

The Duty of Glorious Elections:

Exercise of political will, revolution or external imposition?



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Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose¹

In case there is a viable political will in Armenia, the Electoral Code of the country provides a substantial basis for the conduct of elections, the results of which can accurately reflect the preferences of the constituencies and allow the formation of authorities enjoying the resource of citizen trust. This, however, does not guarantee a flawless election, for the process will continue to be influenced by factors such as the deficiency of competing ideologies and the requisite leaders, the poor legal consciousness and knowledge of the electorate, the incentives of the voters, which are almost entirely defined by the complex social conditions, and the unsatisfactory level of professionalism of those officially involved in the electoral procedures.

Political will: a self-reliable deadlock?

Will is a human characteristic: the exercise of a political will cannot be found in the guidelines of democracy, nor in the routine work of diverse state institutions or in the analyses of the efficiency of their work. The reform of the Electoral Code, the work of the election commissions, the functions of the administrative structures, the propaganda, and PR in general, of the political parties are not yet practical applications of political will. It exists only when risks are taken, both political and personal. Nowadays the political players lack the gumption to undertake such risks.

As a result, over the past decade the elections in Armenia have been conducted with the complete absence of adequate political will and have been aimed at ensuring the reproduction of the political and economic elite in any possible way. In such conditions the amendment of the Electoral Code, (besides in some obvious aspects) implies the necessity of such a change that will eliminate the impact of the absence of political will. Here the reform movement within the legislative framework of elections is at a standstill since the majority, in the current legislative body, is not interested in jeopardizing its future reproduction.

Unrealistic electoral integrity

The stalemate characterizing the legislative framework of the election and the inability to introduce any basic and necessary reforms make it practically impossible to initiate a peaceful realignment of authority in Armenia at the moment. This may hold true until such time when the force striving for power is able to offer the political and economic elite pro tempore warrants of possession and, in some cases, physical safety.

The result will be the international isolation of Armenia (i.e. Belarusization) or the realization that reproduction through the same methods may result in a dangerous accumulation of public dissatisfaction (e.g. in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyz Republic). Given the background of revolutions, this implies two alternatives: loosening the grip or tightening it even more, i.e. either release the pressure or make it stronger. The second option is a natural reaction to any

¹ plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose (French)- The more things change, the more identical they remain.

pressure, a self-protective instinct, which may be wrong and eventually lead the governing authorities to self-destruction. This is charged with yet other potential threats, such as shattering the security of Armenia. It may be fatal for the country as a whole; Armenia has been through many calamities, and tightening the grip may guarantee some future upheavals and may ignite new waves of dissatisfaction.

Breaking through the vicious cycle

Unfortunately, the current forces requiring a change attempt to use any instance of loosening the grip to their advantage, thus reinforcing the self-protective repercussion. The major challenge is not the issue of who has the power at the moment, but rather the fact that in Armenia a natural and smooth transition of power among political forces has yet to take root. This challenge refers to the realignment mechanisms, as well as elections, and not to the essence or content of the political forces. Today a unique opportunity to break the vicious cycle has been presented. The crucial factors for success are courage (political will) and the correct choice of activity sequence. It will be ambitious to claim that through the exercise of political will, alone, a possible to change the current situation will result. The vicious cycle has had a significant influence on the development of events. However, there are several steps that can gradually affect the situation, a non-exhaustive list includes:

- Ensuring pluralism of opinions;
- Freedom of speech;
- Free functioning of electronic media;
- De-monopolization of the political arena;
- Criminal prosecution for electoral violations and consistency in applying adequate penalties; and
- Development of an open milieu for political decision-making and application of the principle of open dialogue.

There certainly will be unexpected results, but these will bring about solid basis for the next election with the expectation of those being more comprehensive.

This brief was prepared on April 13, 2005. It summarizes the discussion on the topic "Electoral Integrity and Electoral Governance" and is based on the opinions of the participants. The round table brought together freelance analysts, and representatives of international organizations.