

Azeri Civil Society Expressing Regrets Over BBC'S Retreat From Azerbaijan

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However, the operation of a radio service providing alternative views on events in the country and the world did not suit the Azerbaijani government, and two years ago the authorities put an end to broadcasting on local frequencies.

Probably the corporation has now decided that that broadcasting on shortwave and other means is ineffective. "However, the appropriateness of this decision is highly questionable, because the BBC Azerbaijani office was not only a source of information for an audience of Azerbaijan, but also the BBC World Service," Hajili said.

The leader of the Musavat Party, Isa Gambar, said that although the decision to cease broadcasting has been caused by economic problems, the ban on broadcasting on local frequencies also affected the decision.

"The free world must not retreat facing the steps to suppress dissent and pluralism, rather it should promote alternative views", - said Gambar.

Ali Karimli, the leader of PFFPA, also expressed regret at the termination of programs broadcast in the Azeri language. "In Azerbaijan, where freedom of speech and press are restricted, foreign radio stations are an important source of information," said Ali Karimli.

Expert in television and radio Zeynal Mamedli considers that the end of BBC Azeri-language broadcasting is a serious loss for the people of Azerbaijan.

The Head of the Committee for Protection of Oil Workers' Rights, Mirvari Gahramanli, also believes that this service is one of the few opportunities to bring the voice of the world community to the civil society of Azerbaijan.

Civil society activists and independent experts could talk on the BBC about the problems of corruption, bureaucratic arbitrariness, and abuse of human rights. "We think that the shut-down of BBC Radio is the closure of a line of communication from the Azeri civil society to the international community," Gahramanli said. She recalled that two years ago, the Azerbaijani government stopped BBC from broadcasting on local frequencies, aiming at silencing a source of critical opinion. Now the leadership of the corporation, which has closed the Azerbaijani Service, is serving the same goal. She expressed a hope that the decision to cease broadcasting the Azerbaijani service would be reviewed. On January 26, the management of the BBC announced that the Azeri, Russian, Ukrainian, Spanish and Vietnamese services were to cease broadcasting and would work through Internet (Turan).