

	INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND SECURITY NETWORK - MANAGING INFORMATION, SHARING KNOWLEDGE	 Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich
Sunday, 11 February 2007	Home / News and Current Affairs / Security Watch / Azeri poll marred by arrests, fraud charges	Contact / Jobs @ ISN
/ NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS	Azeri poll marred by arrests, fraud charges	Search
Security Watch Commentaries From our Partners Last 5 Days Letters to the Editor Search the News Archive About Security Watch RSS Version Russian Regional Report Dossiers Online Subscriptions	<p>ISN SECURITY WATCH (06/11/05) – The ruling party in Azerbaijan has declared victory in Sunday's parliamentary elections, though final results are not expected until Monday and the opposition is promising rallies over the weekend if monitors declare the vote rigged.</p> <p>The run-up to the vote has been tense, with the government in late October sacking and arresting a number of government officials for allegedly plotting a coup, opposition forces promising a Ukraine- or Georgia-style revolution, and the authorities raiding opposition headquarters and arresting two campaign managers on dubious charges.</p> <p>Azerbaijan's Interior Ministry announced on Sunday that a prominent opposition figure arrested on Friday has been released.</p> <p>Police raided the headquarters of the opposition Democratic Party of Azerbaijan (DPA) late on Thursday, searching for a gun, the ministry said, and arrested campaign manager Faramaz Javadov.</p> <p>According to press reports, Javadov was tried almost immediately, convicted for resisting arrest, and released on Sunday after an appellate court heard his case and overturned the conviction. No gun was found, authorities said, although campaign materials were confiscated.</p> <p>Police on Friday also detained Qabil Mammadrzaev, the campaign manager of another key opposition party, the Popular Front Party of Azerbaijan. Mammadrzaev was also released after questioning.</p> <p>Three other opposition activists were detained during Friday night raids and released after questioning by police.</p> <p>Human Rights Watch researcher Matilda Bogner told ISN Security Watch that immediate trials and convictions have been a common tool in intimidating the opposition.</p> <p>"In these administrative trials, they can arrest someone at 5:00 in the evening, and by 10:00 they find a judge who puts them on trial and says 'OK, you are sentenced to ten days in jail'."</p> <p>While technically entitled to an attorney, defendants are often detained and tried so quickly that their lawyers never know until they have served out their sentences, she said.</p> <p>The DPA has become a flashpoint for the government since the attempted return to Azerbaijan of party leader Rasul Guliev, who has lived in self-imposed exile for nearly a decade after charges of corruption were leveled against him at home.</p> <p>Guliev had been scheduled to arrive in Baku on 17 October, but was detained by Interpol in Ukraine for questioning and subsequently released. Since then, rumors have continued to circulate of Guliev's imminent return and arrest.</p> <p>Several government ministers and other high-profile figures have been arrested for plotting an overthrow of the government in the last two weeks, with Guliev the key figure in the alleged conspiracy.</p> <p>Former Economic Development Minister Farhad Aliev, former Health Minister Ali Insanov, and several other government officials and corporate figures were accused of plotting a coup d'etat in collusion with Guliev.</p> <p>On 30 October, Insanov, whom the public widely views as a corrupt official, agreed to testify against Aliev and others named in the coup attempt.</p> <p>Insanov's decision to testify for the prosecution followed a similar agreement by former Finance Minister Fikret Yusifov to turn state's evidence. A contrite-looking Yusifov appeared on television stations in Baku on Thursday, expressing remorse and implicating Aliev and other key suspects.</p> <p>On 29 October, well-known 72-year-old academic Eldar Salaev was arrested for "preparation for mass unrest" and conspiracy to engage in "violent seizure of power", according to the Interior and Justice Ministries.</p> <p>Saturday's election is widely viewed as a test of Azerbaijan's commitment to democracy.</p> <p>Only last week, President Aliev affirmed that the government would implement election reforms such as finger-inking and would allow non-governmental organizations (NGOs) funded by foreign sources to monitor the poll.</p> <p>Azerbaijani television has reported difficulties in government implementation of the finger-inking technique, and many analysts have said the NGO concession came far too late for organizations to respond in time.</p> <p>By 20:00 Baku time on Sunday, the independent Turan News Agency reported "numerous" violations across the country, including the use of opaque (instead of transparent) ballot boxes in the Nakhichevan region and instances of independent observers being barred from polling stations.</p> <p>According to the most recent reports, five members of the Central Election Commission (CEC) had asked the chairman for an "extraordinary session" of the commission in order to discuss "prevention of the violations during the elections to the Milli Majlis [parliament]".</p> <p>Over 1,300 foreign observers are in Azerbaijan, according to the government. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) says it has fielded 640 observers. Also represented are the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), a contingent from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and a handful of NATO observers.</p> <p>In one of many surprises in the crucial poll, the CEC announced recently that more than 500 candidates</p>	<input type="text"/> <input type="text" value="ISN Website"/> <input type="button" value="GO"/> » Tell me more about ISN LASE <hr/> » Comment on this story <hr/> » Printer-friendly version <hr/> » Forward this story to a friend <hr/>  <p>Perspectives is a weekly column written by our Security Watch readers. To contribute, follow the instructions at the bottom of the OpEd column published by Security Watch staff every Wednesday or subscribe to the ISN Security Watch newsletter. Perspectives appears every Monday on ISN Security Watch.</p> <hr/>  <p>ISN and Creative Commons</p>
/ RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS		
/ EDUCATION AND TRAINING		
/ CONFERENCES AND EVENTS		
/ ISN PARTNER NETWORK		
/ ABOUT ISN		

had dropped out of the parliamentary race, roughly 25 per cent of the total.

With 1,541 candidates left running for 125 parliamentary seats, Popular Front leader Ali Keremli told a press conference last week that the opposition expected to win 75 seats.

"We are pretty sure we will win," he said, although "the government will never admit this."

Asked by reporters what the Azadlig opposition bloc's strategy would be if the elections were declared seriously flawed by the international community, Keremli said "peaceful rallies" would be staged "all over the country [...] We will use constitutional means to start our struggle".

Government "special forces are planning to use violence", he charged, but "we will never give the authorities a reason to use violence against us".

The US State Department says it is watching this election with "concern". A final report from the ODIHR is not expected until 7 or 8 November.

Western governments - interested in the country's oil resources - are hoping for a smooth vote that is not marred by either fraud or violence.

(By Karl Rahder in Baku)

» [Comment on this story](#) » [Earlier news](#)

© 1994 - 2007 ISN, Center for Security Studies (CSS), ETH Zurich, Switzerland
All rights reserved. [Disclaimer](#). [Privacy Policy](#).