

European
Elections monitorfrom **Corinne Deloy**

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General Elections
in Azerbaijan,
a round-up one week before the vote.**D-7**7 days before
the poll

4.8 million Azeris will be renewing the 125 members of Milli Majlis, the only chamber in Parliament on 7th November next. These general elections are very important for the future of the Republic of Central Asia led for the last 17 years by the Aliyev family. Indeed during the elections on 6th November 2005 the opposition forces and international observers responsible for monitoring the election denounced the lack of transparency and the numerous infringements and declared that the elections were “*not in line with international commitments*”. The presidential election on 15th October 2008, in which the opposition forces refused to participate, were marred by fraud.

More than 22,000 people including 581 international observers will be monitoring the election on 7th November. Paul Wille will lead the mission of 25 observers of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and Odri Glower will lead that of the Bureau of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the OSCE. The Community of Independent States (CIS) will send 500 observers.

Apart from the New Azerbaijan Party (YAP) led by President of the Republic, Ilham Aliyev, five electoral blocks are standing in these general elections:

- Karabakh (Qarabag), a coalition chaired by Tاليyev which brings together Umid (Hope) led by Igbal Agazade and the Democratic Party (ADP) led by Serdar Jalaloglu;
- For the Good of the People (Insan Namine) that brings together the Green Party led by Mayis Gulaliyev, the Liberal Party (ALP) led by Avez Temirkhan and the Citizens and Development Party led by Ali Aliyev;
- Democracy (Demokratiya) that comprises the Democratic Reform Party (PDR) led by Asim Mollazade and the Civil Solidarity Party (VHP) led by Sabir Rustamkhanli;
- Reform (Islahat) brings together the United People's Front, Aadalyat (Justice), Takamul (Development) and the Grand Assembly party led by Fazil Mustafa;
- the bloc formed by the People's Front Party and Musavat, led by Isa Gambar.

The latter two parties have said they may merge after the election. The People's Front Party, whose members

voted in support of unconditional unification seems however to be the more interested party in this alliance. A great deal still has to be done however before the two parties, which differ on several issues, can merge. Hence Musavat accepted the four seats won in the November 2005 elections unlike the People's Front Party which chose not to sit in Parliament because of the infringements witnessed during the election. Isa Gambar, a former member of the People's Front Party declared that both parties were closer together than might at first be thought. “*Our parties have a similar ideology, similar goals and the same desire to challenge the regime in office,*” he said. The People's Front Party said that it would sit in the Milli Majlis if it won seats on 7th November.

The New Azerbaijan Party (YAP), which claims to have 520,000 members, i.e. more than 10% of Azeris, chose to lead a local campaign preferring door to door canvassing rather than major rallies and even TV debates by its candidates (everyone who stands belonging to a party that puts at least 61 candidates forward has the right to a four minute slot on TV. The YAP likes to boast the diploma and professional competence of its candidates. “*We are putting forward members of the Academy of Science, ten university rectors, around twenty teachers or people who have a doctorate,*” repeats the YAP group leader in Parliament, Ali Ahmedov.

A group of Baku University students launched a petition demanding the withdrawal of the rectors' candidatures. The students said that the position of rector and that

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of MP were not compatible since the law prohibits any Member of Parliament from holding an administrative post other than in the scientific or teaching domain. The present rector of the University of Baku (in office since 1999), Abel Maharramov (YAP) became an MP in 2005 and is standing again. He faces Erkin Gadirli, a former law teacher at the University of Baku, who coordinated the campaign in support of the liberation of Adnan Hajizade and Emin Abdullayev, two bloggers who were arrested in July 2009 and sentenced respectively to 2 and 2.5 years in prison for disturbing public order when making a satirical film about the government. Erkin Gadirli, who is standing as an independent with the support of the bloc formed by the People's Front Party and Musavat, says that the laws governing academic freedom forced him to quit university in order to be able to stand.

704 people are officially registered as candidates in the general elections on 7th November i.e. 63% of those who put in an application to stand.

Although the 111 candidates of the New Azerbaijan Party, at present in the majority in Parliament, were all registered only 44 of the 79 candidates from the bloc formed by the People's Front Party and Musavat, 30 of the 67 candidates of the Karabakh bloc and 19 of the 50 candidates for the Good of the People's bloc were accepted by the Electoral Commission.

332 candidates are standing on the lists of a party or an electoral bloc, 372 are standing as independents.

Just one week before the general election no analyst has forecast a victory for the opposition forces which will stand divided on 7th November next.

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