

**REPORT**  
**OF THE ARMENIAN NATIONAL PLATFORM OF EaP CSF**  
**PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN ARMENIA IN 2013**

**1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Despite progress with regard to certain components of electoral process during the recent years, it is hard to claim that the elections in Armenia have become an established democratic institution. The 2013 Presidential elections failed to meet democratic standards, as they were marred by lack of genuine competition, wide use of administrative resource throughout the campaign, numerous cases of violations during the voting and ballot count and other negative factors that lead to a low level of Armenian public's trust toward the official election result.

Armenian civil society organizations closely monitored the election process. A number of non-governmental organizations including member organizations of the Armenian National Platform for Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum conducted observation mission during the Presidential Elections held on February 18, 2013, namely, "Democracy and Electoral Processes" International Center NGO, "Civil Society Institute" NGO, "Dilnet Service" Educational NGO, "Unison" NGO, Armenian Helsinki Committee, "Urban" Foundation (in cooperation with "Capacity and Development for Civil Society" NGO), Martuni Women's Community Council NGO, Transparency International Anti-corruption Centre, "Asparez" Journalists' Club NGO, Helsinki Citizen's Assembly –Vanadzor NGO, which conducted observations both in the pre-election phase and on the Election Day. The aforementioned organizations carried out observation missions in 81 election precincts in Gyumri, 90 election precincts in rural and urban communities of Martuni region, 25 polling stations in Abovyan, 36 precincts in Ajapnyak administrative district of Yerevan and 48 election precincts throughout rural and urban communities of Tavoush and Lori regions, respectively (in total 328 precincts). From the prospective of accessibility, 291 precincts in Yerevan were observed on the Election Day. 30 legal assistance ambulances within Civil Society Institute NGO were operating on the voting day, which made site visits to Yerevan, Armavir, Aparan, Ararat, Gyumri, Vanadzor, Hrazdan, Ijevan, Gavar, Martuni, Yeghegnadzor, Goris and Kapan cities as well as visited 394 polling stations. The monitoring mission "Citizen Observer", which was carried out by a coalition of NGOs, continued its mission during the municipal elections in Yerevan in May, when it was joined by over two hundred individual volunteers, including Diaspora Armenians and foreigners residing in Armenia. Monitoring of the media coverage of the 2013 presidential elections, as well as the parliamentary elections of 2012 and 2013 Yerevan municipal elections, was carried out by Yerevan Press Club. The report of the EaP CSF Armenian national platform is based on findings of the listed ANP member organizations.

The political context, in which the elections took place, can be described as relatively calm, compared to that of previous presidential election. The internal political tensions, that rose after disputed elections and post-election protests in 2008, were somewhat weakened by 2012 and it could have seemed that grounds were created for improvement of the political environment. However, these opportunities were largely missed. The investigation of the murder of 10 people on March 1-2, 2008 has not lead to any specific outcomes. In general, no adequate political assessment had been given neither to the tragedy of March 1, nor to the curbing of liberties that followed the events of March 1. The parliamentary elections of 2012 were flawed, with allegations of fraud and vote bribing abound. Due to an uneven playing field between opposition and government, several significant opposition parties simply refused to take part in the presidential election campaign of 2013, thus depriving many of Armenia's citizens of an opportunity to make a meaningful choice: three of six parliamentary political forces, including the second, third and fourth largest factions, not only did not nominate their own candidates, but also did not endorse any candidates, leading to a situation, in which more than 40% of the voters (according to the distribution of votes as a result of the parliamentary elections), were not oriented by the political forces they had supported. Thus, the election campaign lacked competition from its very beginning and the playing field was tilted in favor of the incumbent government.

The course of the campaign, even though there were no major incidents of violence (excluding the murder attempt against one of the candidates), can hardly be described as one corresponding to the democratic standards. Administrative recourses were fully employed in favor of the incumbent president Serzh Sargsyan, including state institutions, especially, state educational establishments, where campaigning is prohibited by the national law. Allegations of widespread vote-bribing in favor of the incumbent and concern regarding the inflated voter lists, which was voiced during the campaign, lead to a high level of mistrust to the elections even before the voting took place. These trends, which were manifested during the presidential campaign, became even more obvious during the election campaign for the Council of Elders of Yerevan, which followed in spring 2013.

The voting and ballot count were also marred by numerous reports of irregularities and violations, which make the democratic nature of these elections questionable. The amount of violations at various stages of the electoral process, especially viewed against a background of a long history of disputed elections in Armenia, creates a basis to cast under doubt the official results of the elections, which awarded victory to incumbent Serzh Sargsyan. The mistrust of official results of the elections lead to mass protests in the aftermath of the elections, as a large number of Armenians took to the streets in support of opposition candidate Raffi Hovannisians claim that the elections had been fraudulent. The protests culminated in clashes between protesters and the police on the day of the inauguration of the president on April 9.

The Yerevan Council of Elders elections, which took place on May 5 2013, failed to diffuse the doubts regarding the ability of Armenian government to hold free and fair democratic elections. While more opposition parties took part in these elections than did in the presidential campaign, nearly all of them rejected as fraudulent the official results, which awarded victory to the ruling Republican Party, whose party list was headed by the incumbent mayor of Yerevan Taron Margaran. Thus, it can be claimed that the lessons of previous national elections remained unlearned: the government failed to address the concerns, which had been articulated previously by the civil society and international community with regard to national elections.

Compared to other components of the electoral process, there are certain grounds for optimism when it comes to media coverage of the elections. There were obvious improvements in this sphere during the recent electoral cycle in Armenia (the National Assembly elections in May

2012, Presidential elections in February 2013 and municipal elections in Yerevan in May 2013). This is especially obvious compared to previous national elections (e.g. presidential elections in 2008), during which the media coverage had been unbalanced and heavily biased in favor of the incumbent government. And in general the atmosphere around the elections was more open and quiet than during previous national elections.

## **2. POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE RA PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS 2013**

In the run-up to the parliamentary elections of 2012 certain developments took place, which, to an extent defused the internal political tensions and created bases for improvement of the political environment. In particular, political leaders and activists, arrested in connection to post-election clashes of 2008 were released, and by mid-2011 the freedom of assembly, which had been systematically curbed in Armenia since 2003-2004, was re-established. At the same time the investigation of the murder of 10 people on March 1-2, 2008 has not lead to any specific outcomes. In general, no adequate political assessment has been given neither to the tragedy of March 1, nor to the curbing of liberties that followed these events.

The RA Presidential elections 2013 were preceded by the Parliamentary elections of 2012. The latter were characterized by sharply decreased incidents of violence and ballot box stuffing, as compared to the previous campaigns. The media mostly created equal conditions for various political forces. The dissemination of pre-election promotion materials has been regulated to a relative extent. However, the focus had been shifted to a different technology of election fraud: super-inflated voter lists, cases of citizens registering twice, multiple voting, widespread election bribes, and abuse of administrative resources for the benefit of certain parties and candidates. The electoral process and the results of the voting have also been influenced by political pressure on the employees by employers in the public and private sector. The mechanism of stamping passports with disappearing ink, introduced in order to rule out the opportunities for election fraud, failed. Concerns about inflated voter lists, which had been voiced by opposition, civil society, as well as international monitors, were not addressed neither before nor after the parliamentary elections 2012. In particular, in terms of re-establishing public trust toward to electoral process, the comprehensive voter list corrections could have had a positive impact. Unlike previous years, the Armenian authorities displayed readiness to cooperate with the civil society with regard to this issue to a certain degree. However, ultimately, those suggestions, which could solve the issue of trustworthiness of the lists comprehensively, were not accepted.

Along with the absence of decisive steps aimed at improving the electoral process, public mood was negatively influenced by the refusal of several potential candidates to engage in the competition for Presidency in 2013. Thus, of six parties included in the National Assembly, only two had their own candidates, of which one acted in the capacity of a self-nominated one. Three of six parliamentary political forces, including the second, third and fourth largest factions, not only did not nominate their own candidates, but also did not endorse any candidates. In fact, more than 40% of the voters (according to the official data on distribution of votes as a result of the parliamentary elections), were not oriented by the political forces they had supported.

The issues mentioned by the observers were a consequence of absence of precedents of a change of power through elections in Armenia, “stripping of resources” of the real opposition, abandoning the traditions of public political competition. All this was directly connected to the merging of business with the government, which, in turn, is an obstacle to the formation of a middle

class, free forming and exercise of political preferences. To this have been added direct political pressures, in particular criminal persecution against political competitors and quiet neutralization of businessmen who have the tendency to help the opposition.

In their turn, the opposition forces also had their own “contribution” to the decreasing interest of the citizens towards electoral process. Searching for crooked ways of political survival, negotiations and agreements, which were non-transparent and doubtful from the point of view of the public, alliances being formed and falling apart on the basis of non-political considerations, lack of internal democracy within the parties, have all alienated the opposition from the electorate. The public's feeling of the elections being pre-ordained grew stronger as a result of the position of the party that has the second largest faction in the parliament, which failed to send a clear signal to its supporters regarding nomination of a candidate and presented itself neither as opposition, nor as part of the ruling coalition, but rather as ambiguous “alternative”.

The electoral processes were also influenced by the widespread poverty, unemployment, the feeling of lack of protection and impunity of intruders, which deepened the public indifference and harmed the atmosphere of competition.

The transfer of the struggle for power and internal political competition into a sphere closed from the public's view, a tendency, which became most apparent in Armenia in the period between parliamentary and presidential elections, contains veiled threats of instability and tension, which, in particular, manifested themselves in the assassination attempt against one of the candidates, Paruyr Hayrikyan and the dramatic hunger strike by another candidate, Andreas Ghukasyan.

To sum up the political context in which the elections took place, to an extent defused the internal political tensions and created bases for improvement of the political environment. However, the investigation of the murder of 10 people on March 1-2, 2008 has not lead to any specific outcomes, and, in general, no adequate political assessment has been given neither to the tragedy of March 1, no to the curbing of liberties that followed. The parliamentary elections of 2012 were marred by allegations of fraud and vote bribing. Due to an uneven playing field between opposition and government, several significant opposition parties simply refused to take part in the presidential election campaign of 2013, thus depriving many of Armenia's citizens of an opportunity to make a meaningful choice. Thus, the election campaign lacked competition from its very beginning and the playing field was tilted in favor of the incumbent government.

### **3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

The Republic of Armenia is proclaimed a democratic state by its constitution. According to the article 2 of the Constitution of the RA, “In the Republic of Armenia the power belongs to the people. The people exercise their power through free elections, referenda, as well as through state and local self-governing bodies and public officials as provided by the Constitution. The usurpation of power by any organization or individual constitutes a crime”. In spite of these powerful provisions, all national and local elections, which took place in Armenia after the adoption of the Constitution of the RA in 1995, have been problematic from the point of view of free expression of the will of the citizens.

The changes that took place in the electoral legislation during the recent years have significantly improved the quality of the organization of the elections; however, instead, more sophisticated methods of bypassing the law have been created. At the same time, certain obstacles to holding free and fair elections are conditioned exactly by the drawbacks of the legislation. In the

course of the drafting of new electoral code of the RA the suggestions made by OSCE ODIHR in the wake of 2007-2008 elections have been partly taken into consideration, however certain suggestions have not been properly reflected, including the suggestion to enable the right to be elected of the citizens holding dual citizenship, reduction of the number of voters in election precincts, securing the transparency of donations, as well as the introduction of the obligation on the part of the CEC and precinct election committees to inform law-enforcement bodies on cases of violations. Also the suggestions on reforming “the Law on television and radio” regarding the more inclusive and diverse composition of the Council of the Public television and radio company, inclusion of diverse interests in the process of licensing, transparency of financing, etc., have not been duly taken into consideration.

The suggestions of the OSCE/ODIHR made after the 2012 Parliamentary elections have not been implemented at all, even though it was suggested to address them before the Presidential elections of 2013. These could have at least secured the efficiency of investigation of appeals and complaints, criminal liability for the abuse of administrative resources, filing complaints regarding election bribes, as well as partly solving certain issues related to voter lists

The legislation of the RA limits the right of Armenia’s citizens to take part in the elections. Citizens residing outside of Armenia are deprived of the opportunity to take part in the elections, though special conditions are created for a limited group, persons working in Armenia’s diplomatic and consular missions and foreign branches of corporate bodies registered in Armenia, as well as members of their families. The majority of voting stations are not equipped for wheelchairs and citizens with disabilities either do not take part in the elections, or are forced to overcome numerous obstacles and sacrifice their right to secret vote. People with illnesses who have to stay at home or elderly citizens physically unable to reach the polling stations are deprived of an opportunity to exercise their constitutional rights. The sign language interpretation of the programs and propaganda materials of the candidates for voters with hearing disabilities is not available. Not all polling stations use special forms for visually impaired voters.

Those citizens who have been deprived of their property under the pretext of eminent domain and do not have registration address are also deprived of their voting right. The Constitution of Armenia limits the right of the persons sentenced to imprisonment and those serving their sentence, irrespective of the nature and the level of the danger of the crime.

Electoral code only partly limits the use of the administrative resource, and, as a result, there are widespread cases of propaganda carried out by officials and use of public resources for it, active involvement of the heads of communities as proxies for the candidates, and directing of the voters on the day of the voting, which obstruct the free expression of the will of citizens and create unequal conditions for the candidates.

The voter lists include several hundred thousands of citizens absent from Armenia, and since the publicity of the signed voter lists is limited, it is impossible to check their accuracy, which creates doubts with regard to the violations involving the names of absent citizens. The electoral code does not provide for reflection of all irregularities in the electoral process in the vote count, and as a result such violations as “the carousel” or false signatures are ignored. Opportunities for appeal are extremely limited both in terms of the time frame and the persons who have the right to make an appeal.

#### 4. THE COURSE OF THE CAMPAIGN

The course of the campaign was heavily influenced by the fact that the three main political parties represented in the National Assembly, namely, Prosperous Armenia, Armenian National Congress, ARF neither nominated their own candidates, nor expressed support for another candidates. The leading candidates out of the 8 nominees (1 of them withdrew from the race) during the election campaign race, were incumbent president Serzh Sargsyan, candidate of the RPA, first largest political party in the National Assembly and Raffi Hovhannisian, self-nominated candidate, chairman of “Heritage” party represented in the Parliament.

During the election campaign an assassination attempt was made against presidential candidate Paruyr Hayrikyan, leader of National Self-Determination Union, which could have put off the voting day. However, Paruyr Hayrikyan took a decision not to apply to the RA Constitutional Court with a request to postpone the voting day, as he could have done according to the law. Presidential candidate Andreas Ghukasyan, was on a hunger strike throughout the whole duration of the election campaign, demanding to revoke the candidacy of incumbent president and presidential candidate Serzh Sargsyan due to infringements committed on the part of his Republican Party.

During the election campaign the incumbent and presidential candidate Serzh Sargsyan’s starting advantage over other candidates was obvious, which was manifested both by the quantity of election campaign headquarters, the scale of the enrolled human resources, leasing of vast areas to ensure election campaign activities, high remuneration of the staff members, as well as investment of necessary financial resources for the use of transportation means. Serzh Sargsyan’s election campaign headquarters were formed according to the principle: 1 campaign headquarters per 1 election precinct. Out other candidates, Raffi Hovhannisian formed itinerant election campaign headquarters based on the principle of 1 election campaign headquarters per 1 community, but he was not able to implement this principle in all communities. Serzh Sargsyan’s starting advantage was retained throughout the whole duration of the election campaign, since it was impossible to distinguish between the resources of state and local self-governing bodies on the one hand and those of the Republican Party on the other.

In order to grasp to what extent the opposition candidates faced a severe lack of resources in comparison with the incumbent, the following fact is instructive. According to the data provided by the heads of Serzh Sargsyan’s campaign headquarters, 57 headquarters of Serzh Sargsyan functioned only in one town Vanadzor (with population around 150,000), while only one headquarter of his main competitor, “Heritage” party leader Raffi Hovhannisian, operated here.

During the election campaign voters' passport data were massively collected by the officials of state and local self-governing bodies and personnel of educational institutions, which, according to the widespread public perception, were used for the purpose of distribution of election bribes. Numerous alerts were received with regard to election bribes, which testify to the systematic and massive nature of the bribes. Thus, during the 4 days prior to the voting day, “Asparez” Journalists’ Club received over 30 alerts from citizens regarding collection of passport data in various parts of the city for distribution of election bribes and mostly women were engaged in those processes.

A number of alerts were received from different parts of Vanadzor, according to which, the election bribes, based on specific conditions, were given out as salaries foreseen for the activists. In order to elect Serzh Sargsyan 5,000 AMD were distributed in Khndzorut district of Vanadzor, moreover, if the family was comprised of more than three voters, maximum 15,000 AMD was given. Citizens were promised to receive 10,000 AMD for 1 passport in Serzh Sargsyan’s election

headquarters located in the 3rd district of Vanadzor, but when the citizens went to receive the money, only 7,500 AMD was offered which entailed disputes.

During the election campaign the administrative recourses were abused for the purpose of setting up the pre-election meetings of the incumbent president. Presidential candidate Serzh Sargsyan's campaign meetings were organized at state institutions, especially, state educational establishments, where campaigning is prohibited by the national law. Staff members of institutions subordinate to the state and local self-governing bodies were forced to attend the campaign meetings with the candidate.

Surveys of citizens, who participated in the campaign meetings with presidential candidate, incumbent president Serzh Sargsyan, revealed that they were mainly informed of the meetings by their employers and took part in the meetings under the demand or request of their employers, a fact about which the citizens expressed their discontent. Alerts were received from employees of a number of Gyumri-based state institutions during the campaign phase regarding the fact that their heads strictly instructed them to participate in the elections, and, in some cases, openly urging them to vote in favor of Serzh Sargsyan.

As a general rule, slight and only formal measures were undertaken by the RA Central Electoral Commission, territorial electoral commissions and law-enforcement bodies in regard to alerts on violations of electoral code regarding the expression of free will of voters during the election campaign, which were in fact targeted at denial of those alerts, rather than proper investigation and revelation.

Thus, the course of the campaign, even though there were no major incidents of violence and infringement of the rights of the candidates (with the exception of the assassination attempt against Hayrikyan), can hardly be described as one corresponding to the democratic standards. Administrative recourses were fully employed in favor of the incumbent President Serzh Sargsyan, including state institutions, especially, state educational establishments, where campaigning is prohibited by the national law. Allegations of widespread vote-bribing in favor of the incumbent and concern regarding the inflated voter lists, which was voiced during the campaign, lead to a high level of mistrust to the elections even before the voting took place.

## **5. VOTING AND BALLOT COUNT**

The voting took place on February 18, 2013. On that day local observers and civil society organizations observed and recorded numerous cases of violations, related both to the voting and the ballot count.

One of the most common violations observed was overcrowding in the vicinity of polling stations and facts of massive transportation of citizens. Many such cases were recorded by the observation mission organizations that participated in the compiling of the current report. Thus, overcrowding of people, cases of transporting voters to the polling stations and taking them back after voting were observed in 68 out of 81 polling stations in Gyumri. Overcrowding, i.e. presence of more than 15 voters in polling stations at a given moment, group visits to election precincts and transporting of citizens via minibuses occurred on frequent basis.

Another common violation registered by the monitors and CSOs was distribution of election bribes on the voting day. The police did not undertake proper measures with regard to these and other violations and crimes recorded on the voting day<sup>1</sup>. In some cases, representatives of the Gyumri-Asparez Daily and [www.asparez.am](http://www.asparez.am) noticed lists in the cars and inferred that election bribes were handed out inside those cars, as they witnessed voters periodically approaching and leaving the cars. When observers took photos of these cars in the street, they would leave but often other “shifting” cars came to replace them. “Legal assistance ambulances”, teams, which visited problematic precincts on the day of the voting, recorded several cases of distribution of election bribes.

A common type of violations involved interference of unauthorized persons with the election process. Persons unauthorized to be present at polling stations periodically attended a number of precincts and obviously held the situation under their control, in some of the cases, they were representatives of local self-governing bodies. A few proxies of incumbent Serzh Sargsyan were simultaneously present in a number of precincts, who directed and controlled the voters inside and in the vicinity of election precincts. In general at least 1 proxy of Serzh Sargsyan was present in all of the polling stations without exception, whereas, none of the remaining candidates had a proxy in all election precincts. Hence, only incumbent President Serzh Sargsyan had proxies in all polling stations, who, by the way, were employees of the institutions, where the polling stations were situated (e.g. schools, etc.), managing employers of that specific district or district authorities, positions that enabled the proxies to use various forms of leverage to restrict the expression of voters’ free will. Persons unauthorized to be present in voting rooms were present in 11 of the election precincts observed by HCA Vanadzor. Specifically, persons not having adequate certificates were present inside the voting rooms near the voting booths of #29/36 election precinct. The community leaders periodically attended #29/21, 29/41 precincts, who were intensively engaged in overseeing the flow of citizens.

A number of alleged violations were related to multiple voting, including problems with the ink stamp put in the voters’ passports in order to prevent multiple voting. In the first part of the voting day, numerous alerts were received according to which ink was easily removed by slight intervention, hence, posing the peril of multiple voting. Cases of multiple voting and voting on behalf of others were recorded by the observers of the reporting organizations. Thus, cases of multiple voting were recorded in ##6/10 և 6/20 election precincts, and multiple voting attempts were prevented in ##6/09, 6/13 և 32/54 polling stations. Whereas, the observer at # 32/14 election precinct registered that there were a number of passport data entries in the voters’ list without signatures and signatures without passport data. The observer also noticed repetition of the same signature in the voters’ list for several times. Facts of voting on behalf of others were recorded in a number of other election precincts, specifically, in ##6/04, 6/15, 6/16, 6/23, 29/08,29/27,29/28, 29/41, 30/11, 32/05, 34/27, 40/46, 41/24 և 41/27 polling stations.

On the voting day alerts were received from a number of polling stations regarding ballot stuffing and attempts of ballot stuffing. It was registered by various observation mission organizations that despite the citizens’ passiveness and the low level of participation, the voter turnout, according to the official statistics, in some of the precincts was up to 100%. The voter turnout in Lori region even exceeded the number of population (Transparency International Anti-corruption Center). Despite the fact, recorded by the observers, that the participation of citizens in

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<sup>1</sup> <https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.police.am%2Fimages%2FQveark-or-27-03-2013-jam-15.doc>



the elections was very passive, and in some cases, even boring and monotonous, nonetheless, the ballot boxes were noticed to be full. Already at midday in the various polling stations of #24 election precinct the observers of Martuni Women's Community Council NGO recorded half-full ballot boxes, even though not so active participation of voters was registered. Sometimes, according to the records, in some polling stations the voter turnout reached up to 90%, irrespective of the fact the Gegharkunik region is known for a higher rate of persons leaving for work abroad. A case of ballot stuffing was recorded by the observer in #32/14 polling station. At the same time the organization received an alert from "Heritage" party regarding cases of ballot stuffing in ##31/05 and 32/05 precincts.

Although all of the election precincts were provided with magnifiers by the RA Central Electoral Commission, however, the number of voters with the aid of another person was great, in some of the precincts it reached up to 10%. It was not always that the helpers' data were recorded, moreover, the same person helped citizens to vote for a several times. There was a breach of secrecy of voting in a number of precincts, especially in rural communities, where a tendency to inform the Commission and the proxy about their votes was registered, as well as numerous cases, when citizens were escorted to the voting booth and oversight of voting was registered. Particularly, Officer Yeghshatyan, who was escorting each of the voting servicemen in #29/13 precinct, approached the voting booth with the servicemen and checked who he was voting for.

During the voting the Commissions in fact displayed a single-party conduct: both the law-enforcement bodies and Electoral Commissions often failed to undertake any initiatives or activities to prevent the violations. According to the observers, measures targeted at elimination of violations were undertaken only after alerts, but they expressed no consistency regarding the actual elimination of the violation. In a number of polling stations the members of the Commission actively polled the citizens in the last hours of the voting and ensured their participation by coordinating it via telephone calls.

Results, according to which Serzh Sargsyan was obviously leading in the election race, began being disseminated by the RA Central Electoral Commission since the initial phase of summarizing the polls, although according to the preliminary data of the observation mission organizations, Raffi Hovhannisyian was in the lead. The image presented by the CEC did not reflect the accurate data of the observation mission organizations; however, it coincided precisely to the results of the exit poll conducted on the voting day.

The results of election precincts observed by volunteer observation mission organizations significantly differed from the results of those, where no observation by similar organizations was carried out. This difference was also visible in terms of voter turnout. For instance, Serzh Sargsyan-Raffi Hovhannisyian ratio of votes was 8.4% and 47.0%, in the election precincts of rural and urban communities of Lori and Tavoush regions, whereas, in the election precincts where no observation was conducted the ratio of votes was 57.7% and 37.7% respectively.

Despite the unequal conditions of the campaign (see previous section of current report), incumbent Serzh Sargsyan was defeated in many parts of the republic: his defeat in precincts "controlled" by observers was unexpected, yet obvious for the public. The official voting results were estimated by a large portion of the public as a fraud. A strange pattern was recorded by numerous independent experts and reporting organizations, according to which Serzh Sargsyan's advantage was recorded in election precincts with incredibly higher voter turnout, while, Raffi Hovhannisyian had the advantage in election precincts with more proportionate voter turnout. According to numerous experts, this testifies to massive ballot stuffing and inflated voter turnout.

The voting results of 49 election precincts, where over 90% voter turnout was recorded, are presented as an example: in these precincts Raffi Hovhannisyanyan received in average 6.8%, as opposed to 92% of voted received by Serzh Sargsyan (See annex 1).

The elections were also far from meeting internationally accepted standards, when it came to ensuring the participation of voters with special needs. The accessibility of 467 out of 470 polling stations in Yerevan for persons with mobility issues was assessed by “Unison” NGO. Only 31 (6%) polling stations of Yerevan city were fully accessible for voters with wheelchairs. Another 44 (9%) polling stations were assessed as basically accessible; it means the access of voters with wheelchairs was possible through slight assistance.

Pursuant to the data regarding the electoral violations that occurred during the election campaign of the RA presidential elections, 96 cases in total were addressed at the RA Police, 63 of them were regarding election bribes, 16 cases over impeding election campaign, 12 on impeding expression of free will of voters, 1 case regarding dissemination of slanderous information, 3 over falsification of elections or voting results and 1 case over conducting pre-election campaign. 11 materials were compiled to check the authenticity of the aforementioned cases but there were no conclusion for follow up of the cases due to lack of grounds. A decision over 85 cases was made to refuse filing of a criminal case: in 82 cases it was based on the lack of criminality in 2 cases and an appeal submitted by the aggrieved party in 1 case. 8 cases were integrated into 3 materials and decisions were made to reject initiating a criminal case, however, 1 material was sent to the RA Special Investigative Service, which was returned to the Lori region Investigation Department of the RA Police through the RA Prosecutor’s Office, where on 12.03.2013 a decision was reached to reject filing of the criminal case. (RA Police).<sup>2</sup>

Summing up, it can be concluded that the elections were carried out with numerous irregularities and violations, which put under doubt the democratic nature of these elections. The amount of violations at various stages of the electoral process, especially viewed against a background of a long history of disputed elections in Armenia, creates a basis to cast under doubt the official results of the elections, which awarded victory to incumbent Serzh Sargsyan. The lack of public trust in the official results of the elections lead to mass protests in the aftermath of the elections, as a large number of Armenians took to the streets in support of opposition candidate Raffi Hovhannisyanyan’s claim that the elections had been fraudulent. The protests culminated in clashes between protesters and the police on the day of the inauguration of the president on April 9.

The Yerevan Council of Elders elections did not anything to diffuse the doubts regarding the ability of Armenian government to hold free and fair democratic elections. The administrative resource was again used at its full scale, numerous cases of pressure and intimidation of people working in state institutions became known. Similarly reports about vote bribing became widespread in the media. These cases are usually difficult to prove, as usually the voters, who have come under such pressure or have been offered bribes are reluctant to go public for fear of retribution. However, information about these cases spreads very rapidly through informal channels, deepening the mistrust of the voters towards the institution of elections. Thus, already before the voting day, the public regarded the elections with scepticism, which was confirmed by the developments on the voting day: numerous cases of irregularities and violations were recorded by the media and civil society organizations, particularly participants of the “Citizen Observer”

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<sup>2</sup> <https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.police.am%2Fimages%2FQarozarshav-27-03-2013-jam-15.doc>

initiative, which united several NGOs and around 200 individual volunteers. Some of these cases were not only documented but were shot on video and widely publicized via YouTube. Observers themselves came under pressure, while the police did virtually nothing to prevent such cases or persecute the culprits afterwards. One of the reasons that the violations were more blatant than during the presidential elections was that unlike national elections, the Yerevan municipal elections were not monitored by large teams of international monitors. While more opposition parties took part in these elections than did in the presidential campaign, nearly all of them rejected as fraudulent the official results, which awarded victory to the ruling Republican Party, whose party list was headed by the incumbent mayor of Yerevan Taron Margaryan. Summing up, the elections not only were not a step forward compared to the national campaigns that took place before them, further diminishing the level of the public's trust into the electoral institution as such.

## **6. MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE ELECTIONS**

In the presidential elections of 2013 the trend, which had been observed during the 2012 parliamentary elections, has been preserved. The media coverage of the elections showed significant signs of progress, especially compared to the previous national election of 2008. The broadcast media were not discriminating towards any of the candidates or political forces, while print media and online editions, many of which have obvious orientation towards a certain party or group, presented a wide spectrum of views and opinions. Moreover, if in early 2012, i.e. during the period preceding the pre-election promotion during the Parliamentary campaign, not all broadcasters created equal opportunities for carrying out their election campaign, in the run-up to the presidential elections such opportunities were available in all stages.

This, however, does not mean that the leading Armenian broadcasters are completely fulfilling their mission to assist the citizens of the country in making a conscious and well-informed choice. Thus, according to the monitoring of the broadcasting media carried by YPC, in the period preceding the pre-election promotion the discussion programs in the format "guest-in-the-studio" paid limited attention to many-sided commentary on the pre-electoral situation.

The issue of making a well-informed choice has been complicated even more due to reasons not depending on the media, particularly because of the undecided positions of several leading political forces and leaders. As a consequence, journalists were forced to keep within the scope of their attention a quite wide number of potential presidential candidates: during the period preceding the pre-election promotion 9 leading broadcasters covered 41 persons as potential presidential hopefuls. After the official registration was completed, the analysis of this phenomenon showed that about 60 % of the references to potential candidates and coverage of political forces was devoted to those, who ultimately refused to take part in the struggle for the presidential post. Of the most widely covered potential candidates (Serzh Sargsyan, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, Gagik Tsarukyan and Robert Kocharyan) only two were left in the presidential race. In other words, a major share of the attention of the media in the period preceding the elections, had been wasted on candidates, who not only were not nominated, but also did not endorse any of the registered candidates.

In this situation the TV debates could have received a special importance, since they could secure a many-sided, competitive discussion of conceptions and ideas regarding the development of the country. It would have been useful if such an initiative came from the First Channel of the Public television (H1), taking into account its special mission, but similar initiatives of private broadcasters

would also be welcome. However, the respective statement-appeal made by several Armenian civil society organizations did not receive a reaction and again the elections passed without TV debates between the candidates or their representatives. Suggestions of TV debates made by several TV companies were ignored by the presidential candidates.

For the first time in years, the media, which were ready to perform their professional mission, became the victims of the political situation of the moment. While stating this, we also should not forget that the media themselves throughout almost all the history of “the 3<sup>rd</sup> Armenian republic” have contributed with their conduct to the reduction of competitiveness in the elections and creation of a system of a guaranteed self-preservation of the government through elections. Monitoring of elections and the general political situation, which have been carried out in Armenia since 1995 by Yerevan Press Club ([http://www.ypc.am/media\\_research/ln/en](http://www.ypc.am/media_research/ln/en)) show how the media, first of all the broadcasters, using propaganda tools unacceptable in a civilized society have systematically destroyed the bases for creation of a political alternative and functioning opposition in Armenia. The pre-election situation formed today is a direct consequence of the media discrimination that took place during the previous years

The ongoing centralization of the property in the media field, accessibility of the broadcasting licenses for only those TV companies, which are loyal to the government, show that the positive trends in the coverage of elections, which have been observed during the latest months, cannot be considered irreversible. Today the leading Armenian broadcasters have been ordered “from above” to preserve diversity, while tomorrow a different order may be given and would be equally rigorously implemented.

While the overall picture of the media coverage of the presidential elections was positive, these positive tendencies did not hold, and, to an extent, were reversed with the elections into the Council of Elders of Yerevan on May 5. The first two and a half weeks of the municipal elections campaign reflected both positive and negative tendencies of Armenian broadcast media coverage of elections, which had appeared through the recent years. In particular, as a positive sign we can mention the absence of discrimination with respect to any of the 7 political forces, taking part in the struggle for places in Yerevan Council of Elders. At the same time, a major problem was the lack of willingness of Armenian politicians to participate in debates, open discussions on air. Also, some broadcasters continued the undesirable practice of using in their editorial coverage the footage prepared by electoral headquarters of political parties, which contains elements of pre-election promotion. As another negative tendency, we can mention the reducing of the role of public service broadcasters in the coverage of elections and political life in general. This factor is particularly relevant in the context of growing politicization of several private TV channels, which, being associated with particular parties, are to some extent implementing a certain information agenda. The latter fact can be assessed in two ways. On the one hand, reflection of different political interests in the broadcast media is a guarantee of pluralism in covering election campaigns. On the other hand, a public resource (the frequency) is, as a matter of fact, used for narrow political purposes, which contradicts the essence of the Armenian legislation. In addition, such situation in Armenian broadcast media field limits the information capacity of the political forces that do not have leverage over broadcasters, while guarantees of a more or less balanced coverage (legislation and monitoring) are present only in the short periods of official pre-election promotion. The same restriction applies to a certain extent to the civil society and independent experts.

Summing up, there were obvious improvements in the media coverage of the elections during the recent electoral cycle in Armenia, especially compared to the previous national elections, during which the media coverage had been less than satisfactory. However, in the context of the current political context, shaped by numerous election violations, large-scale misuse of the administrative

resource by the ruling party, and severe limitations of resources available for opposition parties, this openness is not enough to ensure that Armenian voters have opportunities to exercise fully their right to choose their government.

Annex 1. Election precincts where above 90 % of voter turnout was recorded.

EP	Address	Total number part	Part %	R. H.	S.S.
10/34	RA, MJ "Yerevan-Kentron" Penitentiary, Nalbandyan104	29	100.0%	3.6%	96.4%
13/39	RA, MJ "Vardashen" Penitentiary, Nubarashen Roadway 7	44	100.0%	4.5%	95.5%
13/40	RA, MJ "Nubarashen" Penitentiary, Nubarashen Roadway 2	769	98.4%	12.6%	84.5%
14/37	Aragatsotn , Shoghakn, Secondary School	114	92.1%	3.8%	96.2%
14/39	Aragatsotn, Chknagh, Primary School	192	93.2%	3.4%	96.6%
15/10	Aragatsotn, Lernarot, Secondary School	263	91.3%	7.1%	91.3%
16/10	Ararat, Av.Isahakyan st. 1/2, Culture Palace, Abovyan	1170	92.9%	4.8%	92.4%
17/26	Ararat, Ditak, Mall, Mikoyan 4	1939	92.1%	17.8%	80.6%
17/42	Ararat, Masis, Culture Palace, Artashatyan Roadway 20	1719	90.4%	14.5%	84.5%
17/3	Ararat, Artashat, Mravyan 32, #2 building #2 school of Artashat	567	91.7%	14.2%	82.9%
17/2	Ararat, Artashat, Mravyan 32, #1 building #2 school of Artashat	1214	91.0%	16.5%	81.3%
18/16	Ararat, Nor Ughi, Kindergarten of Nor Ughi	682	91.8%	11.6%	86.3%
18/18	Ararat, Sisavan, Sisavan school	1511	91.2%	4.2%	95.8%
18/20	Ararat, Ginevet, Ginevet school	507	90.3%	4.4%	94.2%
18/36	Ararat, Yeghegnavan, Yeghegnavan Cultural Palace	1018	90.3%	3.7%	95.2%
18/39	Ararat, Goravan, Goravan Cultural Palace	1883	92.5%	10.3%	88.9%
18/40	Ararat, Dashtakar, Dashtakar Cultural Palace	430	91.4%	3.9%	93.1%
18/43	Ararat, Shaghap, Shaghap Cultural Palace	660	90.6%	16.1%	81.4%
18/45	Ararat, Lusashogh, Lusashogh Cultural Palace	407	91.9%	4.6%	94.4%
23/33	Gegharkunik, Vahan, Vahan Cultural Palace, 1st., building 45	1356	91.4%	3.7%	95.6%
23/34	Gegharkunik, Drakhtik, Drakhtik Secondary school building, 12 street, building 33	850	92.8%	3.3%	95.3%
23/35	Gegharkunik, Aghberk, Aghberk Secondary school building - 3st, building 15	710	94.0%	1.5%	98.5%

23/36	Gegharkunik, Shorzha, Shorzha Celebrations Hall -10 st. building 1/35	215	90.6%	4.7%	94.0%
23/37	Gegharkunik, Artanish, Artanish Secondary school building - 1st. building 1	405	95.2%	0.0%	100.0%
23/56	Gegharkunik, Tretuk , Secondary school building 1, roadway 7	434	90.2%	7.7%	90.4%
23/64	Gegharkunik, Jaghatsadzor, Primary school building 1, roadway 1, lane #32	174	90.2%	1.1%	98.9%
23/68	Gegharkunik, Upper Shorzha, 1street, # 79 building	102	94.5%	0.0%	100.0%
23/22	Gegharkunik, Chambarak, Charentsi 1, # 3 school of Chambarak	55	91.5%	2.0%	97.6%
24/39	Gegharkunik, Makenis, Secondary school building 1, roadway 16/2	350	90.3%	9.2%	90.8%
26/24	Kotayk, Fantan, G. Vopanyan st. 47, Secondary school	786	91.1%	4.8%	95.2%
27/10	RA, MJ "Abovyan" Penitentiary	39	100.0%	7.7%	87.2%
29/54	RA, MJ "Vanadzor" Penitentiary	55	100.0%	7.3%	90.9%
31/22	Lori, Dzoraget, School building	231	94.8%	1.8%	97.7%
32/7	Lori,Apaven, Former school building	150	98.0%	7.5%	91.2%
32/19	Lori,Paghighbyur, Club building	91	92.3%	21.7%	78.3%
32/46	Lori,Hovnanadzor, Medical Center building	42	97.6%	2.4%	97.6%
33/13	Shirak, Hartashen, Secondary school	101	94.1%	12.1%	87.9%
36/25	Shirak, Hovtashen, Primary school	267	97.0%	12.8%	85.7%
36/55	RA, MJ "Artik" Penitentiary, Harich village	51	100.0%	15.2%	80.4%
37/21	Syunik, Knatsakh, Cultural Palace building	680	91.5%	4.2%	94.6%
37/24	Syunik, Khoznavar, Cultural Palace building	270	94.4%	0.0%	100.0%
37/39	Syunik,Tegh, #2 Secondary school building	655	92.1%	0.5%	99.5%
37/40	Syunik,Tegh, Cultural Palace building	892	93.2%	0.9%	99.1%
37/43	Syunik, Kashuni, Club building	15	93.3%	0.0%	100.0%
37/77	RA, MJ "Goris" Penitentiary, Narekatsi 5	30	100.0%	3.3%	96.7%
38/26	Syunik, Aghvani, Club building	57	91.2%	3.8%	94.2%
38/32	Syunik, Sevakar, Club building	91	92.3%	14.5%	83.1%
38/65	Syunik, Agarak, Celebrations Hall	905	95.2%	6.0%	93.6%
39/35	Vayots Dzor, Arin, school	1174	94.8%	11.2%	83.3%

