United States Agency for International Development (USAID)
Azerbaijan
Request for Categorical Exclusion (RCE)

**Program/Project/Activity Data:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity/Project Name:</th>
<th>Azerbaijan Media Support Activity (AMSA)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assistance Objective:</td>
<td>Governing Justly and Democratically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Area:</td>
<td>Civil Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country(ies) and/or Operating Unit:</td>
<td>Azerbaijan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Originating Office:</th>
<th>Office of Democracy &amp; Governance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
<td>March 25, 2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAD Level RCE: Yes ☐ No X</th>
<th>RCE/IEE Amendment: Yes ☐ No X</th>
<th>DCN of Original RCE/IEE:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supplemental RCE: Yes ☐ No X</td>
<td>DCN of Amendment(s):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If Yes, Purpose of Amendment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DCN(s) of Related EA/IEE/RCE/ER(s):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Implementation Start/End: LOP: 9/30/2014 – 9/30/2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funding Amount:</th>
<th>LOP Amount: 2,400,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Recommended Determination:** Categorical Exclusion

**Additional Elements:**

| Government to Government: ☐ Local Procurement: ☐ Donor Co-Funded: ☐ |

---

1. **Project and Activity Description**

USAID/Azerbaijan intends to award the Azerbaijan Media Support Activity (AMSA), which will support 1) an increase in citizen access to accurate, reliable and balanced information concerning public interest issues and 2) an improved legal environment for media freedom and freedom of expression. Subject to the availability of funds, the MIA is expected to be awarded as a three-year Cooperative Agreement with a total funding level of $2,400,000.

The development hypothesis is based on evidence that well-functioning democratic societies require informed citizen participation. Informed participation requires citizen access to accurate, balanced and diverse sources of news and information. According to analyses in multiple press freedom indices, Azerbaijan’s media environment has markedly regressed during the past five years.1 The AMSA will
work to address some of the identified challenges preventing Azerbaijan from achieving its full democratic potential.

The AMSA is expected to capitalize on new opportunities associated with the development and expansion of digital Information Communication Technologies (ICT). AMSA will also assist existing and new media outlets to disseminate socially valuable information, strengthen protections for media independence and freedom of expression, and improve journalists’ professional standards and practices. The program will also support Azerbaijan’s continued efforts to meet its international obligations to media freedom, freedom of expression and the free flow of information; as well as support and monitor Azerbaijan’s progress in its commitments to the Open Governance Partnership (OGP) initiative.

The program will build synergies and coordinate efforts with other USAID and U.S. Government supported activities in Azerbaijan. For example, the AMSA program will coordinate with USAID’s Azerbaijan Partnership for Transparency (APT) project in helping media monitor implementation of the Government of Azerbaijan’s OGP commitments, even as APT supports civil society in this monitoring role.

The AMSA program will directly support the Democracy & Governance Strengthening Project (DGSP) overall goal of: Effective participation of diverse actors and institutions in the democratic development of Azerbaijan increased. The purposes of the DGSP are largely the same as those articulated in the Azerbaijan Country Development Coordination Strategy (CDCS) Development Objective 2 (DO2) and its intermediate results. USAID’s DGSP development support focuses on three areas:

1. Responsive Government
2. Strengthened Civil Society
3. Citizen Access to Information.

Area 3, Citizen Access to Information area, whose purpose is to “Improve citizen access to high quality information” corresponds to the CDCS DO2 Intermediate Result 2.3 “Access to unrestricted, high quality information expanded and legally protected.”
### Activity 1: Citizen access to quality and quantity of information available through new media technologies is increased

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Illustrative Activities</th>
<th>Potential Impacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Assist independent/alternative online news sources in reducing self-censorship by employing fact-based reporting standards and practices.</td>
<td>No adverse impact likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Recognize journalists and citizen contributors for professional and ethical reporting through thematic contests and awards to showcase excellence in journalism.</td>
<td>No adverse impact likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Increase the level of professionalism among journalists through practical, hands-on education at the university level, including guest lectures by working journalists with skills in investigative and issue-specific journalism.</td>
<td>No adverse impact likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Assist journalism faculties to adapt to their curriculums to digital media realities by providing training and exchange programs for university professors and students to learn about digital media development, the transition to digital broadcasting and other technological advances.</td>
<td>No adverse impact likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Build the capacity of new media managers to attract advertisers and philanthropists to support their online presence; including online marketing and advertising.</td>
<td>No adverse impact likely</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Activity 2: Journalists, bloggers and media professionals are legally protected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Illustrative Activities</th>
<th>Potential Impacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Provide journalists and new content creators with legal assistance as needed through consultations, advice and representation.</td>
<td>No adverse impact likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Provide assistance to leading media advocacy NGOs and media legal community on effective strategies for shaping policy and regulation and establishing positive relationships with governmental officials; and knowledge and skills necessary to proactively advocate on issues concerning internet freedom.</td>
<td>No adverse impact likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Strengthen the network local media freedom advocates and collaboration among leading media NGOs through increased ICT applications.</td>
<td>No adverse impact likely</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. **Justification for Categorical Exclusion Determination**

The activities under the Media Initiative in Azerbaijan will not have an effect on the natural or physical environment and are among the classes of activities listed in 22 CFR 216.2(c)(2). Therefore, under §216.2(c)(1), neither an IEE nor an EA will be required for these activities. Instead, a categorical exclusion threshold determination is recommended for:

- Activities 1.1 – 1.5 and 2.1-2.3 under §216.2(c)(2)(i) Education, technical assistance, or training programs except to the extent such programs include activities directly affecting the environment (such as construction of facilities, etc.);

3. **Limitations of the Categorical Exclusion Determination:**

This categorical exclusion does not cover classes of actions normally having a significant effect on the environment under §216.2(d):

- Programs of river basin development;
- Irrigation and water management;
- Agricultural land leveling;
- Drainage projects;
- Large scale agricultural mechanization;
- Resettlement projects;
- New land development;
- Penetration road building and road improvement;
- Powerplants;
- Industrial plants; and
- Potable water and sewerage projects

In addition, this categorical exclusion does not cover activities that:

- Support project preparation, project feasibility studies, engineering design for activities listed in §216.2(d)(1);
- Affect endangered species;
- Provide support to extractive industries (e.g. mining and quarrying);
- Promote timber harvesting;
- Lead to construction, reconstruction, rehabilitation, or renovation work;
- Support agro-processing or industrial enterprises;
- Provide support for regulatory permitting;
- Lead to privatization of industrial facilities or infrastructure with heavily polluted property;
- Assist the procurement (including payment in kind, donations, guarantees of credit) or use (including handling, transport, fuel for transport, storage, mixing, loading, application, clean-up of spray equipment, and disposal) of pesticides or activities involving procurement, transport, use, storage, or disposal of toxic materials—pesticides cover all insecticides, fungicides, rodenticides, etc. covered under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act; and/or
- Procure or use genetically modified organisms.

Any of these actions would require a Europe and Eurasia Bureau Environmental Officer (BEO) approved amendment to the categorical exclusion.

4. **Mandatory Inclusion of Environmental Compliance Requirements in Solicitations, Awards, Budgets, and Work Plans**

- Appropriate environmental compliance language, including limitations defined in Section 3, shall be incorporated into solicitations and awards for categorical exclusions.
- The implementing partner shall ensure annual work plans do not prescribe activities that are
defined as limitations in Section 3.

5. **Revisions**
   Under §216.3(a)(9), if new information becomes available that indicates that activities covered by the categorical exclusion might be considered major and their effect significant, or if additional activities are proposed that might be considered major and their effect significant, this categorical exclusion determination will be reviewed and, if necessary, revised by the Mission Environmental Officer (MEO) with concurrence by the BEO. It is the responsibility of the USAID Contract Officer’s Representative (COR)/Agreement Officer’s Representative (AOR) to keep the MEO and BEO informed of any new information or changes in the activity that might require revision of this determination.
6. **Recommended Determination for Categorical Exclusion:**

**Approval:**

- Brooke Isham, Mission Director  
  Date: 4/25/2014

**Clearance:**

- Tamar Barbadad, Mission Environmental Officer  
  Date: 4/23/2014

- Aybani Mammadova, AOR/COR  
  Date: 4/23/2014

- Jennifer Tikka, Acting Democracy and Governance Office Director  
  Date: 4/23/2014

- Robert Lopez, Director Program Office  
  Date: 4/28/14

- Joel Sandefur, Regional Legal Advisor (RLA)  
  Date: 4/28/14

**Concurrence:**

- Mark Kamiya  
  Date: 5/1/2014

**Distribution:**

- IEE File
- MEO (to also provide a copy to AOR/COR)