct with our Armenian colleagues once again indicate that struggle in favor of democratic values is going on in capital city of Armenia, namely in Erevan. With regard to regions, the situation is unbearable and people who reside in these regions lack an opportunity to fight for their fundamental rights. If we put it figuratively, thanks to the activities carried out by NGOs democracy remained alive in Erevan. Due to the endeavors made by these NGOs, Armenian society still

relies on democracy and today all of the ordinary people in Armenia need our support. We should save them from Sargsyan's regime.

Taking this opportunity I want to address to the Armenian Ambassador who also participates in this meeting!! Mr. Ambassador, why your government deceives Europe? Why Sargsyan's regime tries to create artificial democracy for visual purposes? in fact its nothing but remnants of Soviet dictatorship. Why the official Erevan government continues its repression policy towards its citizens? Because of these very repressions hundreds of thousands ordinary citizens move from Armenia to other countries. It has to be noted that consequences will be devastating for Armenia and as a result, demographic misbalance will emerge in the region. Armenia is like a company centralized in the hand of an oligarch and this oligarch is Serzh Sargsyan. He views Armenia as the subject of trade and he already sold it out to other country. If we have a look at the closest history of Armenia, compared with the situation we have today, things were more encouraging till 2008. It was in 2008 that Serzh Sargsyan took the office as the president and fully seized the control over the country's growing economy. In this way he established family or clan based economy. Failing to have support from the society, Sargsyan government started to look for support from outside of the country and put Erevan, also Nagorno-Karabakh which is currently under occupation into auction. Frequently violated cease fire regime in the front line of Nagorno-Karabakh is an effort of Sargsyan government that calculated to calm down Armenian society. Therefore, without having stability and security in the region it's meaningless to talk about human rights. It's no coincidence that European Union calls on ensuring democracy in the South Caucasus and peaceful resolution of the conflict. In order to have peaceful resolution we should

abide to the neighborhood policy implemented by the European Union. However, Armenian government disregards that policy and do not demonstrate constructive position.

As it's widely known healthy competition of political forces is illustrated during the elections. Let's have a look on the election that Armenia had till today, how democratic values are observed in this country during those elections. I would like to draw your attention to some facts. As a result of Sargsyan government's incapability Armenian society lost its reliability and as a consequence the voter turn-out was 60 percent during the presidential election held on February 18, 2013. Although 15 candidates put forward their candidacy, only 8 of them continued till the end of election and strangely enough majority of them have an attachment to the Sargsyan's government.

Prior to 18 days of election day on January 31 a gun man tried to assassinate Paruyr Ayrikyan who was one of the candidate for the presidential election. The incident took place in Erevan, in the downtown and as a result of gun attack Mr.Paruyr Ayrikyan was severely wounded and was hospitalized.

In accordance with the Armenian legislation if these sort of incidents occur during pre-election period the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Armenia is obliged to postpone election day, however, the Court turned blind eye to this incident.

Let's take parliamentary election held on May 6, 2012. The overall percent of the election voters turn out was 61. This is a clear manifestation of wave of disbelief throughout the Armenian society towards its government, election outcomes and future of its country.

I would like once again to address to the Armenian ambassador here. Mr. Ambassador, are you aware of the most frequently discussed topics during the election in 2013?

If not, I can bring it to your consideration. It was corruption, shadow economy, exacerbation of military and juridical systems and a wave of migration that deeply concerned Armenian society. All these were “gains” of Armenia obtained during Sargsyan’s power. Factually it is Serzh Sargsyan’s family clan authority that benefited from this and losing side is again Armenian society.

Making use of this opportunity, I would like briefly touch on other South Caucasus courtiers as well. In comparison with Armenia the situation is slightly different in Azerbaijan and Georgia.

With regard to the Republic of Georgia, as you know Georgia has experienced remarkable challenges in the way of democratic consolidation. Mikhail Saakashvili who came into power in 2004 could manage to build democratic society in Georgia. Firstly, he eradicated corruption, power abuse and criminal circles; ultimately he turned Georgia to one of the European member countries. Without doubt Azerbaijan, neighbor and strategic country of Georgia also contributed to the transition period in the country (Georgia). Supply of Azerbaijan oil and gas products to Georgia lead to increased living condition, welfare of citizens within the country. The process still is underway.

However, there are some disappointing nuances that we should emphasize. Presidential election held in Georgia in 2013 once again proved the existence of peaceful transfer of power tradition. In reference to the estimation made by local, OSCE, PACE, European Parliament and Parliamentary Assembly of NATO observes preparation throughout the

country on the eve of pre-election period has been conducted in a high level. However, following the election in which Saakashvili left the office the situation got worsened. At present, the party in power in Georgia employs political repression against former ruling party representatives. These waves of repressions find its reflection not only on promotion campaigns in mass but also physical pressure and groundless accusation brought against former president's team. Criminal investigations launched against former president Mr. Saakashvili, exerted pressure on his supporters make it plain that Georgia returning back to 2004 period. Looking back to the past years one can clearly observe that 75 percent of Georgian population relied on democratic principles with which the country is governed, at present the figure dramatically decreased to 36 percent. I would like to make a reference to survey's results conducted by the National Democratic Institute, USA among the Georgian population. In view of the survey outcomes 28 percent of respondents consider that there is no democracy in Georgia, their more optimistic for democracy to come in the future. On the other hand, 15 percent of them think that democracy exists in the country for a group of people. Having a look at the last local election in Georgia held on June 15 that accompanied with breach of laws and falsifications, we witness that democracy which used to exist in the country fall under peril. Taking into account information provided by our Georgian colleagues, on the local Election Day gun attacks to polling stations, pressures against candidates, "carousel" voters, interference of unknown people to the polling stations and other breach of election laws severely deteriorate democratic reputation and prestige of Georgia. Nevertheless, we do believe that Georgia will move further in the path to democracy.