

“It’s Your Choice” NGO

Report on Long-Term Monitoring Activities Regarding Presidential Elections

February 15, 2013

IYC monitors will be observing RA presidential elections in 1400 polling stations. Observations will be carried out both in Yerevan and in all the other cities and large communities.

81 IYC monitors have been carrying out long term monitoring of February 18 presidential elections since January 11. The political atmosphere, registration and nomination processes of presidential candidates, official campaign, activities of election commissions, issues related to location of polling stations, voters lists, campaign materials, participation of local government bodies and executive bodies in election processes were subjects for observation

It was unexpected that three main political parties made a decision not to take part in the elections. Taking into account the statements of these parties, we assume that the latter will present serious campaigns during the next parliamentary and presidential elections. In any case the decision of these parties not to take part in the elections has significantly reduced the competitive atmosphere and resulted in inactiveness among their electorates.

In this presidential election race, according to our observations, all the nominated candidates had an equal opportunity to conduct their election campaigns without any barrier both in Yerevan and marzes. Air time was open for all the candidates irrespective of their method of conducting their election campaigns. The candidates had an opportunity to present their perspectives and platform during meetings with voters and during TV programs. Objective coverage provided by broadcast media gave an opportunity to the voters to get acquainted with candidates’ platforms.

The natural course of election processes was interrupted by the assassination attempt against presidential candidate Paruyr Hayrikyan. This incident, in our opinion, was an attempt to harm the peaceful and natural course of the election process and obscure the balanced atmosphere observed during the first ten days of election campaign.

Fortunately, this serious incident didn’t destabilize the election atmosphere and the campaign proceeded with a normal course without any obstacles, after Hayrikyan’s decision to continue his pre-election campaign. In comparison with the previous presidential elections no cases of obvious pressure on voters or interferences of neighborhood authorities to election processes were recorded.

The recorded drawbacks mainly referred to inaccuracies in voter lists, as well as unreasonable participation of heads of communities in campaign activities. Perhaps, the abovementioned should be taken into account while making next amendments to Election Code and clearly define the format of participation of community heads in election campaigns.

Our long-term monitors voiced concerns about the fact that principals of a few educational institutions, through using their official responsibilities instructed teachers to support a certain candidate or vote for him. Our concern is that to check this information requires a detailed study, because of absence of witnesses. We urge the Ministry of Education and Science to study these alerts and take respective steps to prevent these kinds of actions (see Appendix 1).

Isolated cases were reported by IYC monitors when select newly appointed members of TEC were not able to tell who they were appointed by or were not well aware of Election Code (see Appendix 2).

CEC efforts to increase the transparency of activities of election commissions and improve the professional qualities of election commission members are worth mentioning.

Many international observers note, that online voter registers and the possibility to watch CEC sessions online are unprecedented even in a number of developed democratic countries.

We urge the competent authorities to prevent any attempt to conduct illegal campaign or exercise pressure on voters and ensure free, fair and transparent elections on E-Day. We also hope that the authorities, candidates and other subjects involved in election processes will make every effort to prove that Armenia has the democratic potential to overcome the negative experience of previous elections.

Political Atmosphere

The fact that political parties playing significant role in the political field of Armenia were inactive at election period and didn't nominate any candidate on their part raised serious concerns among broad segments of society. ANC leader Levon Ter-Petrosyan's decision not to run was reasoned by his age. PAP leader Gagik Tsarukyan announced his decision not to run and added that he wouldn't support any political party or candidate. ARF, another parliamentary power, didn't nominate any candidate either. The decisions of these political parties not to nominate their candidates at presidential elections, accompanied by inconclusive arguments resulted in public disappointment.

At least 8 out of 15 candidates have never played any role in political field before and were unknown to the society. Respecting the ways the candidates have chosen to conduct their campaigns, it should be mentioned that candidates A.Melikyan, V.Sedrakyan, A.Ghukasyan and A.Harutyunyan have chosen only TV campaigns, interviews and sometimes statements as ways of communicating with voters. A.Harutyunyan announced his self withdrawal on February 8. A.Ghukasyan's campaign strategy is a hunger strike.

Paruyr Hayrikyan applied to the Constitutional Court to adjourn the elections, however he took his application back in due time.

We evaluate negatively the absence of political debates. These debates were limited to discussions among campaign managers of a few candidates at press clubs.

We evaluate positively that select candidates conducted active campaigns in social networks.

The rallies organized by the majority of candidates were neither crowded nor interesting. The only animation in this uninteresting campaign was the innovative methods exercised by the presidential candidate Raffi Hovhannisyanyan: handshaking, communication with voters at supermarkets, restaurants, crowded places etc.

Hrant Bagratyan's campaign was dominated by the discussion on economic programs and presentation of the candidate's "100 steps" program.

According to our assessment, this campaign was characterized by inactive, sometimes uninteresting atmosphere. The reason why this is happening needs further study. Is it conditioned by the campaigns organized by the candidates or indifference of voters?

Inaccuracies in Voter Lists

IYC monitors recorded a number of inaccuracies regarding lists of voters. For example, several cases were recorded when names of deceased people had been included on voters' lists. Many cases were reported when the voter could not find his/her name in the voter lists. The monitors also recorded difficulties regarding the access to the lists of voters in several polling stations. In some of them no statements on the time limits and place of submitting applications on inaccuracies in the lists of voters, as well as on the manner, time period, and conditions of their review were posted next to the lists of voters.

Concerning the appearance of names of deceased people in lists of voters, the matter is that in the end of 2012 the competent authorities had not been informed about numerous death cases. Taking into account the IYC monitors' facts and in accordance to the applications submitted by the heads of the communities, the competent body made some corrections regarding the above-mentioned issue (see Appendix 3). Few cases were recorded when lists of voters included names of people who died long ago. For example, in the polling

station 33/49 of Hatsik community names of deceased V.Karapetyan and S.Hakobyan were recorded on voter lists.

Several cases were recorded when the names of young people who completed their military service at the end of 2012 were not included in voter lists (for example, 5 similar cases were recorded in Isahakyan community of Shirak region). There were cases when names of young people drafted to the army at the end of 2012 still remained in voter lists (such examples have been observed in the polling station of Bagravan community) (see Appendix 4,5).

There were several cases when voter lists had not been posted within the deadline defined by CEC. Those cases were conditioned by bad weather and inaccessibility of roads.

The examples are as follows:

- In polling stations 33/31 and 33/33 of Shirak region, polling station 33/34 of Zarishat community, polling station 33/45 of Alvarh community voter lists were posted with a one-day delay.

In several polling stations the voter lists were posted on inconvenient and inaccessible places, thus many voters were not able to check whether their names were included in the lists and to make relevant corrections if needed. The examples are as follows:

- In the polling station 41/28 of Ijevan town, polling station 40/47 of Paravakar community, polling station 40/48 of Varagavan community, polling station 40/52 of Verin Tsakhkavan community, polling station 41/35 of Itsakar community, polling station 40/54 of Chinchin community, polling station 41/36 of Navur community of Tavush region, pollign stations 16/04, 16/02, 17/08, 17/10, 17/11 of Ararat region there were no statements on the time limits and place of submitting applications on inaccuracies in the lists of voters, as well as on the manner, time period, and conditions of their review were posted next to the lists of voters (see Appendix 6).

IYC monitors recorded other difficulties regarding the access to voter lists. The examples are as follows:

- In the monitored precincts of the constituency 20 of Ararat region the lists of voters are not compiled in the same manner. In some precincts those lists are compiled in alphabetic order, in the others- according to the addresses of the places of registration of voters or per family members (for example, precincts #20/12 and # 20/13). The above mentioned has caused a great deal of confusion.
- The voters of Maralik town of Shirak region were not able to get acquainted to voter lists because of the confusion regarding the location of the polling station 36/37. According to the decision of Maralik city mayor, the polling station 36/37 should be located in the building of local School of Arts. However, the voter lists were posted at the Secondary school # 1 of Maralik town. Later, the mayor changed his decision, and decided to move that very polling station to the Secondary school # 1, as the building was heated and it was convenient for TEC to implement its activities. However, the PEC considered the second decision of the mayor unacceptable. Thus, the voter lists were posted in School of Arts much later.

Violations on Installation of Campaign Materials

IYC monitors recorded numerous cases regarding the violation of the Second Clause of Article 20 of the Electoral code of the RA. The requirements of this very law were violated during the previous parliamentary elections and are evaded currently. The reason is that the law does not identify relevant bodies to be responsible for the implementation of the above-mentioned requirements and relevant punishments are not determined by law.

IYC monitors recorded numerous cases of presence of campaign materials on public buildings (see Appendix 7).

Cases on Damaging Campaign Materials

IYC monitors recorded isolated cases when candidates' campaign materials were harmed. Mostly, those materials which had been posted in an open air were damaged for technical reasons and they were replaced with the new ones. Several cases were recorded when the materials were damaged intentionally. For example:

- The posters of candidates V. Sedrakyan and P. Hayrikyan posted in the building of Arts Center in Artashat town of Ararat region (23 August street) were damaged by the unknown people. Similar case on damaging Sedrakyan's poster has been recorded in Armavir town (see Appendix 8).

Appendix 1

- IYC is concerned about the statement of newly elected mayor of Gyumri city Samvel Balasanyan. During his press-conference on January 21, 2013 (the official launch of the election campaign) the latter announced that he would support the incumbent president and promised to bring reasons for this decision. Statements made by the community head while realizing his official duties, are regarded as campaigning in favor of a particular candidate.
- Workers of the copper factory of Zangezour, which is located in Kacharan community/ constituency 38, jointly support the incumbent president, because the management of the factory indirectly makes a pressure on them.
- The attendants (school principals and staff) of the meeting with the candidate Serzh Sargsyan in Meghri and Agarak towns, entered the hall with invitation letters. Those voters who were eager to be present at the meeting and did not have invitations, lost the chance to be present at the meeting. The school staff participated in this event on their working hours.
- IYC observers in Syunik region reported that heads of local self-governments and state officials support the candidacy of the incumbent. In Goris they ensured the presence of schools' staff at the meetings with the candidate. The observers of Sisyan and Kapan have also reported about the observation of similar cases.
- In the community of Jrap it was planned to open presidential candidate Serzh Sargsyan's headquarters in the cultural centre, which is located on the territory of the village municipality. Following the recommendation of IYC observer the headquarters was moved to the former post office building.
- On January 4, in Artashat a great number of teachers from other communities of Ararat region were brought by buses to attend Serzh Sargsyan's meeting with voters.

Appendix 2

- The observations at the TEC #7/31 showed that Ashot Baghinyan, member of «Heritage» party which has a fraction in RA parliament, does not have any idea about his responsibilities as the TEC secretary.
- Aleksandr Gevorgyan, member of the same TEC # 7/31 was unable to give a definite answer to the observer's question on who he is appointed by or what political power he represents.

Appendix 3

- In Shirak region names of deceased people were found on the voter lists at the polling stations 35/39 (Herbert Chobanyan, deceased on 20.11.2012), 35/10 (Srbuhi Mkoyan), 35/14 (Garegin Harutyunyan), 35/31 (Lia Amirkhanyan). Similar cases were observed also in Samaghbyur and other communities of Shirak region.
- At the polling station 33/68 the voter list contained the name of deceased Koryun Ivanyan, at 33/25 there was the name of the deceased Mayisik Vasilyan.
- At the polling station 33/50 the voter list included the names of deceased Martunik Ghandilyan, J.Hasanyan, at 33/51 names of Artur Mkrtchyan, Arutik Grigoryan, Hreghen Tadevosyan.

- At the polling station 36/19 the name of Robert Saroyan, deceased in 2012 was found on the voter list.
- At the polling station 39/03 the name of the deceased Qajik Vardanyan was on the voter list.
- In Vayots Dzor region, at the polling station of Malishka community the names of recently deceased Lyudvig Sargsyan and Babken Stepanyan appeared on the list, and at the polling station of Khachik community – the name of Vardanush Stepanyan.
- At the polling station 25/31 the voter list contained the name of Jenik Nazaryan deceased in 2013, which will be removed from the list.
- At the polling station 4/05 names of the deceased – Elichka Harutyunyan (Address: Shirvanzade 7, apt 19), 4/09 – Vachagan Minasyan (Address: Mamikonyan 27, apt 110), 5/24 – Azniv Asiryan (Address: Papazyan 21/2, apt 40).
- At the polling station 36/20 – name of the deceased Arshak Siezyan, and at 36/17 – the name of the deceased Amalya Khalatyan.
- The voter list of Arevik community contain the names of deceased Benik Nazaretyan and Haykanush Hakobyan.
- At the polling station 35/01 the voter list includes the name of Rima Charkhifalakyana, daughter of Vachagan (Address: Street #31, house #34) who died in 2012.
- At the polling station 35/02 the name of Samvel Sahakyan, son of Karapet, Address: Street 45, house 24, who died on 19/06/2012, appears under the number 1688 of the voter list.
- At the polling station 33/32 the voter list included the name of the deceased Julietta Mkhitarian, at 33/58 – name of Sargis Minasyan.
- Similar cases were recorded in the communities of Jrap, Sarnaghbyur, Sarakap, Qaraberd, Dzithankov, Shirakavan and other communities of Shirak region.

Appendix 4. The inclusion of soldiers' names on the voter lists

- At the polling station 33/53 the voter list includes the names of soldiers – Davit Khachatryan, son of Slavik; Sasun Sargsyan, son of Ara; Karapet Sahakyan.
- At the polling station 33/46 the voter lists contain the names of soldiers – Hovhannes Hovhannisyan, son of Samvel and Artak Hovhannisyan, son of Abraham.
- At the polling station 33/15 the voter list included the name of a soldier – Gevorg Minasyan, son of Gagik.

Appendix 5. The absence of names of resigned soldiers

- At the polling station 35/15 of Yerazgavors community the voter list did not include the names of the resigned soldiers – Goris Martirosyan and Edgar Khachatryan.

Appendix 6. Inconvenience of displaying the voter lists

- In Tavush region at the polling station 41/28 the voter lists were posted in inconvenient places, which made it difficult for the voters to find their names on the lists.
- In Ararat region as of January 21 at the constituency 18 those polling stations which are located in the buildings of kindergartens were mostly closed due to holidays (e.g. #2 Kindergarten of Ararat), and the voters were unable to check the presence of their names on the lists.
- At the polling station 5/34 the statements on the time limits and place of submitting applications on inaccuracies in the lists of voters were posted in an inconvenient place. After the observer's remarks the deficiency was corrected.
- At the polling stations 4/02, 5/35 the voter lists were posted in dark places, because of this the voter were unable to get acquainted with them.
- At the polling station 4/10, 5/25 the TEC members list was not posted.
- At the polling station 16/09 the voter list is posted in the school gym the doors of which are closed after noon.
- At the polling station 16/01 the voter list is posted in the kindergarten hall, which is closed at 16:00.

In the last two cases these hours are often inconvenient for the voters.

Other deficiencies of the voter lists

- In Armavir region the voter list of the polling station of Aygeshat community did not contain Yeranuhi Harutyunyan's name.

Appendix 7. Violations in placing campaign literature

- In Artik the big banner of RPA candidate is posted on the wall of the trade centre "Agha".
- In Avan administrative district of Yerevan the candidates' banners (mostly those of S.Sargsyan and R.Hovhannisyanyan) are posted in visible places near food markets, shops, trade centers and educational centres. Campaign materials are not allowed to be posted in these places.
- The similar situation is observed at Malatia-Sebastia administrative district of Yerevan (e.g. S.Sargsyan banner is posted on a shop next to the building Sheram 47)

Appendix 8. Cases of damaging campaign materials

- The campaign posters posted on the boards in Artashisyan and Bagratunyants streets in Yerevan were often deliberately torn off.
- Within the period between February 9, 20:00 and next morning Hrant Bagratyan's big poster that was posted next to the entrance of his headquarters at the address 154 Muratsan Street, Yerevan, was torn and taken away by unknown people.

- R.Hovhannisyan's and V.Sedrakyan's campaign materials were torn off the campaign boards, installed at 17 building Nairi Zaryan Street in Yerevan.
- P.Hayrikyan's and S.Sargsyan's posters were torn off the boards installed in buildings #7 and #11 Azatutyan Street, Yerevan.
- Cases of damaging H.Bagratyan's campaign posters were observed in the town of Ararat.