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After losing to a ruling party candidate in initial returns, Keremli was then declared the winner. But the final decision of the CEC has overturned his victory, with a new election to be held in January.</p> <p>In a press conference on Friday, Keremli speculated on the CEC's strategy.</p> <p>"They wanted to silence my voice," Keremli said, but after international pressure, "I was declared the victor," he said.</p> <p>The government was fearful of the opposition's support after the violent 26 November rally, he said. "Thus, they eliminated my victory."</p> <p>Leo Platvoet of the CoE echoed Keremli's sentiments, saying that the CoE's impression was that election returns were declared invalid in a number of constituencies "not because there was a lot of fraud, but because the candidate of the opposition won".</p> <p>The CoE delegation also expressed dismay with the US State Department's conciliatory position so soon after the 26 November police crackdown on demonstrators in Baku's Galaba Square.</p> <p>The US statement referred to Washington's desire "to work with the government with the aim of strengthening democratic institutions, including parliament, in which all voices are heard - independent, opposition, and the ruling party".</p> <p>Andreas Gross, one of the three CoE delegates at Friday's press conference, said any notion of working with the opposition was nonsensical since "you can't cooperate with an opposition in a parliament when the parliament has no opposition".</p> <p>President Bush's inaugural address last January is used frequently by Azerbaijan's pro-democracy activists as a clarion call. In that speech, Bush laid out a radical departure for US foreign policy, stressing American solidarity with oppressed peoples everywhere.</p> <p>"There is no justice without freedom, and there can be no human rights without human liberty," Bush said.</p> <p>But Gross compared these words with the US statement supporting the Constitutional Court's decision: "In this [embassy] statement, the dedication of Mr. Bush in his inaugural statement last January, you can't feel anymore."</p> <p>As the post-election reality sets in, many Azeris say they feel abandoned, and question the tradeoffs between geopolitical necessity and what they hoped would be an embryonic democracy.</p> <p>"The US is in a tough spot," said an American political scientist visiting Baku. "They want to nurture democracy, but they're scared of the consequences if this country is plunged into chaos. The strategic realities are driving their policy, and the stakes are much too high for them to encourage a color revolution. And they've got to consider that Russia and Iran are very close and will take advantage of any perceived weakness."</p> <p>The US is also very interested in Azerbaijan's oil resources and was hoping for a smooth vote.</p> <p>With diminishing options available to the opposition and an America that has now washed its hands of an unpleasant episode, Azerbaijan's government may nevertheless be sanctioned or at least beleaguered in a variety of international forums.</p>	<p>Search</p> <p><input type="text"/></p> <p>ISN Website <input type="button" value="GO"/></p> <p>» Tell me more about ISN LASE</p> <p>» Comment on this story</p> <p>» Printer-friendly version</p> <p>» Forward this story to a friend</p> <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. 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At Friday's press conference, Keremli said his Azadlig (Freedom) opposition bloc might take its case to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France.

More significantly, the three CoE representatives predicted at least one punitive measure the body could take: non-recognition of Azerbaijan's new parliament.

"We will accept the parliament when the elections are not fraudulent," said Platvoet.

Of 125 seats in the parliament, 56 have been declared for the ruling YAP and 11 for the opposition, including six for Azadlig.

Seven opposition victors have begun a boycott of parliament, which convened earlier than expected on Friday.

Altogether, the CEC and the high court invalidated results in ten constituencies.

As Azadlig plans for an extended period of struggle against the government, Keremli has sounded increasingly indignant, saying the parliament was "appointed by the government", which he compared to a "totalitarian, Communist regime".

The next opposition rally is scheduled for 10 December, Keremli said, regardless of whether the government grants permission.

A sit-in may or may not be attempted. "It's too early to tell, but it's possible because the people want to stay in the square. I don't think we need to stay in the square at every rally. That's heroism. It's impossible to expect heroism at every rally," he said.

(By Karl Rahder in Baku)

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