

LONG TERM PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION MONITORING REPORT

ARMENIA

Prepared by It's Your Choice (IYC)

January 21-February 6, 2003

Introduction

In October of 2002, Its Your Choice (IYC), an Armenian NGO, started its long-term observation mission for the presidential election of 2003. IYC is a non-partisan organization that includes 4000 volunteers representing all 10 Marzes and Yerevan city communities. This report covers the period immediately before the election, February 19, 2003.

The report includes information on the official campaign beginning Jan. 21, 2003, involvement of state officials in campaigns, and the process of forming territorial electoral commissions. This report also addresses official campaigning conducted on TV and radio, and mass media coverage of campaigns in general.

Political Atmosphere

The official beginning of the presidential campaign was distinguished by the strong and unyielding struggle of the current president versus the eight candidates that represent the oppositional "Union of 16." As of February 6, the decision of the "Union of 16" had not united behind one candidate. The current president, R. Kocharian and his main opponents, S Demirchyan, Aram Z. Sargsyan, Aram Karapetyan, Artashes Geghamyan and V. Manoukyan, campaigned extensively in Yerevan and marzes.

Violations Observed

The following were serious violations observed within this reports timeframe:

- Interfering with the campaign process
- Prohibiting campaign information for military personnel
- Use of administrative resources for the incumbent's campaign
- Disproportion of campaign coverage and bias of mass media
- Unfair appointment of electoral commissioners
- Involvement of foreign citizens in campaigns

Cases of Interfering with the Campaign Process

Examples described below demonstrate that the government failed to provide public order and security.

- On February 4 in Artashat, a rally for candidate Aram Karapetyan was interfered by a dozen people, turning into a fight. This resulted in serious injury of Hayk Babukhanyan, proxy of Karapetyan who serves as National Assembly Deputy, as Vice-President of Constitutional Law

Union (party) and editor of “Iravunk” newspaper. He was stabbed and transported to a hospital. Two representatives of the party received other injuries.

- Another rally was disrupted on the same day in Artashat. A dozen people purposefully disturbed the speech of candidate V. Manoukyan and made it impossible to continue the rally. The meeting with voters in Artashat had to be delayed. In both cases, governmental structures failed to provide public order and undertook no measures for that purpose. The head of the Ararat Marz, A. Sargsyan even declared that he could not guarantee the safety of candidates who visit his marz for campaigning.
- Windows of the marz campaign office of S. Demirchyan in Abovyan broken the night of January 29.
- A case of obvious prohibited campaigning carried out by a high military official was observed in Tairov, a village in Armavir Marz. Before arrival of candidate S. Demirchyan, Arakel Movsisyan, currently a military staff member at Ministry of Defense, tore down the electoral posters of Demirchyan, ordered all voters to stay in their houses and declared that no one should be elected in their village except Kocharyan. Thus, the requirements of the 2nd subclause of the 4th clause of the 18 article of the “Electoral Code” was violated, because it states that “military personnel ... have no right to carry out electoral campaigning”.

Cases of Prohibiting Campaign Information for Military Personnel

Those military servants who have Armenian citizenship have the right to vote; hence they have the right to be provided with full information about candidates. At the time of this report, no candidates had access to military institutions, although the Minister of Defense was granted a leave of absence to head R. Kocharian’s campaign. The following incidents testify to limitations of military personnel’s right to campaign information.

- On January 25, General Mirzoyan, Head of Military Academy, informed a reporter of “Zhamy” news program of “Armenia” TV agency that he believed the army should not be involved in campaigning. Therefore, he forbade dissemination of any kind of electoral materials in the Academy. He added that on the day of elections, after students of the Academy and other military servants voted, he would personally report to the Minister of Defense, who is currently the head of the incumbent’s campaign, how the students and staff voted.
- Member of Republic Party, A. Jeinalyan appealed to Precinct Commission #2, requesting permission to campaign for A.Z. Sargsyan at the Military Academy. However, the head of the Military Academy forbade the initiative.

Use of Administrative Resources for the Incumbent’s Campaign

Administrative resources are actively used for the incumbent’s campaign during the process of official campaigning. Many ministers and community leaders organize campaigns for the current president and advocate for him. Examples:

- On January 29 in the presence of reporters, Minister of Trade and Industry K. Chshmarityan gave his official statement to governmental officials about Armenia’s economic progress during the past year. He added descriptions candidates’ economic programs, giving each a negative evaluation.

- On January 23, the administration of Armenian’s State Postal Office organized a large meeting of communication workers; during the meeting, Minister of Communication and Transport A. Manoukyan and head of the state postal office, V. Arakelyan, advocated for R. Kocharyan.
- Maralik Mayor G. Gevorgyan and Giumri Mayor V. Ghukasyan worked in the incumbent’s campaign offices during the week on official government time.
- D. Harutiunyan Minister of Justice went on leave and actively joined the incumbent’s campaign. On January 23, when reporting officially on activities of his ministry, he mentioned that he supports the current president. He also assigned heads of Arabkir community schools of Yerevan to mobilize their forces for re-election of R. Kocharyan.
- Minister of Communication and Transport, A. Manoukyan, similarly mobilized forces for the incumbent in schools in Erebuni.
- During parents’ meetings, administrators of schools campaigned for the incumbent. For instance, a number of parents of School # 89 informed that O. Petrosyan, the head of the school, ordered the parents to vote for the incumbent. (The parents asked IYC not to publish their names.) The same situation occurred in School # 119 and others.
- In Shirak, Lorik, Siunik, Ararat and Armavir Marzes, village leaders and councilors were invited to marz offices and demanded to provide the incumbent with the same amount of votes that he received during previous elections.
- In Yerevan communities, leaders and their employees were ordered to be present at campaign events for the incumbent. People were transported from enterprises, schools, etc. For example, A. Khachatryan, Community Leader of Achapniak, forced old people who were eating in a charity cafeteria to be present at a meeting of the incumbent. They were told that if they did not comply, they would be deprived of the food.
- In Kotayk Marz, a number of young people informed a reporter of “Azatutun” radio station that a large crowd of people was brought by bus from Yerevan to participate at a campaign rally.
- When receiving their benefit at their state humanitarian office, residents of Artashavan and Aragatsotn Marz were ordered to vote for Kocharyan and told that if they did not comply, they would be deprived of their benefits.
- Only posters of R. Kocharyan have been posted on the buildings of Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth Issues, as well as on other state institutions. This violates the 2nd clause of the 21st article of “The RA Electoral Code” which states that a community leader has to define special places for posting campaign posters within a territory of a given community and give access to all candidates.
- The illegal practice of going door-to-door and registering voters’ passport data became a common practice. This task was assigned to Yerevan district community leaders, Community Service Centers, employees of the electric system, etc.
- A number of people went door to door (e.g. Building 14, Tigranyan Street in Yerevan) and counted and took names of those who indicated they were going to vote for Kocharyan. This practice was carried out in nearly all communities of Yerevan.
- In Davitashen, they not only registered people, but also demanded their signatures.

- Simonyan, head of the territorial campaign office for candidate A. Karapetyan testified that on February 2, A. Babakhanyan, a councilor of Nork-Marash community in Yerevan and head of campaign office of R. Kocharyan, along with seven other people, visited his apartment and threatened to close down their campaign office and demanded that they cease campaigning in the community.

Disproportion Campaign Coverage and Bias of Mass Media

Electoral coverage performed by 6 TV stations, 11 newspapers and Public radio was monitored according to a methodology developed by the European Institute of Mass Media. Campaign coverage both quantitatively and qualitatively was neither fair nor equal, as forbidden by the 2nd Clause of Article 22, Electoral Code. This was unfair coverage was especially occurred for state government media, the prime source of broadcast information for citizens. The following preliminary observations were made based on the results of a 10-day observation.

- Information services of Public TV, as well as “Prometheus” and “Armenia” TV stations that have broad coverage, not only were turned into an obvious mechanism of Kocharyan’s electoral campaign, but also impeded the objectiveness of electoral coverage and deprived voters of the right to receive accurate and objective information.
 - The incumbent was allotted 40% of the entire period allotted in total for all campaigns on the public TV station news program, “Hailur.” He received 22 positive reports, totaling 1.3 hours of the total hours of news broadcasting.
 - Candidate S. Demirchyan had 12 negative reports, totaling 0.5 hours or 17% of programming.
 - A. Karapetyan had 6 neutral reports, totaling 0.2 hours or 5%.
 - A. Geghamyan had 9 neutral and four negative reports, totaling 0.7 hours or 21%.
 - A.Z. Sargsyan had 3 neutral and 4 negative reports, totaling 0.1 hours or 3.6%.
 - V. Manoukyan had a total of eight neutral and negative reports, totaling 0.2 hours or 6.8%.
 - V. Darbinyan had 2 negative reports that lasted 0.2 hours or 3%.
 - A.G.Sargsyan had a total of 3 neutral and negative reports that lasted 0.1 hours or 3%.
- Similar studies with similar results were conducted on “Prometheus”, “ALM”, “Shant”, and “Armenia” for their coverage of the campaign; results will be presented in final report.
- In 10 editions of the daily state newspaper, Hayastani Hanrapetutiun, broad coverage of the current president’s electoral campaign made up 42% of articles dedicated to elections (29 reports). Information about other candidates was mainly negative.
- Due to the above pattern of unfair campaign coverage, candidate A. Geghamyan forbid representatives of mass media to be present at and report on his campaign.

Unfair Appointment of Electoral Commissions

According to articles 34, 35 and 36, RA Electoral Code, the 3/9 electoral commissions are formed from parliamentary faction members (National Assembly) and the president appoints 3/9 individuals. Taking into

consideration the fact that the 3 members of the commission that represent the National Assembly factions support the current president and 3 other members of the commission are representatives of the same president, it is obvious that opposition candidates do not have equal representation in the commission.

Interference of Foreign Citizens in Campaigns

“Foreign citizens and organizations... are forbidden to conduct electoral campaigns and disseminate any kind of materials related to electoral campaigning” according to clause 18 of article 18 of “The RA Electoral Code”. The following cases violate the aforementioned article:

- On January 30, after broadcast of the news program, “Hailur,” on Armenian Public TV, Constantine Zatulin, a Russian citizen and Head of the Institute of CIS Countries, made a speech, enumerating the advantages that the current president has compared to other candidates.
- The edition of “Hayastani Hanrapetutiun” newspaper on January 30 included an article with extracts from foreign press about the high evaluation that Russian citizens (Alexei Maluchenko, Constantine Zatulin, Alexander Khramchikhin) give to R. Kocharyan. The title of the article was “There is no alternative for Armenia except for Kocharyan”.
- The edition of “Respublica Armenia” on January 31, in the article named “3 Favorites, One Winner” there were statements of foreign citizens that contained elements of campaigning.
- The state newspaper “Hayastani Hanrapetutiun” on January 24 and the newspaper “Golos Armenii” on January 25 published a letter submitted by Russian intellectuals (20 scientists), addressed to Armenian citizens stating they should vote for R. Kocharyan.
- During news program “Lraber” of January 28, “Prometheus” TV channel hosted Victor Krivopuskov, Head of Moscow’s Alexeev Municipality; he spoke in the favor of R. Kocharyan.
- On February 5, during his visit in Yerevan, famous Russian singer I. Kabson informed reporters that his arrival in Armenia was not political, but nevertheless, he urged Armenians to evaluate the advantages of the current president.

Recommendations

1. Punish those who are responsible for purposefully obstructing campaigning.
2. Ensure public order during electoral campaigning.
3. Prevent and forbid campaigning conducted by military personnel.
4. Allow candidates to campaign among soldiers and military personnel.
5. Government officials should not be allowed to take sabbaticals for the purpose of campaigning.
6. Ensure provision of equal conditions or mass media coverage for all candidates.
7. Revise the Electoral Code to assure formation of electoral commissions do not unfairly support incumbents.
8. Forbid media organizations to report campaigning on the part of foreign citizens.