

21 January 2016
Strasbourg, France

Statement by the delegation of the Republic Azerbaijan
GR-DEM meeting

Dear Colleagues,

Point 1 - Report recognizes many problems and the real situation is even worse:

The Delegation of Azerbaijan has carefully read the GR-DEM report which *notes some progress, while at the same time* openly recognizes existence of many other problems.

Based on this report, as well as on other reports on the human rights situation in this country, we can tell with confidence that there are still many persisting problems. Many of the problems, such as those related to freedom of assembly, freedom of expression, attacks on members of civil society and cases of intimidation targeting human rights defenders etc. took place within the reporting period and got documented in different relevant reports. You might be aware of those problems as some countries, as well as many international human rights watchdogs have voiced their deep concern over them on many occasions.

Point 2 - The above said was once more proved by the referendum as it was marred by massive violations:

During last GR-DEM meeting many of our colleagues linked the decision to the results of the referendum on the new constitution in Armenia in terms of its compliance with European standards. As we all know relevant observation missions, including the cross-party delegation of PACE reported many problems and concluded that it was marred by an unprecedented number of violations.

PACE delegation raised concerns about the vote, saying the run-up had been marred by "little public debate" and that the "low turn-out reflects the fact that the referendum was driven by political interests instead of the needs of the Armenian public". It mentioned several problems, like large-scale organized vote buying and carousel voting, pressure on voters, lack of level playing field for media, misuse of administrative resources etc. and urged the authorities to address them in order to build trust in the voting process.

The turn-out just 0,5% over the 50% threshold, required to make the referendum valid, also raised a great deal of suspicion amongst observing NGO's.

OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media expressed concern over the cases of obstruction and threats against Armenian journalists covering the referendum.

European Platform for Democratic Elections (EPDE), which brings together many NGO's across the Europe, which observed the entire process and on the voting day deployed 700 observers, stated that and I quote "*due to high number of electoral violations and crime, including intimidation of voters, falsification of protocols and numerous reports on ballot box stuffing Citizen Observer Initiative and EPDE believe that the referendum results do not reflect the free will of Armenian citizens and should not be considered to be legitimate*".

Point 3 - Amendment proposal submitted by Armenia is unacceptable:

Paragraph 124 of the report acknowledges that many positive developments are still at the stage of legislative drafting and/or adoption, states the progress remains to be assessed in light of the future changes and addresses specific recommendations to Armenia. Adopting Armenia's proposal would mean disregard to the GR-DEM report and discredit the well-established monitoring mechanism.

In light of the recent democratic exercise expressed in the marred by violations referendum even this draft looks quite complaisant and definitely needs strengthening.

Having said that and recalling all what was said during the last GR-DEM meeting we believe that the Committee needs to show consistency in this issue.

Point 4 - One particular obligation of Armenia remains unimplemented:

In the same vein, the draft decision, introduced by the Secretariat is quite complaisant. Many commitments, which Armenia upon its accession undertook to honor, remain unimplemented and the decision must reflect that.

In particular we would like to recall one commitment related to peaceful settlement of the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno Karabakh conflict, which still goes unimplemented. Even more, unfortunately Armenia does not seem to be very much inclined to doing so, as it goes on occupying part of our internationally recognized territories.

We must not forget that the conflict has brought about the violation of the rights and freedoms of millions, is the main challenge to security of us all, as well as constitutes a stumbling-block on the way to full-fledged economic cooperation, prosperity and democratic development in this part of Europe.

Therefore, the decision must remind Armenia of this particular commitment. We have prepared an amendment proposal to that end and intend to submit it in writing to the Secretariat after the meeting.

Thank you!