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"EU Support to Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Azerbaijan" technical assistance project was launched on June 7.

Participants in the event included members of parliament, employees of state bodies and private organizations, officials of the European Union and the European Commission and representatives of vocational education institutions.

In his remarks at the event, Minister of Education Mikayil Jabbarov said that thanks to President Ilham Aliyev's purposeful and well thought-out socio-economic policy Azerbaijan has made great strides in recent years, the level of poverty was reduced to a minimum and Azerbaijan became a middle-income country. The minister stressed the importance of preparing highly-qualified specialists. "The establishment of the State Vocational Education Agency under the Ministry of Education, endorsement of "The Strategic Road Map for Vocational Education and Training" stimulated the creation of a vocational education system, which is based on state-business cooperation, and which is capable of meeting the national economy's demand for highly-qualified specialists and addressing flexibly the current economic challenges."

Mikayil Jabbarov said the project aims to provide legal aid for the preparation of a draft law on vocational education and improve the legal base, expressing his confidence that the project will contribute to the development of vocational education.

The minister highlighted the measures to ensure the development of vocational education in the country. He said 32 primary vocational education institutions in Baku and Ganja were rationalized and merged with 13 State Vocational Education Centers based on specializations. "Gabala State Vocational Education Center for tourism and agriculture was established on the basis of two vocational education institutions in the city of Gabala."

Mikayil Jabbarov said that under "ASAN Profession" project, starting from the past academic year children in the cities of Baku and Ganja started to be enrolled to primary vocational education institutions by "ASAN Xidmət" centers. He said that in the 2017 academic year it is planned to continue this process in other cities and districts where ASAN Xidmət centers operate.

Director Neighbourhood East at the European Commission Lawrence Meredith noted the importance of paying attention to the development of youth. Head of the EU Delegation to Azerbaijan Malena Mard highlighted cooperation between the European Union and Azerbaijan in the fields of training and education. Chair of the Milli Majlis Science and Education Committee Isa Habbibayli drew the audience's attention to law reforms in vocational education system in the country.

Director of the State Vocational Education Agency under the Ministry of Education Famil Mustafayev emphasized the importance of the project, saying it will play a key role in fulfilling the tasks set by the Strategic Road Map.

Project manager Herman Sonneveld laid out the objectives of the project and responded to questions from the audience.

"EU Support to Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Azerbaijan" technical assistance project aims to increase the attractiveness of the public status of vocational education and training and improve it to labour market requirements.