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RELEASE
NEWS

THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS SECTION / EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

IFES Survey Indicates Increased Economic Expectations and Optimism, But Dwindling Interest of Young People in Political Process

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IFES released the final report of its 2004 Public Opinion in Azerbaijan today, which reports on findings from a national survey and focus groups conducted last summer to gauge attitudes toward democracy and governance in the country.

The research findings indicate that a majority of Azerbaijani citizens are optimistic about the nation's economic progress with 54% describing the current economic situation as good or very good. This is a significant increase in optimism from the 2002 and 2003 IFES surveys in Azerbaijan, in which no more than 27% rated the economic situation as being good. The positive assessments of the current economic situation also led to heightened economic expectations for next year, with a plurality (48%) saying the economic situation will get better compared to only 7% who think it will get worse. Further exploration of this issue in the focus groups, however, indicates that these optimistic expectations are based on the population's assumption that the anticipated increase in state oil revenues will translate into tangible economic benefits for all citizens of Azerbaijan.

Despite the generally optimistic assessments of the economic situation, a large percentage of Azerbaijanis continue to cite unemployment (40%) and low standards of living (13%) as two of the biggest problems facing the country. The Nagorno-Karabakh situation is mentioned as one of the biggest problems facing the country by 69% of Azerbaijanis. The research also reveals that corruption is a pervasive problem in Azerbaijan. A majority of Azerbaijanis (53%) report that they have either paid bribes to public official in the past or been asked for a bribe by a public official. The two most commonly reported reasons for paying bribes are to obtain medical care or to secure better grades in schools and universities.

The poll also found that the involvement of young people in the political process has decreased, while the overall population has shown steadily increased interest in politics since 2002. The 2004 survey demonstrates that the gap in sociopolitical interest and activity between those aged 18-25 and other age groups has increased in the last three years. The survey finds that interest in the upcoming municipal elections among Azerbaijanis of all age groups is fairly low and that less than 50% of Azerbaijanis are likely to vote in this election.

The final report on the survey will be available on both the IFES-Azerbaijan (www.ifesaze.org) and IFES-Washington (www.ifes.org) websites by 5:00 p.m. Washington time today.

The survey was conducted June 21-July 21, 2004 with a sample of 1,620 respondents throughout Azerbaijan. This sample consists of 1,000 interviews in a national sample, with additional interviews from several urban centers in the country (Barda, Ganja, Kuba, Lenkoran, Nakhichevan, and Zakatala).

The combined 1,620 interviews were weighted to represent the national population on the basis of rural/urban mix, regional population proportion and gender mix. The margin of error for the entire sample is $\pm 2.4\%$. Eighty-four percent of the interviews were conducted in Azeri and 16% in Russian. The average interview lasted 45-50 minutes.

IFES conducted similar surveys of the Azerbaijani population in 2002 and 2003, and data from those surveys was used to identify trends in public opinion in the new report. IFES also conducted focus groups with people interested in politics following the survey, and some findings from the focus groups will be included in the 2004 report.

The survey was funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development.

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Since opening our office in Azerbaijan in 1998, IFES has provided training and technical assistance to the Central Election Commission, the Milli Majlis, municipalities, and domestic civic organizations. IFES works with commission members, legal drafters, and NGO leaders to support the establishment of a sustainable system of democratic elections and encourage broader public understanding of democracy and democratic institutions in Azerbaijan.