

Digitalization in forensic activities in Azerbaijan

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The article outlines the essence of fundamental reforms undertaken in Azerbaijan's judicial and legal system, the integration of modern information and communication technologies, and digitalization in these areas. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of enhancing state administration and aligning service quality with international standards through the modernization of forensic expertise.

Keywords: *reforms in the judicial-legal system; standardization; digitalization.*

Діджиталізація в судово-експертній діяльності Азербайджану

Ахмет Джабір

У статті докладно розглядається суть фундаментальних реформ, проведених у судово-правовій системі Азербайджану, а також інтеграція сучасних інформаційно-комунікаційних технологій і цифровізації в цих сферах. До того ж підкреслюється важливість покращення державного управління та приведення якості послуг у відповідність до міжнародних стандартів шляхом модернізації судової експертизи.

Ключові слова: *реформи судово-правової системи; стандартизація; діджиталізація.*

In our country, significant reforms in the justice and legal system have been deepened, and comprehensive measures have been implemented to ensure the agility of justice and the independence of the judiciary. The rule of law, the reliable provision of human rights and freedoms, the strengthening of legal institutions, the provision of high-quality legal services to the population, the facilitation of citizens' appeals, and the

enhancement of the efficiency of justice are among **the priorities of Azerbaijan's legal policy.**

As in other areas, special attention is given to the broader application of modern information and communication technologies, digitalization, and transparent, innovative methods within the judiciary and legal system.

Pursuant to the **Order on the establishment of the "Electronic Court"**

information system, the “Electronic Court” information system, which utilizes modern information and communication technologies in court operations, was created and the following were implemented:

- Receiving applications, complaints, and other documents in electronic form;
- Electronic processing of cases in courts and the electronic circulation of documents;
- Automatic assignment of cases among judges in the court;
- Creation of an electronic schedule for court hearing times;
- Electronic delivery of information (e-mail, SMS notifications, etc.) to participants in court proceedings;
- Recording court proceedings using audio, video, and other technical means of recording, and creating an opportunity to observe them online;
- Monitoring compliance with procedural deadlines for cases and having warning functions regarding the expiration of deadlines;
- Oversight of the implementation of adopted court decisions and the enforcement process;
- Creation of a “personal cabinet” within the system, allowing users to access information about the progress of the process, decisions made, implementation status, and any complaints or protests filed by the participants;
- Integration with the “Electronic Government” portal and the information system used by the General Prosecutor’s Office of the Republic of Azerbaijan;

— Conducting court statistics electronically;

— Systemized information storage.

It is required to provide an adequate response to the economic and political challenges occurring globally, raise the technical standards of forensic laboratories to integrate Azerbaijan into global systems, organize the service sector according to modern requirements while considering the needs of service users, and implement a quality management system in the research process.

The measures carried out on the accreditation of forensic examination offices according to international standards are of particular importance.

A quality management system has been implemented in the field of forensic expertise, and measures have been taken to align the operations of research laboratories to the ISO/IEC 17025 standard, “*General requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories* “. As a result of these efforts, the Forensic Science Centre of the Ministry of Justice became the first state institution in our country to *achieve accreditation according to the ISO/IEC 17025 international standard* from the Turkish Accreditation Agency (TURKAK).

Currently, **23 %** of the research methods employed at the Centre are accredited in accordance with the ISO/IEC 17025:2017 standard. The standardization of 58 % of methods is ongoing, and accreditation for an additional 10 % is anticipated soon. In 2023, **13.5 %** of the expert opinions issued by the Forensic

Science Centre were based on methods accredited according to the ISO 17025 standard and are internationally recognized.

The activities of the country's competent authorities in the field of standardization are of great significance. To date, important steps have been taken to adapt the national standardization system to international practices, including the development of cooperation with international and regional organizations, as well as the signing of *up to 20 intergovernmental agreements and inter-agency memorandums of understanding* in the areas of standardization, accreditation, conformity assessment, and metrology.

The *“Strategic Roadmap for the National Economy Prospects of the Republic of Azerbaijan”* outlines specific measures to be implemented in the legislative and institutional spheres to establish a technical regulation and national standardization system in accordance with international requirements.

The *Development Concept “Azerbaijan — 2020: The Vision of the Future”*, which encompasses the *“State Program for the Development of Azerbaijani Justice for 2019-2023”*, has selected the following main priorities:

- Expanding the application of information and communication technologies in the justice system;
- Ensuring the transition to digital government;
- Enhancing the integration of modern scientific and technical advancements in forensic examination activities.

The Decree *“On Deepening Reforms in the Judicial-Legal System”* outlines the following tasks:

- Electronic publication of court decisions;
- Random and automatic electronic allocation of cases in courts;
- Expanding the application of the “Electronic Enforcement” information system;
- Creating appropriate functional capabilities for effective searches based on various criteria for court decisions published in the “Electronic Court” information system;
- Promoting the use of the “Electronic Court” information system by individuals and legal entities.

The *“State Program on the Adaptation of the National Standardization System to International Requirements for 2023-2025”* highlights the importance of aligning laboratory activities with international standards and identifies the application of high technologies and innovative solutions as key directions of activity.

The State Program was approved on the basis of the significance of adapting laboratory operations to international standards and serves as a continuation of ongoing efforts in this direction.

The Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan *“On the Establishment of the Forensic Expertise Council”* is a document that lays the foundation of a new era in forensic expertise. This order aims to enhance public administration and improve the quality of forensic examination services through the modernization of the rele-

vant field. To achieve this, *priority tasks* include ensuring the standardization of the research process and the accuracy of its methods, increasing the quality of specialist training through international cooperation, and strengthening scientific and methodological work.

The preparation and implementation of a development concept that determines the near, medium, and long-term development of forensic expertise will not only ensure the provision of quality services in the field in accordance with international standards and support the stable growth of the relevant sector, but also contribute to the advancement of the country's international reputation (for example, on the Rule of Law Index, the Corruption Perceptions Index, etc.).

The expansion of digitalization in the field of forensic expertise and the establishment of a unified information system are intended to ensure the accessibility of the use of the service:

- Creating an electronic expertise information system to coordinate and digitize the activities of courts, investigation bodies, and examination authorities;

- Implementing projects on the application of modern information and communication technologies in the activities of forensic examination offices (provision of expert questioning, participation in court sessions, and online involvement in investigative actions and court reviews in cases permitted by law);

- Providing forensic departments with access to state databases that

contain essential information used in forensic examinations (passport, driver's license, etc., real estate cadastre, money and securities database, etc.);

- Universalizing specialized archives and information-search systems for various types of forensic examinations and creating a single national database (DNA sample database, shell, bullet, and fingerprint archives, etc.);

- Establishing the infrastructure for determining and obtaining the results of forensic examinations through digitization, along with adopting the necessary normative legal acts for this purpose;

- Implementing forensic research methods within a unified information system that integrates with the existing electronic systems of the State Registry of justice institutions;

- Facilitating mutual information and document exchange with legal and natural persons who appoint (order) expertise related to the provision of electronic services;

- Integrating with the "Electronic Government" portal, "Electronic Court," and the information system utilized by the General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Azerbaijan;

- Defining and standardizing the necessary technical normative legal acts related to the application of the electronic expertise information system.

In our opinion, the reforms implemented in the justice and judiciary-legal system, along with the modernization of the forensic examination service in Azerbaijan and the alignment of these

activities with international standards, will create an opportunity to significantly improve laboratory conditions and operational efficacy, reduce the costs of expert research, and expand the possibilities of forensic examination.

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