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Bribes paid to be in Azeri anti-corruption commission, political analyst says

Text of I. Abbasov report by Azerbaijani newspaper Ayna on 4 January headlined "'None of the senior officials will be exposed' and subheaded 'Eldar Namazov thinks that there may be conditional 'victims''"

The law "On fighting corruption", which was signed by President Ilham Aliyev on 13 January last year, has been in force for four days. The president has also approved the state programme of "fighting corruption" in 2004-06.

The anti-corruption fight in 2004 was no different from previous years in Azerbaijan. Having investigated the level of corruption in the world, Transparency International put Azerbaijan into one of the last places on its list.

One may wonder if there will be a turning point after the law comes into force? Political analyst Eldar Namazov says that the fact that the law was adopted and came into force is a positive factor, but he does not believe serious steps will be taken to make the anti-corruption fight effective.

"The main condition for the anti-corruption fight is not just having good laws or programmes, but having political will. It was possible to fight corruption in Azerbaijan with the laws adopted previously, but this was not done," he said.

Some reports now give grounds for pessimism about the way of fighting against corruption, he said. "Some say that people who wanted to be in the [state] commission to fight corruption had to pay bribes. Therefore, we can now assume that the fight against corruption will not be effective."

Under the law the expenses of political parties will also be in focus. Having said that "the Azerbaijani authorities may start the fight against corruption by attacking their political rivals, political parties", Namazov expressed regret that public and political entities in the country do not have legal [as received] sources of funding. "Funds are not allocated from the state budget for this purpose, while those who obtain grants from international organizations are blamed. It became

clear from the certificates provided by the presidential candidates in 2003 that they had no personal property and all of them lived at the expense of their wives or relatives. Naturally, one cannot believe that," he said.

Having declined to forecast the future of the anti-corruption fight, Namazov said that none of the senior officials will be exposed. "To show that the fight against corruption is formally under way some petty officials maybe chosen as victims for taking bribes of 100-200 dollars."

A member of the political council of the [ruling] New Azerbaijan Party [NAP], MP Gular Ahmadova, said that one should not be pessimistic and the fight against corruption is important.

"To fight corruption, we have to start with ourselves. Nobody can say that he has never suffered from corruption or its most rudimentary form which is a bribe. We do give bribes at housing associations or out-patient hospitals, but we start to worry when we cannot pay a required bribe at some places."

The NAP official does not think of calling anyone corrupt. "Bribe taking is a very private thing. Bribes are not offered or taken in the presence of a second person. Under the circumstances who can say that someone is corrupt?"

Thinking that the opposition has clandestine sources of funding, Ahmadova sent a message to political parties: "Opposition parties should provide information about their sources of financing to avoid inspection."

By the way, petty officials can mitigate the danger, if they act cautiously. They can take a "bribe" worth 257,000 manat or 55 dollars, because this amount is described as a "gift" in the new law.

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