



**REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS 2017**

REPORT

HELSINKI COMMITTEE OF ARMENIA

Yerevan 2017

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Preface

The present Report is about the parliamentary elections held in the Republic of Armenia (RoA) on 2 April 2017 and is based on findings of the observation mission carried out by the Helsinki Committee of Armenia and on partner organizations' reports and statements as well as on publications in the media. As compared to previous elections, these elections were particularly important because through the new Constitution¹ adopted by the 6 December 2015 referendum Armenia made a transition from a presidential to a parliamentary system of governance. As per the Constitutional amendments, the National Assembly is elected through a proportional representation system². The referendum on Constitutional amendments was followed by the debates about new Electoral Code. The new Electoral Code established that the list of voters who took part in the elections be published. That had been one of the most important demands of the opposition and civil society in all previous national elections. The requirement that the entire process of voting and vote count in polling stations be videotaped and live streamed was also introduced as were the Voter Authentication Devices to rule out multiple voting.

Even though the Constitution and the Electoral Code established the proportional electoral system, every political party submitted alongside the national list of its candidates also its district electoral lists, as a result of which there was fierce competition not only between various political parties but also between the candidates nominated by the same party on the district electoral lists³, in some cases leading to disputes and violence. 9 political forces, *viz.* 5 political parties (the Republican Party of Armenia, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF-Dashnaksutiun), Armenian Renaissance, Free Democrats, Communist Party of Armenia) and 4 alliances of political parties (Tsarukyan Alliance, YELK Alliance, Congress-Armenian People's Party Alliance and Ohanyan-Raffi-Oskanian Alliance), were nominated to run in the parliamentary elections of 2017.

¹ The Report of the Helsinki Committee of Armenia on the referendum on Constitutional amendments can be accessed at <http://armhels.com/publications/helsinkyan-komitei-zekuyicy-sahmanadrakan-popokhutyunneri-veraberyal/>

² The National Assembly shall be elected through proportional electoral system. The Electoral Code shall guarantee formation of stable parliamentary majority. Where stable parliamentary majority is not formed as a result of elections or through formation of a political coalition, a second round of election may be held. In case of holding a second round of elections, the formation of new alliances shall be permitted. The restrictions on, conditions and procedure for formation of political coalition shall be prescribed by the Electoral Code. (*Constitution of the Republic of Armenia*, Article 89, para.3).

³ Elections to the National Assembly shall be held under the proportional electoral system, from one multi-mandate constituency covering the whole territory of the Republic from among candidates for MPs nominated in the national and district electoral lists of political parties (*RoA Electoral Code*, Article 77).

Electoral Campaign

Electoral campaign in broadcasting media

According to the OSCE/ODIHR monitoring results, during the campaign the Public TV (H1) devoted an equitable share of airtime to all contestants in its newscasts. *Armenia TV* devoted almost double the news coverage to the Republican Party of Armenia and Congress-Armenian People's Party Alliance (21 and 19 per cent respectively) than to each of the other contestants. *Kentron TV* devoted significantly more news coverage (18 per cent) to the Tsarukyan Alliance than to other contestants. *Shant TV* devoted 20 per cent of the news to the Republican Party of Armenia while giving between 7 and 12 per cent to the others. *Yerkir Media TV* allocated 25 per cent of its news to the Armenian Revolutionary Federation leaving the other contestants with 6 to 13 per cent of coverage. The news coverage on all monitored TV stations was 98 per cent neutral or positive in tone. However, the monitoring results for the period from 24 February to 4 March, before the start of official campaign, revealed a clear bias of monitored TV stations in favor of their publicly perceived party affiliation⁴.

Use and abuse of administrative and financial resources

During the electoral campaign there were numerous publications about instances of *abuse* of administrative resources by political forces and individual candidates and of *giving* material assistance to voters or of *promises* of providing such assistance. On 31 March, the Independent Observer Civic Alliance published the *Long-term Observation of Electoral Campaign Report*, which contained information about instances of services provided and material support given to voters by the candidates nominated by the Republican Party of Armenia and the Tsarukyan Alliance⁵. From the campaign start on, during numerous rallies the leader of the Tsarukyan Alliance Gagik Tsarukyan manifestly made promises of material support to the citizens who

⁴ *Statement of preliminary findings and conclusions regarding parliamentary elections*. OSCE/ODIHR International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) 2 April 2017.

⁵ «Նախընտրական քարոզչության երկարաժամկետ դիտարկման զեկույց» Անկախ դիտորդ հասարակական դաշինք, 31.03.2017թ., հղում՝ http://hcav.am/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/HCAV-Report-30-03-final-draft_RS-1-1.pdf (*Long-term Observation of Electoral Campaign Report*. Independent Observer Civic Alliance. 31 March 2017. See http://hcav.am/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/HCAV-Report-30-03-final-draft_RS-1-1.pdf)

approached him with various requests. The Central Electoral Commission warned the Alliance stating that by making promises of monetary and material assistance Gagik Tsarukyan had violated the law. However, the CEC did not initiate any administrative proceedings⁶.

According to a publication in *Zhoghovurd* newspaper, those servicemen in the armed force who had already served six months and had not yet availed themselves of the leave envisaged for them by the law, they were allowed to go on leave on the condition that they would return to their military units by April 2⁷.

According to *Haykakan zhamanak* newspaper, Seda Hakobyan, a principal of kindergarten № 38 (and wife of the candidate Arman Sahakyan nominated by the Republican Party of Armenia) ordered her staff to get their relatives residing in the country's regions reregistered in Electoral District №2⁸.

On March 24, *sut.am* website published audio recordings that were made during telephone conversations with 136 principals of schools and kindergartens. Members of *Union of Informed Citizens* non-governmental organization, who had made those recordings posing as members of the Republican Party of Armenia, asked those principals about the “recruiting” lists. According to the recordings, the principals of those educational institutions compiled lists (the lists for the most part included parents of kindergarten and school children), submitted them to Regional Governors’ Offices, Town and City Halls, Offices of Districts’ Heads, to the electoral campaign headquarters of the Republican Party of Armenia or its candidates revealing the names of the candidates. The number of persons on the lists was on average 240 in case of schools and 150 in case of kindergartens, at times reaching 1,700. The principal of school №37 in the city of Gyumri even declared that they “*have been working with voters for one month already, every day, by intimidating them through any means.*”⁹ In response, the electoral campaign headquarters of the Republican Party of Armenia and the party’s Deputy Chairperson Armen Ashotyan declared that if the principals were involved in campaigning and logistical activities outside their working

⁶ «ԿԸՀ. Ծառուկյանը խախտում է օրենքը» Ազատություն Ռադիոկայան, 08.03.2017թ., հղում՝ <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/28358011.html> (Radio Liberty. *Central Electoral Commission: Tsarukyan is violating the law.* 8 March 2017. See <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/28358011.html>)

⁷ «Զինծառայողներին ուղարկում են արձակուրդ պայմանով, որ ապրիլի 2-ին լինեն զորամասում» *Lragir.am*, 21.03.2017թ., հղում՝ <http://www.lragir.am/index/arm/0/country/view/150006>. (“Servicemen went on leave on the condition that they would return to their military units by April 2.” *Lragir.am*, 21 March 2017).

⁸ «Արման Սահակյանի կինն ընտրողների հավաքագրմամբ է զբաղված. ձայնագրություն» Հայկական ժամանակ, 21.02.2017 թ., հղում՝ <http://www.armtimes.com/hy/article/105134> (“Arman Sahakyan’s wife is engaged in recruiting voters.” *Haykakan zhamanak*, 21 February 2017).

⁹ «ՀՀԿ-ն չարաշահում է վարչական ռեսուրսը դպրոցներում ու մանկապարտեզներում (114 ձայնագրություններ)» *sut.am*, 24.03.2017թ., հղում՝ <http://sut.am/archives/803> (The Republican Party of Armenia abuses an administrative resource in schools and kindergartens (114 audio recordings).” *sut.am*, 24 March 2017. See <http://sut.am/archives/803>)

hours, their actions do not contradict the law¹⁰. After the elections, 30 of those principals brought a suit against the *Union of Informed Citizens* NGO and its member Daniel Ionisyan demanding public retraction of facts, which they regard as defamatory, and to pay damages of 60 mln AMD¹¹, while the Prosecutor's Office announced that there is no corpus delicti in those recordings¹².

On 13 April 2017, Haysatan 24 media outlet published an audio recording made during a meeting of employees of **SAS Group Ltd**. One can hear in the recording how the moderator of the meeting demands that in the parliamentary elections to be held on 2 April employees should vote for Artak Sargsyan, who was nominated by the Republican Party of Armenia, and should involve their family members, relatives and friends. Those employees with few people on the list [with passport and other data of people who committed to vote for Artak Sargsyan] were publicly shamed and words of sarcasm and threats of dismissal were hurled at them, while those with many names on the list received encouragement and were promised higher wages, promotion and travel packages¹³. On April 19, the RoA Special Investigative Service initiated a criminal case as per Article 154² para. 2 of the Criminal Code¹⁴.

According to the results of the long-term observation mission by the Independent Observer Civic Alliance, an employee of the Copper-molybdenum plant in Kajaran was

¹⁰ «Ընտրական օրենսգիրքը չի արգելում ներգրավված լինել քարոզչական աշխատանքներում աշխատանքային ժամից դուրս» Արմենպրես, 24.03.2017թ., հղում՝ <https://www.armenpress.am/arm/news/884022/yntrakan-orengirgy-chi-argelum-nergravvats-linel-qarozchakan.html> (“The Electoral Code does not prohibit involvement in electoral campaign activities outside working hours.” *Armenpress*, 24 March 2017. <https://www.armenpress.am/arm/news/884022/yntrakan-orengirgy-chi-argelum-nergravvats-linel-qarozchakan.html>)

«Ա. Աշոտյան. «ՀՀԿ-ի դեմ միտումնավոր հակաքարոզչություն է իրականացվում» a1plusnews, 28.03.2017թ., հղում՝ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4osHx9w5iz0> (“A. Ashotyan. “A smear campaign is intentionally conducted against the RPA.” *a1plusnews*, 28 March 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4osHx9w5iz0>)

¹¹ «ՀՀԿ-ի համար ձայներ հավաքագրած տնօրենները 60 միլիոն են պահանջում. դատի են տվել Բոաննիսյանին» Հայկական ժամանակ, 10.04.2017թ., հղում՝ <http://armtimes.com/hy/article/109166> (“The principals who collected votes for the RPA demand 60 mln AMD: They brought a law suit against Ioannisyan.” *Haykakan zhamanak*, 10 April 2017. <http://armtimes.com/hy/article/109166>)

¹² « Գյումրիի թիվ 37 դպրոցի տնօրենի արարքում «քրգործի հիմքեր չկան» Ազատություն Ռադիոկայան, 17.04.2017թ., հղում՝ <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/28434875.html> (““There are no grounds for a criminal case” in the actions of the principals of school №37 in Gyumri.” *Radio Liberty*. 17 April 2017. <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/28434875.html>)

¹³ «Նախընտրական ծողով «ՄԱՍ» գրուպում» Hayastan24.com, 13.03.2017թ., հղում՝ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lw82y1i_nNM (“Electoral campaign meeting in SAS Group.” *Hayastan24.com*, 13 March (2017). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lw82y1i_nNM)

¹⁴ *Coercion* of a voter to vote for or against any one of the candidates, political parties (alliance of parties) or referendum campaign initiatives or to participate in elections or to refuse from participation in elections, *which was done* with damaging property or with a threat to damage property, with violence or with a threat of using violence, personally or through a mediator, giving voter a bribe, *i.e. promising or giving money, property, the right to property, securities or any other privilege*, for himself or for the person he represents (political parties, alliances of parties).

fired for failing to collect passport data of 100 citizens who would vote for the Republican Party of Armenia¹⁵.

As per Article 114 of the RoA Labor Code, employee's convictions or views and affiliation in political parties, inter alia, are not considered as legitimate reasons for the termination of the employment contract on the initiative of the employer. The grounds for emergence of labor rights and obligation are thoroughly presented in Article 36. Article 3 of the same Code prohibits any type of compulsory work, while Article 37 establishes that while exercising their rights and fulfilling their duties employers, employees and their representatives are bound to comply with the law and act in a sound and reasonable manner. Abuse of labor rights is prohibited.

After the elections the Civic Observer Initiative announced that having studied the signed voter lists, they discovered 106,000 citizens' registration at unknown addresses¹⁶. Having reviewed data on the final lists of citizens who had the right to vote in the 2017 parliamentary elections (the lists were posted on the official website police.am of the RoA Police), representatives of the YELK Alliance found out that the total of 18,404 voters were registered at 616 addresses in the city of Yerevan¹⁷.

Violence and Pressure

The electoral campaign in the 2017 parliamentary elections was launched on March 5 and was marred by tensions. Instances of politically motivated violence and pressure were registered not only during the electoral campaign but even before it was officially launched. Before the start and during the electoral campaign mass media disseminated numerous pieces of information about unequal conditions for campaigning, non-allocation of premises for campaign offices of the opposition forces or refusal to allocate premises to them by bringing pressure to

¹⁵ «Նախընտրական քարոզչության երկարաժամկետ դիտարկման զեկույց» Անկախ դիտորդ հասարակական դաշինք, 31.03.2017թ., հղում՝ http://hcav.am/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/HCAV-Report-30-03-final-draft_RS-1-1.pdf (*Long-term Observation of Electoral Campaign Report*. Independent Observer Civic Alliance. 31 March 2017. See http://hcav.am/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/HCAV-Report-30-03-final-draft_RS-1-1.pdf)

¹⁶ ««Հրապարակ». 106 հազար քաղաքացի գրանցված է անհայտ հասցեներում» Հրապարակ, 12.04.2017թ., հղում՝ <http://hraparak.am/?p=143404&l=am/hraparak+106+hazar+qaxaqaci+grancvac+e+anhayt+hascenero%D6%82m> (“106,000 citizens registration at unknown addresses?” *Hraparak*, 12 April 2017, See <http://hraparak.am/?p=143404&l=am/hraparak+106+hazar+qaxaqaci+grancvac+e+anhayt+hascenero%D6%82m>)

¹⁷ «Բազմաթիվ հասցեներում 100-ից ավելի անձինք են հաշվառված. 18 հազար ընտրող 621 հասցեում» Հայկական ժամանակ, 05.05.2017թ., հղում՝ <http://armtimes.com/hy/article/111225> (“In many single addresses over 100 persons are registered: 18,000 voters at 621 addresses.” *Haykakan zhamanak*, 5 April 2017, See <http://armtimes.com/hy/article/111225>)

bear on the owners of leased premises¹⁸. Many media outlets disseminated publications about heated disputes between candidates on the district electoral lists of the Republican Party of Armenia, ARF-Dashnaktsutiun and Tsarukyan Alliance and between supporters of political parties or alliances of parties, about brawls and incidents of stabbing in various regions of the Republic of Armenia¹⁹. According to the 2017 first *Quarterly Report of the Committee To Protect Freedom of Expression on the Situation with Freedom of Expression and Violations of Rights of Journalists and Media in Armenia*, during the official campaign 3 cases of physical violence and 18 cases of pressure on the media representatives were registered²⁰.

On March 12 and 14 there were clashes in Jrarat community in Armavir region with the participation of members of Ohanyan-Raffi-Oskanian Alliance (ORO) and Lernik Yerasosyan

¹⁸«Փակվել են Մասիսում ու Արտաշատում «Ելք» դաշինքի թեկնածուի բացած շտաբները. «Հայկական ժամանակ» Առավոտ, 08.03.2017թ., հղում՝ <http://www.aravot.am/2017/03/08/863315/> (“The campaign offices of the YELK Alliance candidates have been shut down in Masis and Artashat towns: Haykakan zhamanak.” *Aravot*, 8 March 2017, See <http://www.aravot.am/2017/03/08/863315/>)

«Հրայր Անտոնյանը Արարկիրի դպրոցների տնօրեններին հրահանգել է աշխատել ՍՍՍ-ի Արտակիր օգտին» Հայկական ժամանակ, 01.03.2017թ., հղում՝ <http://armtimes.com/hy/article/106066/> (“Hrayr Antonyan instructed school principals in Arabkir district [in Yerevan] to work for Artak of SAS.” *Haykakan zhamanak*, 1 March 2017. See <http://armtimes.com/hy/article/106066/>)

¹⁹«Մասիսում բախվել են ՀՀԿ-ական երկու թեկնածուների կողմնակիցները», Ազատություն ռադիոկայան 24.02.2017թ., հղում՝ <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/28330622.html> (“Supporters of two candidates from the Republican Party of Armenia clashed in the town of Masis.” *Radio Liberty*, 24 February 2017. See <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/28330622.html>)

«Պատգամավոր Բազմասեր Առաքելյանի կողմնակիցները ծեծկոտուք են կազմակերպել», Երկիր մեդիա 26.02.2017թ., հղում՝ <http://yerkirmedia.am/1political/bazmaser-araqelyan-ceckrtuq-dashnakcutyun/> (Supporters of Member of Parliament Bazmaser Arakelyan started a brawl.” *Yerkir media*, 26 February 2017. See <http://yerkirmedia.am/1political/bazmaser-araqelyan-ceckrtuq-dashnakcutyun/>)

«Արարատի մարզում ՀՀԿ-ականը 23-ամյա ԲՀԿ-ականի է դանակահարել», Հայկական ժամանակ 01.03.2017թ., հղում՝ <http://www.armtimes.com/hy/article/106095/> (“A member of the Republican Party of Armenia stabbed a 23-year-old member of Prosperous Armenia Party in Ararat region.” *Haykakan zhamanak*, 1 March 2017. See <http://www.armtimes.com/hy/article/106095/>)

«Բախում Աշնակ գյուղում՝ ՀՀԿ-ականների և ՀՅԴ-ականների միջև» Առավոտ, 19.03.2017թ., հղում՝ <http://www.aravot.am/2017/03/19/867805/> (“Clashes in Ashnak village between members of the Republican Party of Armenia and ARF-Dashnaktsutiun.” *Aravot*, 19 March 2017. See <http://www.aravot.am/2017/03/19/867805/>)

²⁰ «Հայաստանում խոսքի ազատության վիճակի եւ լրագրողների ու ՋԼՄ-ների իրավունքների խախտումների մասին ԽՄՊԿ-ի 2017 թ. առաջին եռամսյակային զեկույց (հունվար-մարտ)» Խոսքի ազատության պաշտպանության կոմիտե, 25.04.2017թ., հղում՝

<http://khosq.am/reports/%D5%B0%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%A1%D5%BD%D5%BF%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B4-%D5%AD%D5%B8%D5%BD%D6%84%D5%AB-%D5%A1%D5%A6%D5%A1%D5%BF%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%A1%D5%B6-%D5%BE%D5%AB%D5%B3%D5%A1%D5%AF%D5%AB-10/> (“The 2017 first Quarterly Report of the CPFE on the Situation with Freedom of Expression and Violations of Rights of Journalists and Media in Armenia (January-March).” *Committee To Protect Freedom of Expression*, 25 April 2017. See <http://khosq.am/reports/%D5%B0%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%A1%D5%BD%D5%BF%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B4-%D5%AD%D5%B8%D5%BD%D6%84%D5%AB-%D5%A1%D5%A6%D5%A1%D5%BF%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%A1%D5%B6-%D5%BE%D5%AB%D5%B3%D5%A1%D5%AF%D5%AB-10/>)

who is a brother of the RoA Deputy Police Chief Levon Yeranosyan. The RoA Investigative Committee confirmed the fact that during the 12 March dispute Lernik Yeranosyan used firearm²¹. According to the ORO Alliance, during a meeting that they organized on March 12 in Jrrarat village Jrrarat Community Head Samvel Galstyan verbally abused the meeting participants and demanded that they leave the venue. An altercation ensued between him and the meeting participants. On the same day, in a home of the ORO Alliance sympathizers Police Colonel Lernik Yeranosyan threatened the Alliance members with a handgun, fired shots into the air. However, the latter managed to seize the handgun and subjected Yeranosyan to beating. **On March 14**, 4 shots were fired from a sub-machine gun into the air. ORO Alliance declared that police servicemen Seryozha Galstyan, a brother of Community Head Samvel Galstyan, was armed with the sub-machine gun. After the incident 3 sympathizers of ORO Alliance were taken to *Erebuni* Medical Center. One of them had a gunshot wound²². The video material posted on the Internet shows that the RoA Deputy Police Chief Levon Yeranosyan was present during the incident²³. According to the report published by the Union of Informed Citizens NGO, Lernik and Levon Yeranosyans reside in Jrrarat village and are uncles of the village Head, member of the Republican Party of Armenia Samvel Galstyan²⁴. In connection with the incident the RoA Investigative Committee launched a criminal case. The Jrrarat village resident Tigran Sargsyan was detained, charged and remand in custody was selected for him as a measure of restraint.

On March 22, the former Defense Minister of Karabagh, supporter of the ORO Alliance Samvel Babayan was detained and then arrested within the framework of the criminal case on illegal transfer of *Igla* portable antiaircraft missile complex from Georgia to Armenia²⁵. During the interrogation Samvel Babayan declared that he has nothing to do with the transfer of the

²¹ «Պարզվում են Ջրառատում տեղի ունեցած վիճարանության հանգամանքները» ՀՀ քննչական կոմիտե, 13.03.2017թ., հղում՝ <http://www.investigative.am/news/view/lernik-eranosyan.html> (“The circumstances of the dispute that took place in Jrrarat village are being clarified.” *RoA Investigative Committee*. 13 March 2017. See <http://www.investigative.am/news/view/lernik-eranosyan.html>)

²² «Ջրառատում տեղի ունեցածը բավականին խորը արմատներ ունի. մանրամասներ» Ժողովուրդ, 15.03.2017թ., հղում՝ <http://armlur.am/666438/> (“What happened in Jrrarat village has quite deep roots: details.” *Zhoghovurd*, 15 March 2017. See <http://armlur.am/666438/>)

²³ «Ջրառատ գյուղի միջադեպին անմիջական մասնակցություն է ունեցել նաև Լևոն Երանոսյանը», Zham Tesanyut 14.03.2017թ., հղում՝ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JdLPABYuRe0> (“Levon Yeranosyan took a direct part in the incident in Jrrarat village.” *Zham Tesanyut*, 14 March 2017. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JdLPABYuRe0>)

²⁴ «Արտահերթ զեկույց Ջրառատի դեպքերի մասին», Իրազեկ քաղքացիների միավորում 15.03.2017թ., հղում՝ <http://uicarmenia.org/3090> (*Special Report on events in Jrrarat*. Union of Informed Citizens. 15 March 2017. See <http://uicarmenia.org/3090>)

²⁵ «Սամվել Բաբայանը կալանավորվեց երկու ամսով» Ազատություն Ռադիոկայան, 24.03.2017թ., հղում՝ <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/28389382.html> (“Samvel Babayan has been arrested for two months.” *Radio Liberty*, 24 March 2017. See <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/28389382.html>)

ՀՀ ազգային անվտանգության ծառայություն, հղում՝ <http://www.sns.am/index.php/am/news/363-22032017> (RoA National Security Service. See <http://www.sns.am/index.php/am/news/363-22032017>)

weapon and does not know the individuals who were arrested in connection with the case. One week prior to his arrest, in an interview given to *Radio Liberty* Samvel Babayan stressed his continued support of ORO Alliance and subjected the powers that be to unsparing criticism²⁶. Heads of ORO Alliance qualified Babayan's detention as persecution of the Alliance and regarded Samvel Babayan a political prisoner²⁷.

Voting

During the 2 April 2017 parliamentary elections 49 local NGOs accredited by the Central Electoral Commission carried out an observation mission. It should be noted that from the very beginning the fact that the CEC granted accreditation to a large number of local organizations involving 28,000 observers raised serious concerns.

The Helsinki Committee of Armenia was among the organizations that carried out an observation mission. Its 120 observers carried out an observation mission in 52 polling stations in Ajapniak administrative district in the city of Yerevan. An observation mission was also performed by Transparency International Anticorruption Center (about 3,100 observers) (the *Citizen Observer Initiative*) as well as the *Independent Observer Civic Alliance* (about 200 observers) that was established by the Vanadzor Office of Helsinki Citizen Assembly, Union of Informed Citizens, Women's Community Council of (the town of) Martuni and Press Club (of the town of) Goris non-governmental organizations. The above-mentioned organizations held press conferences and issued statements and reports regarding the Election Day. In their view, the parliamentary elections were marred by numerous flaws and violations and the pressure that was brought to bear on free expression of voters' will²⁸.

²⁶«Լևոն Երանոսյանն անձամբ ներգրավված է Ջրաստտի միջադեպում. Սամվել Բաբայան» Ազատություն Ռադիոկայան, 15.03.2017թ., հղում՝ <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/28371063.html> (“Samvel Babayan: Levon Yeranossyan was personally involved in the incident in Jirarat.” *Radio Liberty*, 15 March 2017. See <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/28371063.html>)

²⁷ «Բաբայանի Հովհաննիսյան. «Սամվել Բաբայանը քաղաքականացված է» Ազատություն Ռադիոկայան, 27.03.2017թ., հղում՝ <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/28392965.html> (“Raffi Hovhannissian: “Samvel Babayan is a political prisoner.”” *Radio Liberty*, 27 March 2017. See <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/28392965.html>)

²⁸«Հայաստանի Հելսինկյան կոմիտեի զեկույցը 2017 թ. ՀՀ ԱԺ ընտրությունների վերաբերյալ» Հայաստանի Հելսինկյան կոմիտե, 07.05.2017թ., հղում՝ <http://armhels.com/publications/hayastani-helsinki-koitei-zekuycy-aj-yntrutyunner/> (*The Helsinki Committee of Armenia Report on the 2 April 2017 RoA parliamentary elections*. Helsinki

In the polling stations where Helsinki Committee of Armenia carried out an election observation mission, the observers from a number of local organizations pursued their political parties' interests (Tsarukyan Alliance and Republican Party of Armenia), instructed voters for whom they should cast their ballots for, "helped" them to vote, attempted to give instructions to Precinct Electoral Commission members, to control the election process and to engage in campaigning, etc. Those organizations are *Full Life, Regional Center for Initiatives and Projects Development, Center for Economic and Social Rights, United Leaders' Chamber, Eurasian Integration, Institute for Development of Legal Culture, Democracy and Election Processes* and *All-Armenian Youth Association*.

- A significant number of polling stations were **not accessible** to persons with **locomotor disability**, special devices intended for organizing voting for **visually impaired** persons were absent, the polling rooms were not adequately furnished and in almost all polling stations **disruption in the operation of Voter Authentication Devices** were registered.

- Not all PEC members in the observed polling stations were knowledgeable enough **about the voting procedure** (for instance, they took a break during the vote count session) or were indifferent to the voting procedure (for instance, violations of the procedure for changing the Commission members' shifts that were determined through drawing lots).

- Some proxies and local observers present in the polling stations attempted to regulate the voting process and to give instructions to PEC members. Instances were observed when those individuals interfered with the activities of PEC members, replaced the latter, took part in vote count, etc.

- In some polling stations the performance of the observation mission was obstructed. Observers were intimidated and their rights were limited.

- **Crowds gathered and clusters of vehicles parked** outside of many polling stations (within the 50-meter radius). The individuals assembled there would meet voters who were

Committee of Armenia, 7 May 2017. See <http://armhels.com/publications/hayastani-helsinkyan-koitei-zekuyacy-aj-yuntrutyunner/>

«Տեղեկանք 02.04.2017թ. ԱԺ ընտրությունների ընթացքում և հետո «Անկախ դիտորդ» հասարակական դաշինքի իրավաբանական ծմբի կողմից իրականացված գործողությունների վերաբերյալ» Հելսինկյան Քաղաքացիական Սասնաբլեայի Վանաձորի գրասենյակ, 12.04.2017թ., հղում՝ <http://hcav.am/publications/12-04-2017-02/> (*Report on the activities undertaken by the Legal team of Independent Observer Civic Alliance during and after the 2 April 2017 parliamentary elections*. Vanadzor Office of Helsinki Citizen Assembly, 12 April 2017. See <http://hcav.am/publications/12-04-2017-02/>)

««Քաղաքացի դիտորդը» բազմաթիվ բողոքներ է ներկայացրել ընտրախախտումների վերաբերյալ» Քաղաքացի դիտորդ, հղում՝ <https://citizenobserver.am/hy/news/view/sokz2017-04-14-13-18> (*The Citizen Observer Initiative submitted numerous complaints concerning electoral violations*. The Citizen Observer. See <https://citizenobserver.am/hy/news/view/sokz2017-04-14-13-18>)

coming to cast their ballots and would accompany them in groups or one by one to the polling station. Many of those individuals from time to time talked to the *Tsarukyan Alliance* or *Republican Party of Armenia* proxies or to observers from a number of local NGOs. Observers from those local NGOs represented **political parties' interests**, in some instances stating that in no uncertain terms.

- Often citizens coming to cast their ballots violated the principle of secret ballot. They revealed who they voted for by clearly showing outside the voting booth what ballot paper they put into the envelope or by saying out loud about the choice they made.

- There were numerous instances of the same individuals helping those voters who were unable to vote **on their own** as well as of **several individuals** entering the same voting booth simultaneously.

- Registered were attempts of **multiple** voting.

- In many polling stations unauthorized persons were present who undertook activities **in the interest of** a political party or an alliance of parties or of their candidates, exercised control over the voting process and violated secrecy of ballot.

On the Election Day also registered were instances of violence against and pressure brought to bear on reporters. On April 3, a number of non-governmental organizations issued a statement noting 2 incidents of violence and 8 incidents of obstruction and pressure targeting reporters²⁹.

Shoghik Galstyan, a reporter with *Araratnews.am* news website, and *Radio Liberty* reporter Sisak Gabrielyan were assaulted near the campaign office of the Republican Party of Armenia candidate Hakob Beglaryan in Kond administrative district in Yerevan. S. Gabrielyan noticed cases of vote-buying in the campaign office of the Republican Party of Armenia, which was very close to the polling station. The individuals in the campaign office said that they were paying salaries. The crowd near the campaign office demanded that the reporters leave the premises and stop videotaping³⁰. The reporters went on with videotaping and then two residents started shoving the reporters and seizing their videotaping devices. Julietta Kokolyan and Levon

²⁹ «Լրագրողներին խոչընդոտելու և բռնություն կիրառելու դեպքերի վերաբերյալ հայտարարություն» Ա1+, 03.04.2017թ., հղում՝ <http://www.a1plus.am/1533663.html> (*Statement about incidents of obstruction and violence against reporters*. A1+, 3 April 2017. See <http://www.a1plus.am/1533663.html>)

³⁰ «Հանրապետականի շտաբում հարձակման է ենթարկվել «Ազատության» թղթակիցը» Ազատություն Ռադիոկայան, 02.04.2017թ., հղում՝ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9i9IKI91CFE> (“A Radio Liberty reporter was assaulted in the campaign office of the Republican Party of Armenia candidate.” Radio Liberty, 2 April 2017. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9i9IKI91CFE>)

Gasparyan were charged under Article 149 Part 2 para.3 of the RoA Criminal Code³¹ for using violence against the reporters and obstructing their professional activities.

Professional activities of Tirayr Muradyan, a reporter with *Haykakan zhamanak* daily, were obstructed in polling station № 9/29 in Kentron administrative district of Yerevan. In connection with the incident a criminal case was instituted under Article 149 Part 2 para.3 of the RoA Criminal Code³².

On April 9, the Central Electoral Commission published the election results, according to which 4 political forces obtained seats in the National Assembly, *viz.* the Republican Party of Armenia (**49.08%**), Tsarukyan Alliance (**27.3%**), YELK Alliance (**7.78%**) and ARF-Dashnaktsutiun (**6.57%**).

Conclusions

Since the declaration of independence, elections in the Republic of Armenia were held with gross violations, *viz.* intimidation, ballot-box stuffing, snatching of ballot-boxes, manipulation of voting results protocols, terrorization of and violence against opposition candidates, while from 2000 on, vote-buying too became widespread. In the aftermath of each successive elections an impression was created that that powers that be try to make voting and vote count as much transparent as possible. Through the Constitutional amendments referendum, which was held in 2015 and was also accompanied by numerous violations, the presidential system of government in Armenia was replaced with the parliamentary one. The specific feature of the 2017 parliamentary elections was that the position of the President will not be filled through general elections and that in the years to come the National Assembly will play a key role in the formation of the system of government. Even though voting and vote count were held

³¹ «Ավարտվել է «Ազատություն» ռադիոկայանի և «araratnews.am» լրատվական կայքի լրագրողների մասնագիտական գործունեությանը խոչընդոտելու համար մեղադրվող անձանց վերաբերյալ քրեական գործի նախաքննությունը» ՀՀ քննչական կոմիտե, 27.04.2017թ., հղում՝ <http://www.ccc.am/hy/1428493746/3/5506> (“Preliminary investigation is over of the criminal case of individuals charged with obstruction of professional activities of *Radio Liberty* and *Ararat.news* news website reporters.” RoA Investigative Committee, 27 April 2017. See <http://www.ccc.am/hy/1428493746/3/5506>)

³² «Լրագրողի գործունեությանը խոչընդոտելու փաստով հարուցված քրեական գործն ընդունվել է Հատուկ քննչական ծառայության վարույթ» ՀՀ քննչական կոմիտե, 19.04.2017թ., հղում՝ <http://www.ccc.am/hy/1428493746/3/5496> (“The criminal case launched in connection with the fact of obstruction of reporter’s activities has been admitted to the RoA Special Investigative Service for investigation.” RoA Investigative Committee, 19 April 2017. See <http://www.ccc.am/hy/1428493746/3/5496>)

for the most part in transparent fashion, the reproduction of power was guaranteed through the use of administrative and financial resources. Many facts of the use and abuse of administrative and financial resources were uncovered and acts of violence were committed, which, however, did not have any appropriate legal consequences.

The *Helsinki Committee of Armenia* states that the parliamentary elections held on 2 April 2017 were marred by numerous flaws and violations, that pressure was brought to bear on free expression of voters' will and that the elections did not comply with principles and standards of democratic elections.