



(Vatican Radio, September 27, 2016).- A referendum was held on Monday in the Republic of Azerbaijan on proposed constitutional changes regarding presidential powers and term limits, just days ahead of Pope Francis' Apostolic Journey to the country.

The proposed changes to the Azerbaijani constitution included raising presidential term limits from five to seven years and granting the president the right to disband parliament.

Voting on Tuesday wrapped up at 7 pm and initial counting showed a high turnout of around 70 percent of eligible voters.

Azerbaijan's Central Election Commission chief, Mazahir Panahov, said that with nearly three-quarters of the ballots counted, over 90 percent of voters supported the extension of the presidential term.

President Ilham Aliyev assumed the top office in October of 2003 and is the 4th president of the country since its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.

Officials say referendum results will be announced by October 21st.

Pope Francis is due to visit Azerbaijan this Sunday following his Apostolic Journey to Georgia.

It will be the Holy Father's 16th pastoral visit and will focus on the themes of peace and solidarity, following on the message of peace that he took with him to the neighbouring Republic of Armenia last June.

(Devin Sean Watkins)