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NDI URGES REVERSAL OF COURT DECISION AGAINST AZERBAIJAN'S ELECTION MONITORING CENTER

WASHINGTON, DC – The National Democratic Institute (NDI) expressed deep concern regarding today's court decision in Baku that shut down the Election Monitoring Center (EMC), a nonpartisan domestic monitoring organization that works in partnership with NDI in Azerbaijan.

EMC's registration was granted on Feb. 12 after six previous applications were denied. However, on April 29, the Azerbaijani Ministry of Justice reversed its decision and initiated legal proceedings against EMC. The charges involve minor technical matters, such as inconsistencies in addresses.

In today's decision, the court found EMC in violation of the registration law and ruled in favor of the Ministry of Justice's decision to annul the organization's registration and ordered the liquidation of EMC.

"The court's decision strikes at the heart of the democratic election process – the right of citizens to monitor their elections," said NDI President Kenneth Wollack. "This is a fundamental principle of the Copenhagen Document of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

"Anytime actions are taken against domestic election monitors, it raises concerns about the integrity of the election process," Wollack said. "We hope that justice will eventually prevail and that the Election Monitoring Center will be allowed to carry out its mission for the October election."

EMC has observed six elections in Azerbaijan since it was founded in 2001 and has trained more than 4,000 observers. Prior to the Justice Ministry's objections, EMC was preparing to observe the upcoming presidential election on Oct. 15. The organization conducts its activities in accordance with Azerbaijan's laws and well-established

practices for nonpartisan election observation. “EMC has developed a reputation for impartiality and professionalism,” Wollack said.

Observation of elections by nonpartisan domestic citizen organizations is an accepted practice around the world. OSCE Participating States, including Azerbaijan, commit themselves, through the Copenhagen Document, to allowing this practice and the right to form, join and participate in nongovernmental organizations, including those that seek to promote and protect the right to democratic elections. The document says these organizations should be allowed “unhindered access and communication” with domestic and international organizations and may receive financial assistance from them. The document and other human rights instruments to which Azerbaijan is a party also make clear that states must not impose burdensome or unnecessary restrictions.

NDI began working in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 1995 at the invitation of President Heydar Aliyev and has since supported in a nonpartisan manner the development of political parties and civic engagement. Through a cooperative agreement from USAID, NDI has provided financial and technical assistance to the EMC. It does not provide funding to political parties. The Institute currently operates in more than 60 countries, including throughout Eurasia.

NDI is a non-profit, nonpartisan organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. NDI works with democrats in every region of the world to build political and civic organizations, safeguard elections, and promote citizen participation, openness, and accountability in government.

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