

Post-Election Statement

OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Election Observation Mission to the Presidential Election in Armenia, 18 February 2013

Overall, the 18 February election in Armenia represents an improvement compared to previous presidential elections. The election was generally conducted in a peaceful manner and was well-administered under an improved legal framework. Freedoms of assembly and expression were generally respected, and media provided balanced coverage. However, the limited field of candidates meant that the election was not genuinely competitive. The candidates who did run were able to campaign in a free atmosphere and to present their views to voters, but the campaign overall failed to engage the public's interest.

The fact that several influential political forces chose not to field candidates in this election seems to have contributed to apathy and a lack of trust among voters. In addition, electoral campaigns were often not based on concrete political platforms, with several instead focusing on personalities and electoral conduct. Voters were therefore presented with a limited array of genuinely different political options.

On the other hand, observers noted increased citizen engagement in political debates on social media. This seems to be a new and growing phenomenon which stakeholders could make use of in the future. Some stakeholders questioned whether the required candidate registration deposit of AMD 8 million (ca. 15,000 EUR) was onerous, and the only woman among prospective candidates failed to meet this requirement.

There were persistent reports, particularly at local levels, of an unclear distinction between the campaign activities of the incumbent and state structures. These included misuse of administrative resources and pressure on public employees to participate in the election and campaign events. Until such practices are eliminated, there will not be a level playing field between electoral candidates, and Armenia will remain in breach of its commitments in the 1990 Copenhagen Document.

The authorities repeatedly declared their intention to conduct democratic elections in line with OSCE commitments. The Prosecutor General's Office actively encouraged citizens to report instances of vote-buying or other violations and guaranteed that such reports would not lead to negative repercussions for those reporting. Unfortunately, allegations of vote-buying persist, somewhat undermining voters' confidence.

The election administration generally functioned in a professional and transparent manner, meeting legal deadlines. Added transparency, including the prompt display of disaggregated results and the live streaming of Central Election Commission sessions, contributed to trust in the ability of authorities to technically administer the election.

Although the police have made significant efforts to improve the voter register, inaccuracies continue to be widely reported. Many stakeholders, including candidates and civil society representatives noted the potential for fraud and misuse of weaknesses. This has been a long-standing issue in Armenia, and will require dedicated political will to resolve.

This was the first presidential election held following the adoption of a new Electoral Code which generally provides a sound framework for the conduct of democratic elections. Nonetheless, the disenfranchisement of all prisoners, regardless of the severity of the crime committed, is in breach of Armenia's international commitments guaranteeing universal suffrage.

Transparency in campaign financing is critical to fairness and public trust in government. The new Electoral Code has strengthened finance rules, and requires reporting on services, assets and products related to campaigning. However, the fact that campaign offices were excluded from reportable expenses and the opinion of the CEC that the establishment of dedicated campaign bank accounts is not mandatory challenged the underlying principle of transparency.

Candidate registration was inclusive, and candidates reported virtually no hindrance to their campaigning. This freedom is important progress for Armenia. The assassination attempt on one candidate raises serious concern, but was a unique case which did not reflect the overall campaign environment.

Media coverage enabled voters to inform themselves regarding the campaign. Broadcast media generally provided balanced coverage of presidential candidates, reflecting the level of their campaigning. Public broadcasters provided free airtime to all candidates, in accordance with the law, and an array of private media outlets also enabled candidates to present their views and qualifications. However, the total lack of direct debates between candidates and a limited amount of critical journalism limited voters' ability to compare and contrast political platforms.

On election day, the voting process was well organized in most of the polling stations observed. However, instances of organizational problems were observed as was one case of ballot box stuffing. As in the May 2012 parliamentary elections, the inking of passports did not provide the intended safeguard against multiple voting, as the ink could easily be wiped off. The vote count was assessed positively in most cases, although there were observations of procedural problems and isolated cases of non-matching figures. Many observers noted low participation by domestic observers, and only few proxies representing the presidential candidates in polling stations. The CEC declared a preliminary voter turnout of 60,05 per cent.

19 February, 2013 – The Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE (OSCE PA) was invited to observe the presidential election in Armenia by the President of the National Assembly of Armenia in line with OSCE commitments. The OSCE PA decided to deploy a limited election observation mission led by PA Vice President Tonino Picula (Croatia).

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly assessed whether this election was in conformity with the OSCE commitments as stated in the 1990 Copenhagen Document.

The OSCE PA started its election observation by establishing an office in Yerevan on 6 February 2013, following a pre-election visit. On election day, 30 parliamentary observers visited more than 100 polling stations in Yerevan, towns and villages in Sevan, Armavir, Ashtarak and Kotayk. The OSCE PA would like to thank the Armenian authorities and people for their hospitality and co-operation.

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