



## EVALUATION OF THE APRIL 2, 2017 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN ARMENIA

The 6th parliamentary elections were held in Armenia on April 2, 2017. According to the unofficial results announced by the Armenian Central Election Commission, 60.86% (namely 1,575,382) of the 2,588,590 registered voters participated in the elections and the Republican Party of Armenia won with 49.17% (771,247) of total votes.

According to the Article 89 of the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia with the amendments, which were introduced by the referendum on December 6, 2015, Armenia has a single legislative body composed of at least 101 deputies. According to the Electoral Code of the Republic of Armenia, parliamentary candidates may be nominated by the political parties and the alliances of the political parties. Alliances of the political parties may be formed by at least two political parties and each political party can only be involved in one alliance. The political party included in an alliance cannot participate in the elections alone (Article 81). In order to be elected to the National Assembly as a deputy in the name of a party or alliance of parties, a candidate needs to win at least 5% of total votes of the voters of his party and at least 7% of total votes of his alliances (Article 95). Armenian citizens who are over the age of 25 years and who are legally eligible may be elected as a deputy of the National Assembly (Article 80). The deputies of the National Assembly are elected for 5 years (Article 90).

Within the framework of the election laws, five political parties and one alliance of political parties could pass the 5% and 7% vote thresholds in the 5th parliamentary elections, which were held on May 6, 2012 with the participation of 8 political parties and 1 alliance of political parties. As a result, the Armenian Republican Party took 40 seats, the Prosperous Armenia Party took 28 seats, the Armenian National Congress (Opposition Alliance) took 7 seats, the Heritage Party, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation "Dashnaksutyun" and the Rule of Law Party each took 5 seats in the National Assembly. The other 41 seats were won by the Republican Party of Armenia (29 seats) and the Prosperous Armenia Party (9 seats) in accordance with the majority election system. The Heritage Party, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation "Dashnaksutyun" parties and the independent candidates each gained 1 seat. The fact that the Armenian Republican Party constitutes the vast majority of the National Parliament means that the government did not face a serious opposition from the Parliament in the law-making process.

The parliamentary elections corresponded to the period, in which a Constitution reform was being made, protests of some opposition groups were being held in the country, high tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan have become intensive due to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and in this

context, the period of socio-economic tension in the country, where alliance ties with Russia (especially military field) have been strengthened. As known, it is expected that the Constitutional reform, with its first four chapters entered into force on December 22, 2015, will be completed by April 2018. The Constitutional Reform, which was launched by the initiative of the President Serzh Sargsyan, was supported by the Armenian Republican Party, the Prosperous Armenia Party and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation "Dashnaksutyun" Party. The Heritage, the Rule of Law and the Armenian National Congress parties strongly opposed the amendment to the Constitution. Basically, the reform aims to strengthen the role of the parties in the political system and to increase their influence on the formation of the Cabinet (Government) by collecting political power in the hands of the National Assembly. Thus, it is aimed to facilitate the transition from the presidential system to the parliamentary system and to expand the powers of the Prime Minister. For instance, according to the new Constitution, the term of office of the President was increased from 5 years to 7 years, while the President's right to be elected twice has been removed. The same person may be elected as the President of the Republic only once. (Article 124). Moreover, the provision for the President to be elected by the citizens was directly abolished and electing the members of the National Assembly by the vote of four-thirds of the deputies was ruled. On the other hand, according to other amendments, upon recommendation of the Prime Minister, the President of the Republic appoints the Ambassadors (Article 132) and the Chief of General Staff and at the time of war, the Prime Minister can act as the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces (Article 155).

The "Four-Day War", which took place in Nagorno-Karabakh on April 2-5, 2016, prompted the Armenian authorities to strengthen their military alliance with Russia. In this direction, during his official visit to Moscow, the Defense Minister of Armenia, Vigen Sargsyan, on November 30, 2016, signed an agreement on the United Group of Troops, which united the two countries' armies. The official sources state that the United Group of Troops will include the Russian 102nd Military Base in Armenia and some military units affiliated to the Armed Forces. It is also worth noting that the group is not against third countries. According to the press reports in Armenia, the main task of the United Group of Troops is to forewarn Russia and Armenia of possible military attacks and to protect the items and borders that are considered important for the existence and continuation of the state. In short, it can be predicted that the military alliances between Armenia and Russia will be strengthened in the near future.

Under these conditions, 1,500 deputy candidates participated in the recent elections. According to the results of 2009 polling stations operated in 13 electoral districts nationwide, the distribution of votes is as follows: the Republican Party of Armenia 49.17% (771,247); the Tsarukyan Alliance 27.35% (428,965); the Way Out Alliance 7.78% (122,049); the Armenian Revolutionary Federation "Dashnaksutyun" Party 6.58% (103,173); the Armenian Renaissance Party 3.72% (58,277); the Ohanyan-Raffi-Oskanian Alliance 2.07% (32,504); the Armenian National Congress and the People's Party of Armenia Alliance 1.66% (25,975); the Free Democrats Party 0.94% (14,746) and the Armenian Communist Party 0.75% (11,745). Accordingly, two political parties and two alliances of political parties could pass the 5% and 7% thresholds. According to the lists of political parties and alliance of political parties, the Republican Party of Armenia took 58 seats, the Tsarukyan Alliance took 31 seats, the Way Out Alliance took 9 seats and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation "Dashnaksutyun" Party took 7 seats of the total 105 seats in the National Assembly.

Total of 650 representatives from international organizations such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the CIS Parliamentary Assembly and European Parliament, and 28 thousand local observers monitored the National Assembly elections in Armenia. The CIS representatives reported that the elections were open, transparent, legitimate and adhered to fundamental ethical principles. However, according to the OSCE representatives, the election process was generally calm and peaceful and the principles of freedom were respected in the elections, although some organizational problems and undue interference in the process, mostly by party representatives, were observed.

To conclude, according to the current Constitution, Serj Sargsyan's presidential term will end on March 2018 and constitutional reforms will be completed by April 2018. In this context, Sargsyan, who was born in 1954, may continue to rule the country over the Republican Party of Armenia. Indeed, the Constitutional reforms will remove possible obstacles that Sargsyan can face in the process. The election results also provide a majority of support for Sargsyan. It should also be expressed that there is quite high desire to receive the Armenian Revolutionary Federation "Dashnaksutyun" Party's support and Russia's support in future.

## Politics, Foreign Affairs and Security

- The Central Election Commission of Armenia reported that the President Serzh Sarkisian's ruling Republican Party won the parliamentary elections with 49.17% taking 58 out of 105 mandates in the new Parliament, while the opposition Tsarukian Alliance gained 27.35% (31 mandates). It was also stated that pro-Western opposition Yelk Alliance (Way Out) and Armenian Revolutionary Federation got 7.78% (9 mandates) and 6.58% (7 mandates) of votes, respectively. The turnout was 60.86%.
- During his official visit to Moscow, the President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, and the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, discussed further development of the Uzbek-Russian relations focusing on strengthening cooperation in the political, agriculture, culture, and tourism spheres. Moreover, the Uzbek and Russian sides discussed the increase in the trade turnover volume, expansion of ties in the transport and transit spheres. As a result of the meeting, the Governments and Ministries of the two countries signed more than 50 documents worth \$16 billion, including investment deals worth \$12 billion and trade contracts worth \$3.8 billion.
- During the meeting held in Tashkent, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan, Abdulaziz Kamilov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, Kayrat Abdrakhmanov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan, Erlan Abdildayev, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan, Sirodjidin Aslov, and the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, Vepa Khodjiyev, exchanged views on the current situation in Central Asia, focusing on further strengthening of bilateral cooperation. As a result of the meeting, the parties agreed to conduct five-sized forums of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Central Asian states on a regular basis.
- During the meeting of the CIS Council of Foreign Ministers held in Tashkent, the Heads of the Foreign Ministries of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Russia, Tajikistan and the Deputy Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan, Moldova and Turkmenistan, discussed the current state and prospects for developing cooperation in various areas of the organization's activities focusing on reinforcing regional security and stability, deepening trade, economic, cultural and humanitarian cooperation. The Foreign Ministries of the CIS member states considered 15 documents, 9 of which will be submitted to the Council of Heads of State in October 2017.
- During the 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Regional Infrastructure Confidence - Building Measures (RI-CBM) technical groups held in Ashgabat as part of the Istanbul Process on Afghanistan, the participants exchanged views on issues such as the role of transit corridors for regional integration and regional energy cooperation as a factor of sustainable economic development and stability. The Istanbul Process was created as a platform for regional dialogue and cooperation for encouraging security, political, and economic stability between Afghanistan and its neighbors. The regional technical groups for the RI-CBM within the Istanbul

Process are currently co-chaired by Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan.

- The President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, signed a law on ratification of an agreement with Russia to develop military and technical cooperation. The law was adopted by the Parliament in March 2017. The agreement on military and technical cooperation signed between Russia and Uzbekistan in 2016 is aimed at further deepening cooperation in the military and technical sphere and maintaining the scientific, technical, production and technological potential of the parties in the field of production and modernization of military products.

## Economy, Finance and Energy

- The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) announced about the allocation of the second tranche of loan to Azerbaijan's Southern Gas Corridor company for the Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) project. The IBRD allocated the second tranche worth \$146.3 million, while AIIB's second tranche amounted to \$219.5 million was allocated on April 5. The first tranche from both international financial institutions worth \$108.4 million and \$162.6 million, respectively, were allocated in February 2017.
- The Chairman of Russia's Gazprom Management Committee, Alexey Miller, and Uzbekistan's Deputy Prime Minister, Gulomjon Ibragimov, signed a contract, under which the company will annually buy 4 billion cubic meters of gas from Uzbekistan within five years, starting from 2018. It was also noted that Russia bought 6.2 billion cubic meters of gas from Uzbekistan in 2016 and plans to buy 5 billion cubic meters in 2017.
- The Head of the Russian unit of Azerbaijan's state oil company SOCAR, Farid Jafarov, announced that the company launched negotiations with Russia's Gazprom to increase the gas supply to Azerbaijan by 3-5 billion cubic meters per year. In 2015, the two companies agreed on the supply of 2 billion cubic meters of gas per year.
- The First Vice-President of SOCAR, Khoshbakht Yusifzade, reported that Azerbaijan's commercial gas stood at 4.8 billion cubic meters in the first quarter of 2017. It was also stated that Azerbaijan's total natural gas production was 29.4 billion cubic meters in 2016, including 18.71 billion cubic meters of commercial gas, of which 6.754 billion cubic meters was exported.
- During his visit to Aktau, the Minister of Economy of Azerbaijan, Shahin Mustafayev, and the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, agreed to introduce a special customs regime for the logistics center of Azerbaijani Azersun Holding in Aktau Sea Port Special Economic Zone. Azersun logistics center is the first logistics center of Azerbaijan, located outside the country. The total area of the logistics center is 8,730 square meters. The cost of the project is \$20 million.
- On the sidelines of the official visit of the President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, to Moscow, the Uzbek and Russian high-ranking authorities signed 16 bilateral agreements, contracts and other documents worth more than \$3.5 billion in trade, eco-

nomical and investment spheres. The sides also signed a contract on supply of fresh and processed fruit and vegetable products worth \$612 million to Russia, a Memorandum on the supply of Russian oil to Uzbekistan and an Agreement on cooperation in the supply of excavator equipment.

- During the 3rd Meeting of the Azerbaijan-Estonia Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation, Azerbaijan's Minister of Transport, Communication and High Technologies Ramin Guluzade and Estonia's Minister of Public Administration, Mihhail Korb signed the protocol that envisages further deepening bilateral cooperation in different areas such as energy, tourism and trade.
- The State Committee for Industry, Energy and Subsoil Use of Kyrgyzstan reported that due to the fact that the accumulation of water in the Toktogul reservoir improved in 2016, the country will be able to export electricity to neighboring countries in 2017. It was also stated that as of April 2017, the water level in the reservoir of the Toktogul hydro power plant (HPP) was 12.7 billion cubic meters, which is by 3.8 billion cubic meters more than last year. The Toktogul HPP, built in 1975, generates up to 40% of all electricity in the country.
- The President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, signed a decree that provides a wide range of benefits and preferences to businesses operating in the country's Khorezm province and Karakalpakstan autonomous region. The decree exempted legal entities registered and operating in the two regions from mandatory sales of foreign exchange earnings from exports of industrial products with the exception of commodities.

## Society and Culture

- Under the decree of the President of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, the country's Deputy Prime Minister, Esenmyrat Orazgeldiyev, was appointed as a member of Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS). Turkmenistan will chair the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea between 2017-2019. The IFAS was established in 1993 by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to support scientific and practical research and organize financing social-economic and environmental programs in the region aimed at improving environmental situation of Aral Sea region.
- The Iranian Parliament declined a draft bill that would authorize private broadcasting in the country. Iran's only broadcasting organization, the IRIB, has been the only owner of the television channels in Iran. The Head of the IRIB is approved by the direct decree of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The reformist faction of the Parliament, namely, the Hope Parliamentary Group, introduced the bill.
- The Head of the Azerbaijani Parliament's Legal Policy and State Building Committee, Ali Huseynli, reported that the country temporarily suspended the issuance of migration cards intended for controlling the period of temporary stay of foreigners and stateless persons without visa. It was also noted that in this regard the introduction of the earlier proposed amendments to the Migration Code of Azerbaijan was suspended.