

Unsurprisingly Ilham Aliyev is due to be re-elected on 9th October for a third mandate as President of the Republic of Azerbaijan

The Azerbaijanis will be electing their president on 9th October next. Article 178 of the electoral code stipulates that the head of State must be appointed on the third Friday in October of the year at the end of the presidential mandate, but this year, this day, 16th October, will be the day of the Eid al-Adha (the Feast of Sacrifice). The election date has therefore been brought forward by a week.

There are no issues at stake in this presidential election since victory seems to be certain for the outgoing President Ilham Aliyev (New Party of Azerbaijan, YAP) in office since 2003 when he took over from his father Heydar Aliyev, who led the country almost continuously from 1969 to 2003. Re-elected as head of State on 15th October 2008 with 88.67% of the vote Ilham Aliyev succeeded in the same year after a referendum in removing the limit of two successive presidential mandates from the constitution and so he can stand for a third mandate.

On 7th June last Ilham Aliyev was appointed as the YAP's candidate during the party's congress. His wife Mehriban Aliyeva was elected as the party's vice-president. The YAP consolidated its power during the last general elections on 7th November 2010. It won 72 of the 125 seats in the Milli Majlis (National Assembly), the only chamber of Parliament, i.e. a higher result than it won in the last election on 6th November 2005 (+9).

Ilham Aliyev has the support of the Supreme Religious Council of the People of the Caucasus which is asking the Azerbaijanis to vote for him on 9th October.

Azerbaijan, a country with a wealth of natural gas and crude oil (this represents 50% of the State budget and 70% of exports), has experienced high economic growth over the last few years. The GDP grew by 35% in 2006. Figures have illustrated a net decline (9.3% in 2009, 5% in 2010 and even -1.1% in 2011) due to a slowing in the international economy's growth in the wake of the crisis. The country undeniably suffers a lack of diversification in its economy and is over dependent on hydrocarbons. The country is also a major transit route for American troops and supplies in Afghanistan.

An already controversial election

The USA has expressed its doubts about the democratic nature of the upcoming presidential election. "A free and fair election is not just limited to what happens on

Election Day. To guarantee an impartial electoral atmosphere free access by all parties to the media has to be guaranteed, opportunities for a free campaign have to be created and regular meetings should be held without interference on the part of those in power. This includes the possibility of undertaking healthy civilian dialogue," declared the American Ambassador to Baku, Richard Morningstar.

The NGO Human Rights Watch has accused the Azerbaijan authorities of falsely accusing opponents to Ilham Aliyev's regime of being in the possession of drugs. Four people were arrested between March and May last: a blogger, a member of a youth movement, an opposition militant and an imam, in whose homes the police are said to have discovered small quantities

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of drugs. All have denied the accusations and three of them maintained that they were beaten in prison. "The latter cases show that the government is stepping up its campaign against its critics as the presidential election draws closer," indicated Giorgi Gogia, a researcher for Human Rights Watch.

At the end of the last year the authorities, who were alarmed at the demonstrations of the "Arab Spring" and their possible influence over the people of the Caucasus, increased sanctions against those taking part in any unauthorised demonstration (the opposition is no longer allowed to convene its supporters outside of Baku); freedom of speech has been restricted (notably on the social networks) and dozens of people have been arrested.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

(PACE) will dispatch an observation mission in time for the presidential election comprising 32 people. It will be led by Robert Walter. Koray Targay will lead the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe's mission (OSCE)'s delegation which started on 26th August last.

The leader of one of the two main opposition parties Musavat (Equality), Isa Gambar has already said that demonstrations would be organised against Ilham Aliyev's candidacy which he qualifies as "illegitimate". On 18th August last around 3000 people close to the National Council of Democratic Forces demonstrated in a Baku suburb.

The last presidential election on 15th October 2008, in which the opposition forces refused to take part, were marked by infringements.

Reminder of the Presidential Election Results 15th October 2008 in Azerbaijan

Turnout: 75.64%

Candidates	No. of votes won	% of votes won
Ilham Aliyev (New Party of Azerbaijan, YAP)	3 232 259	87,34
Igbal Aghazade (Umid)	104 279	2,82
Fazil Mustafaiev (The Great Creation Party)	89 985	2,43
Gudrat Hasangouliev (People's Front of Unified Azerbaijan Party)	83 037	2,24
Gulamhusein Alibaili (independent)	81 120	2,19
Fouad Aliev (Liberal Democratic Party)	28 423	0,77
Hafiz Hajiev (Musavat)	23 771	0,64

Source : Commission électorale centrale d'Azerbaïdjan

The research institute, Adam, has recently undertaken a survey in Azerbaijan. 38.1% of those interviewed qualified the country's government as being "pseudo-democratic" and 26.3% deemed it to be a "semi-democracy or a limited democracy". 2/3 of those interviewed (65.3%) maintained they preferred a democratic government to an authoritarian one. However although 62% of Azerbaijanis believe that the organisation of free, transparent elections is necessary for the normal development of society, 32% say they can do without it, since, in their opinion, the country's stability and the level of wages are more important. Seven Azerbaijanis in 10 (71.2%) said they want to vote in the presidential election.

The Presidential Office and the Candidates

In Azerbaijan the President of the Republic enjoys

most of the political power. A candidate in the election must have the signatures of at least 40,000 voters in order to be able to stand. 21 people are officially running and have been registered by the Central Electoral Commission [1].

The candidates are as follows:

- Ilham Aliyev, outgoing president in office since 2003 and leader of the main political party (YAP) ;
- Jamil Hasanli, a professor of history at the State University of Baku, candidate of the National Democratic Forces bringing together several opposition parties;
- Igbal Aghazade, chairman of the Umid Party (Hope) ;
- Ahmad Orujov, chairman of the Azadlig Party (Freedom) ;

1. <http://www.msk.gov.az/en/elections/prezident-seckileri/09-10-2013/487/>

- Ali Aliyev, leader of the Citizens and Development Party;
- Fuad Aliyev, chairman of the Liberal Democratic Party;
- Hafiz Hajiyev, candidate for Modern Musavat;
- Faraj Guliyev, leader of the National Revival Party;
- Arastun Orujlu, Director fo the East-West Research Centre, independent;
- Araz Alizade, co-leader (with Ayaz Mutalibov) of the Social Democratic Party ;
- Gudrat Hasanguliyev, People's Front of Unified Azerbaijan Party;
- Sardar Mammadov, leader of the Democratic Party;
- Ilyas Ismayilov, Parti Adalet (Justice) ;
- Zahid Oruj, independent;
- Ilgar Mammadov, lawyer presently held in custody, independent;
- Ismayil Yusifov, independent ;
- Elshan Hasanov, independent ;
- Gudrat Isagov, independent ;
- Rauf Guliyev, independent ;
- Hidayat Rustambayli, independent ;
- Ilgar Ali Mammadov, independent.

On 2nd July last the National Council of Democratic Forces created on 12th March last according to the model of the coalition Georgian Dream (Bidzina Ivanisvili a merger of 6 parties which won the general elections on 1st October 2012 in Georgia) appointed Rustam Ibrahimbekov as its candidate in a united opposition against the Presidency of

the Republic. A playwright, Rustam Ibrahimbekov won the Oscar for the best foreign film in 1994 for the film *Burnt by the Sun*.

But the Central Election Committee refused to register him on 27th August because of his dual nationality (Azerbaijani/Russian). Indeed the Constitution states that any candidate running in the presidential election has to have lived permanently for more than 10 years in Azerbaijan (Rustam Ibrahimbekov has only lived there for 1,163 days). The opposition candidate has requested the revocation of his Russian nationality and the National Council of Democratic Forces asked Russian President Vladimir Putin to facilitate the procedure.

After the Central Electoral Committee's decision the National Council of Democratic Forces appointed Jamil Hasanli as the united opposition's candidate. He has made Azerbaijan's integration to the European Union and NATO his priorities.

According to a survey by the independent research centre Adam, 26% of the electorate want to vote in support of the outgoing President on 9th October; 16.5% for the opposition candidate and 6.5% in support of Ali Karimli, leader of the People's Front Party (AXCP). Another poll by the Centre Ryay, published on 4th September last indicates that more than 8 Azerbaijanis in 10 (84.7%) are about to re-elect the president. Only 0.4% intend to vote for Jamil Hasanli. The electoral campaign started on 6th September and will end on 8th October next.

Outgoing president Ilham Aliyev re-elected for a third mandate in Azerbaijan

Outgoing president of the Republic Ilham Aliyev (New Azerbaijan Party, YAP) was re-elected on 9th October during the presidential election in Azerbaijan. In office since 2003, taking over from his father, Heydar, who led the country almost non-stop between 1969 and 2003, he will now be undertaking a third five year term as head of the country.

According to still partial results Ilham Aliyev won 85% of the vote against 5% for his main opponent Jamil Hasanli, the National Council of Democratic Forces' candidate. The opposition, which mainly boycotted the previous presidential election on 15th October 2008 came to agreement this time to support a joint candidate. After the Electoral Commission's refusal to register Rustam Ibragimbekov because of his dual Russian/Azerbaijani nationality, historian and former MP Jamil Hasanli was chosen to stand for the opposition.

Turnout was slightly lower than in the previous presidential election: 72% (-3.64 points).

Results

Ilham Aliyev focused his campaign on his results, the promise of stability and continued economic progress. Azerbaijan, a country with a wealth of natural gas and crude oil, is famous for its sharp economic growth. The GDP has risen from 850\$ to 7,850\$ over the past 10 years, i.e. the greatest increase by this indicator in the world. Baku recorded 5% growth of its GDP in the first half of 2013. The country is suffering however from a lack of diversification in terms of its economy and from its dependence on hydrocarbons. Many experts say that the probable decline in revenues from oil will cause discontent amongst the population, which the authorities might find difficult to contain. Hence over the last few months claims have been made by society notably against corruption and an increase in inequality.

The opposition forces noted some irregularities, notably ballot stuffing. *"Fraud took place across the entire country,"* declared Jamil Hasanli. *"The opposition does not acknowledge the results of this presidential election which was neither free nor fair,"* stressed the opposition's chief of staff. More than 55,000 local and international observers monitored the election [1]. On 3rd October last the European Union said it was concerned

about the *"pressure"* placed on the opposition, civil society and the independent media and by *"recent developments in Azerbaijan which had affected both the pre-electoral period, the respect of Human Rights and political freedom,"* according to the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton and the Commissioner for Enlargement Stefan Füle, who spoke of *"intimidation, arrests based on questionable charges and convictions which did not respect international standards."*

"Many people are upset about the unequal distribution of oil revenues, of the arbitrary, the lack of access to education and quality healthcare. But the opposition was unable to transform this discontent into any real movement of protest," analyses Togrul Djuvarly, a political expert and head of the National Public Committee for European Integration. *"Although the political system is not democratic Ilham Aliyev does not have any credible adversary,"* stresses Alex Nice, a Caucasus specialist at the Economist Independence Unit. Finally Leyla Yunus, chair of the Peace and Democracy Institute indicates that the lack of any *"middle class capable of making any claims"* explains in part the present situation in Azerbaijan.

1. <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/106908>

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