

Role of the National Assembly in Building Political Consensus



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Is it possible at all to achieve a final decision on holding a snap election exclusively through political decisions and political agreements? Can parliamentary factions discuss the future of the parliament together? Is it possible to negotiate whether the parliament should be dissolved or not; to reach an agreement about a new role, collaboration or anything else? A coin, as usual, has two sides.

Side One: Government

Politicians in the government believe that in terms of representative democracy there is a gap between the constituency and the parliament. The parliament de facto does not reflect the overall picture of political preferences and orientations in the society.

They do not refuse to regard the parliament as a potentially feasible platform for building political consensus, which is reflected in the work of the government concerning some ongoing policy and political issues. However, when it comes to more comprehensive issues, such as constitutional amendments, self-dissolution of the parliament, they consider the risk of a political crisis to be too big. There are no clear perspectives on such issues, and at the moment the visible solutions are beyond politics and even the Constitution.

Side Two: Opposition

For the current opposition the parliament has ceased to be a space for political negotiations, because they believe that the country lacks the second room where it would be possible to negotiate and come to even small agreements. They are certain that there is only one person who makes political decisions in the government, and in the best-case scenario, parliamentarians can only become a liaison, even regarding issues of less significance.

The opposition, specifically the representatives of the previous government, think that in the result of the current actions of the government they have ended up in a situation where ultimately, they have nothing to lose. "We have lost and now they are trying to annihilate us", this is the impression they get from the current actions and public messages of the government.

What Will Happen if the Momentum Continues?

It is not a difficult task to forecast the 'mainstream' pattern of developments if the political forces do not start talking to each other and do not discuss their perceptions and visions of the parliament's future. If there is no negotiation route targeting consensus building, an everyday effort towards this goal; a conducive environment; willingness and even professional mediation, we will end up in a situation that bears the characteristics of confrontation, rather than of a political process. This seems a realistic scenario of development today, when the goal of one of the sides is the dissolution of the parliament by all means, and the goal of the other side is absolutely the reverse. However, if the common goal is to achieve a solution that absolutely rejects psychological or physical violence, there is certainly a lot to be done.



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The Art of Small Steps: Mediation

- There has been a revolution and the government enjoys an unprecedented public support, whereas the current parliament does not reflect the current realities and needs to dissolve.
- We have legitimate mandates. We can provide the necessary checks and balances to the government. In case of adequate attitude, we can also be cooperative, and we have no intention of ever dissolving.

These major arguments of the opposing sides are rather predictable. At a first glance, these are hard and confrontational statements, which, however, reflect only the surface of how things stand. What is there below the surface? And to what extent these contradictory positions can be brought closer? To answer these questions an additional and serious effort is required. There are institutions in Armenia that have demonstrated expertise and capacities to work towards identifying the interests behind the positions of confronting political forces; institutions which at the first phase of the process can facilitate negotiations and mediate towards at least better understanding of the range of wishes of each side.

The paper is elaborated based on the opinions passed by the participants of the discussion "Political Consensus: Actions, Risks and Opportunities", which took place on 14 September, 2018. The roundtable discussion was attended by independent analysts, government officials, and representatives of the international organizations.

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