

Honorable Secretary General, Chairman, participants,

On May 12, 2007 the Republic of Armenia held elections of the legislative body- the National Assembly of the RA. What were the peculiarities of these elections, what innovations were introduced and what was the assessment of the international election observation missions? In accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, The National Assembly consists of 131 MPs, 90 out of whom are elected under proportional system and 41 MPs-under majoritarian system.

22 political parties and 1 party alliance ran in the elections under proportional system, 119 candidates- under majoritarian system. In the electoral lists of the parties at least every tenth candidate is a woman.

The elections were prepared, organized and conducted by a three- level system of electoral commissions: the Central Electoral Commission, 41 Territorial Electoral Commissions and 1923 Precinct Electoral Commissions. There is an efficient computer network connecting the permanently functioning CEC and TECs through an optical fiber cable.

This network and the special software were discussed during our previous meeting and today I can report that our plan has successfully been put into practice.

A necessary provision for an effective election administration is the training of the candidates for the commissions. Since 2006, at least twice a year special trainings have been conducted all over the Republic of Armenia for those citizens who want to be included in the electoral commissions. Subsequently, at present the Republic of Armenia possesses a bank of citizens who have the right to be included in the electoral commissions. The bodies who have the right to appoint members to the electoral commissions only deal with those citizens who are included in this bank, have passed a training and received a corresponding qualification certificate as a result of a test.

The fact of having accurate voter lists is an important circumstance on the way to conducting democratic elections. The Republic of Armenia resolved this matter in 2005 when a permanently updated Voter Register was introduced. The Voter Register is on the CEC's website (www.elections.am), thus any citizen can access it and get acquainted with the voter lists, find his/her name and surname.

It was thanks to the consistent and effective measures directed to the voter lists that during the elections only 80 citizens (0.003 per cent of the voters) restored their electoral right through appealing to the court.

An indispensable factor for conducting the elections in accordance with the democratic standards is providing the candidates with equal conditions through the mass media.

Shall we understand the word “equal” in its absolute sense? “The Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters” of the Venice Commission gives the answer to this question , “Depending on the subject matter equality may be strict or proportional...Equality of opportunity applies in particular to radio and television airtime, public funds and other forms of backing.” (point 2.3)

All the participants of the campaign are provided with “strictly equal” conditions at the beginning of the campaign.

Later on, equality is conditioned by the modes and methods of the pre-election campaign carried out by the stakeholders, the number of the events organized, the public interest in the programs introduced and the gradual growth or decline of this interest in the society.

The activities of the TV and radio companies, which followed the above-mentioned principles of equality, were touched upon in the 20.06.2007 joint report of the PACE and OSCE/ODIHR observation mission, “The activities of the media were also praiseworthy; the political parties were equally provided with free airtime and impartial coverage during the campaign.”

Because of not being brave enough to acknowledge and evaluate own mistakes in the electoral procedures, complaints concerning election results were submitted to the Constitutional Court.

Democratic elections are also about being able to face one’s defeat with dignity. The violation of certain electoral processes by the electoral commissions or various electoral actors can’t be considered as a basis for appealing against election results. To put it figuratively, the conduct of the elections can’t be considered as a crossing of a minefield where each wrong step or diversion can result in irretrievable consequences, i.e. invalidity of the elections.

Election results are the manifestation of the subjective electoral right of numerous voters. The free expression of each and every voter’s will is of great value.

The clash of interests between certain candidates running in the elections, based on their political preferences, can not become an irremovable obstacle to the formation of the authorities on the basis of the expression of the voters’ will.

The Constitutional Court of the RA, taking into consideration these circumstances as well and proceeding from concrete facts, rejected the complaints and left unchanged the decisions on election results by the corresponding commissions.

These elections were also specific for the fact that those who violated the legislation received their punishment.

All the materials on electoral violations discovered by the CEC were sent to the prosecutor's office where criminal cases were brought against the violators. By the verdicts of the court 17 citizens were convicted, 2 of whom were imprisoned.

Approximately 50.000 proxies and more than 14.000 observers from 6 international and 54 local organizations were involved in the elections to the National Assembly. All along the elections unprecedented publicity and transparency were in place.

The 12 May 2007 elections to the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia demonstrated a considerable improvement in comparison to those held in the previous years. The above-said is confirmed by the collective public perception as well as the assessment of the international election observation missions.

As is stated in the 20.06.2007 joint report of the PACE and OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission, "The 12 May 2007 elections for the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia were conducted largely in accordance with the international standards for democratic elections although some shortcomings still remained. The Armenian authorities and other actors in the electoral process showed a will to address previous shortcomings and improve the level of the conduct of these elections..."

This assessment considerably differs from the conclusions drawn by the international election observation missions on the previous elections. Moreover, it is the first time that the statements held by the OSCE and CIS observation missions have demonstrated a close correspondence.

Some shortcomings could also have been evaded if during the process of amending the Electoral Code it had been taken into consideration that the procedures for voting and summarization of voting results were too complicated, contained a number of unnecessary details and some additional difficulties would be inevitable as they were implemented. This has been mentioned in the report of the observation mission as well, "The vote count was protracted in many precincts also due to the fact that the legal procedure for it is rather complicated."

The commission's new proposals concerning the amendments to the Electoral Code are particularly directed to the simplification of this issue. The commission looks upon the amendments to the Electoral Code as a basis for conducting democratic elections.

The electoral authorities and the State are determined to conduct the oncoming presidential elections (winter 2008) and the elections to the local self-government bodies (autumn 2009) in a free, fair and transparent manner - in accordance with the commitments and obligations undertaken by the State and democratic standards.

Finally, I would like to introduce a proposal concerning ACEEEO annual conference that will be held in 2009 – I would like to express our readiness to organize it in the Republic of Armenia.

Garegin Azaryan

Chairman of CEC of RA.