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**EU Statement on Azerbaijan**

The European Union has followed closely events in the run up to and during the course of the 6 November Azerbaijan Parliamentary elections. The EU has already welcomed measures to provide for better and more democratic elections. The EU notes that the preliminary findings and conclusions of the OSCE/ODIHR International Election Observation Mission recognise that these elections have shown some improvements on the Presidential election of November 2003 and previous Parliamentary elections.

The EU welcomes the fact that a large number of OSCE/ODIHR observers from 42 OSCE participating States monitored these elections. We commend the IEOM for its thorough and professional effort. Ambassador Ahrens' team has been in Azerbaijan - all regions, not just Baku - for several months analysing all relevant aspects of the pre-election period as well as election day itself. However their job is not yet over. Complaints and appeals must now be dealt with. It is essential that this is done on the basis of evidence and facts, and through the proper legal and administrative channels.

The EU further welcomes that the largest contingent of observers was from Azerbaijan itself. An important role of the international community is to encourage and help all parts of Azerbaijani society to contribute to free and fair elections. Domestic observers played an important role in these elections.

The EU regrets that the 6 November parliamentary elections did not yet meet a number of OSCE commitments, as assessed by the OSCE/ODIHR observation mission. In addition to the problems relating to the campaign, which the EU raised in earlier statements, we are particularly concerned by reports of serious problems in the counting and tabulation of votes in a large number of constituencies, as well as by reports of interference by a number of Heads of local authorities in support of individual candidates.

It is essential that in those constituencies where complaints of fraud and malpractice have been made, they are investigated fully, quickly and transparently, and that appropriate action is taken. The EU will pay close attention to the way in which complaints are handled.

The EU was encouraged by President Aliyev's remarks when he pledged to discipline those who abused their official positions, or committed criminal acts during the electoral process. We also praise his constructive initial response to the IEOM's preliminary report and his desire to continue co-operation with the OSCE. The EU urges all levels of Government in Azerbaijan to continue working with the OSCE to resolve the problems that arose during this election.

The EU would like to raise another issue arising from the elections in Azerbaijan, which is of serious concern to us as a matter of principle.

The EU was disturbed by a media statement issued on behalf of a "national group" within the IEOM.

In our view, the statement appeared to be designed to call into question the findings of the IEOM. The EU sees this statement as a clear breach of the Code of Conduct for election observers, which states that, "Observers will not make any comments to the media on the electoral process or on the substance of their observations, and any comment to the media will be limited to general information about the observation mission and the role of the observers." The EU for its part has full confidence in the objectivity and professionalism of the observation of the elections carried out by the IEOM.

The EU urges all parties and their supporters in this election, and the authorities, to respect the rule of law and to refrain from violent confrontation.

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey and Croatia<sup>1</sup>, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, EFTA country Iceland, member of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this declaration.

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<sup>1</sup> Croatia continues to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process