

the institutional means available, such as oppositional MPs in the National Assembly, to upgrade the level of public advocacy. Definitely, rapid development of technologies, larger penetration of Internet and advancing new media and citizen journalism will play a crucial role in spreading alternative information and mobiliz-

ing people. From that point of view, it is very important that the opposition and civil society stand against any web regulating laws which may possibly be advanced by the ruling regime in preparation for the next round of elections.

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## Political Parties Before, During and After the Elections of 2012–2013

Ara Nedolyan, Yerevan

### **Abstract**

The most important event during the first 100 days of Serzh Sargsyan's second presidential term is the abolition, or the radical collapse, of the organized political opposition. Immediately after the election, it seemed that the political opposition headed by Raffi Hovhannisyán (the leader of the "Heritage" party) was at the peak of its power. According to public opinion polls, as well as to his own statements, Hovhannisyán won the 2013 presidential elections. However, the election results were falsified by the government. Society revolted: meetings and protests were held every day in Liberty square. The situation seemed to be turning revolutionary. However, the City Council elections on May 6 were a total failure for the opposition; the Republican Party of Armenia became the leading force in city hall. Thus, the deep crisis of legitimacy that Sargsyan faced since the 2008 presidential elections, expressed in the great public support for opposition political forces, came to an end. This situation may change again, but currently no political force seriously challenges Sargsyan. This article provides an overview of Armenia's main political parties.

### **The Leading Party: the Republican Party of Armenia**

The government is represented by the Republican Party of Armenia (RPA), whose leader is Serzh Sargsyan (Armenia's president). There is also an affiliate party of little influence called Rule of Law that will not be further discussed. During the last five years the representatives of the opposition have been the Armenian National Congress, headed by Levon Ter-Petrosyan, Heritage, headed by Raffi Hovhannisyán, Gagik Tsarukyan's Prosperous Armenia, a relatively "passive opposition", and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun) with no definite leader.

Armenian political parties by themselves have not played a prominent role during the years of independence. They have been inconsistent political entities lacking regulations, ideological activity, an open inner debate, close relations with different strata of the society, a definite ideological orientation and a social base. These

parties are mainly clubs of supporters of this or that politician. They essentially support their leader's ideological, promotional and organizational activity.

The leading party's inner life is inevitably wider, as it carries out also the tasks of state governance, partially replacing the activity of other state institutions. This is the reason why it often becomes a place of rivalry between the sub-elites of the ruling elite. Such access to power adds to the attraction of the leading party and stirs public interest in it. The society still remembers the times when all the social events originated inside the leading and the only party, the Communist Party. In this respect, now the leading Republican Party also has some charm for the Armenian society, as there have formed in it some internal struggles and procedures for the resolution of differences.

The present day Republican Party was formed in 1998 as a result of President Levon Ter-Petrosyan's resignation. Before that it had been a minor and non-influential party. Two days after the resignation, several MPs

declared en masse their cooptation into the Republican Party. They were followed by all those state officials who wanted to maintain their posts under the new government. Later the RPA served as a ground for the formation of R. Kocharyan's social basis, i.e. the upper bourgeoisie, which merged with the machine of government. Big capital and the state merged, and this still remains Sargsyan's social base. This base was strengthened by nationalistic ideology (derived from the old Republican Party ideology) combined together with some clerical and glamour-intellectual elitist elements. As a result, a new balanced system was created, which, still the only one in Armenia, was able to replace its leader Robert Kocharyan with Sargsyan. At the same time, it maintained its inner intrigue, which has become the only remarkable intrigue of Armenian political life against the background of the opposition's failure.

There are several competitions going on inside the party: between the holders of "European" and "Russian" positions, as well as between the first generation "plebeian-criminal" businessmen (oligarchs) and the second generation "educated" oligarchy, which also presents itself as the supporter of the country's modernization. There is also a fraction consisted of those who support the party's ex-leader Kocharyan. Sargsyan presents himself as a person who balances all these interests. Thus, the leading party has some of the components necessary for political longevity: an actual and vital (or imitational) inner debate, diversity, a certain inner collegiality determined by the presence of different fractions, a conflict-resolution procedure, and the ability to change the leader in an externally legal way, without delegitimizing the previous leader. The party's main and organic defect is that it still remains the party of the privileged minority. It fails to become a place of self-expression for the citizens of Armenia. It is not able to create a social lift for the society and cannot exist without the monopolistic possession of all the power levers (administrative, economic and cultural). In order to maintain this monopoly, the leading party has to apply force, commit crimes and violate Armenia's democratic constitution and laws. This arouses the society's rightful anger and stirs its inner willingness to change the situation, which becomes the potential for the development of opposition parties.

The 2013 presidential elections were Armenian society's only hope of getting rid of the grouping that has pocketed political, economic and cultural power. Why not the parliamentary or the local government elections? Because the society still relies on a leader that will act in favor of the nation: social self-organization is not regarded as a means of fighting the evil. The leader, in his turn, is expected to co-opt the whole society in the process of governance and in this way modernize the country.

### **The Armenian National Congress: 2008 and Beyond**

During the 2008 presidential elections, the role of leader was performed by ex-President Levon Ter-Petrosyan. He was able to do three important things. Firstly, he characterized the present administration to be a gang, pointing to their anti-constitutional, anti-social and anti-state nature. Secondly, he clearly determined the goal, which was to restore the constitutional order in Armenia, to provide a social lift in the political, economic and cultural spheres, and to abandon the clerical-nationalist (elitist) ideology. Finally, Ter-Petrosyan was able to create a large political union, gathering around him almost all the opposition groups of Armenia. This made a clear impression on the society. Ter-Petrosyan announced that he was the winner of the 2008 presidential elections which were falsified by the government. Then the society started what was later called a "constitutional revolution".

Everyday meetings were held in Liberty square, the government was troubled and deployed police force against the peaceful demonstrators. During the night of March 1 to March 2, 2008, the unarmed demonstration was suppressed with the use of weapons. Ten people were killed and hundreds of people were arrested on false accusations. After these events, the opposition declared the formation of the Armenian National Congress, which was meant to be the union of those political forces and citizens who supported the restoration of the constitutional order. Ter-Petrosyan declared himself to be the political instrument of the citizens. The main work style of the Congress was the so-called "street policy" in the form of meetings, marches and pickets.

The original Congress managed to become a place for the society's self-expression, but not a place for gaining political power. It obtained a diverse inner ideology with the cooperation of, for example, the conservatives, the socialists and the liberals. Open professional commissions operated there and formed policies of political and economic transformations. A new independent media was formed in Armenia around the various issues put forth by the Congress. At that time the social movements for ecology, law enforcement and social self-organization became active. The crowded square served as a link for all these processes: it provided a common information area and resulted in the unity of public mind with public activity. Life can be changed—this time not through a revolution with a negligible result, but consciously, by creating a modern field of democratic values and starting a free social debate—this was the main idea of the process.

This productive social situation lasted for four years, until the autumn of 2011. There is no clear benchmark

to which the decrease of this activism can be related. The main reason for this might be the fact that the Congress was not institutionalized. Its original structure and the official staff did not change, moreover, the existing structures degraded instead of developing. New social groups did not become members of the Congress, and the experience of cooperation of the different existing groups was not given a normative formulation. No platform was created to unite the ordinary members of the Congress on a daily basis, the speechmakers at the podium remained the same, and there was no party media developed. All the new and existing enterprises that were not part of the Congress administration, were not regarded as expressions of the Greater Congress: on the contrary, they were considered to be unwelcome competitors. This led to the paradoxical break of the Congress with public movements, independent media, artistic circles and, finally, with society. Here we can also see the society's fault expressed by its tendency to become easily fascinated and easily disappointed, by its suspiciousness and too critical attitude toward Ter-Petrosyan or the Congress, and finally, by its lack of understanding. As a result of this, the Congress was rapidly gaining an undesirable "brick-stone identity" and predictability. The inner debate was fading, and the chances of self-expression via the Congress were growing smaller and smaller. Then a conflict occurred between the founders of the movement. The Congress lost its main quality of uniting people, and the spheres of expression were blocked because of the absence of normative means of manifestation, because of the hierarchy and roughness of the inner debate forms. In the end, the Congress turned into an ordinary party in the Armenian perception of the concept (devoid of real substructures, regulation, debate, creativity and social base). This led to the failure of the Congress to participate in the country's political processes. The Congress did not participate in the 2013 presidential elections, and at the 2013 City Council elections did not receive even the minimum of 5% of the votes.

However, during the four years of its active existence, the Congress created a valuable example of democratic policy, gained experience and intellectual achievements that, together with the mistakes, still remain actual and exemplary.

### **Heritage and the Problem of Inheriting a Democratic Movement**

Thus, we saw how the Armenian society, though perhaps not very wisely, ceased to trust the establishment of democracy in Armenia to the Armenian National Congress. But the problem remained unsolved, whilst the presidential elections were about to start. The Armenian

National Congress and two other political forces (Prosperous Armenia and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation) decided not to take part in the elections. During his campaign the leader of the Heritage, Raffi Hovhannisyan, applied a new style, which he called "BAREV revolution" (BAREVolution—a "Hello Revolution"). He walked in the streets of Yerevan, travelled to the regions and greeted everyone, talked with them, thus creating an image of a sociable and modest political figure. Hovhannisyan was born and educated in the USA. In 1992 he was appointed the first Minister of Foreign Affairs of independent Armenia. During the year in this post, he led a moderately nationalistic, mostly anti-Turkey policy. Because of this policy he had to resign from the post. Together with this moderate nationalism, the Heritage, which also has a parliamentary group, during the past years had gained the reputation of a party that helps people in need. Its campaign was based on this idea. The Heritage had always been liked by the society, for being constantly oppositional but in a soft way, unlike the rough style of the Congress. At the same time, the Heritage displayed the same soft opposition against the Congress itself. During the 2013 presidential elections, these factors worked in favor of Hovhannisyan, and the latter won the elections, according to public opinion. Again, like five years before, demonstrations and meetings started in Yerevan's Liberty square. Hovhannisyan paid active visits to the regions, which was highly appreciated by the population. He declared that he was no longer the representative of the Heritage, but the representative of the whole society. He promised to unite the oppositional part of society and claimed that he didn't regard the government as his enemy either, but wanted it to fulfill the people's wishes. However, in contrast to the Congress, the public activism of Raffi lasted only three months. At the end of this period, the public disappointment was obvious.

The reasons are manifold. Firstly, unlike Ter-Petrosyan, Hovhannisyan did not bring with himself a new and independent political text. Of course, his non-elitist, non-hierarchic attitude was a fresh and effective factor. But the basis of values brought by him was too eclectic, somewhat contradictory, and highly populist. Secondly, despite the fact that different political groups participated in Hovhannisyan's meetings, namely the ARF-Dashnaktsutyun and one of the former leaders of the Congress, Raffi failed to create a structure capable of a long struggle, like the Congress. Although Hovhannisyan did not refuse the idea of creating an openly working alternative government, it was not fulfilled because of the lack of a decision-making system. There was also a lack of ideological discussion and strategy elaboration in the square and among the society. It was disappoint-

ing that Hovhannisyan, who named his party “Heritage”, refused to inherit the legitimacy of the past five years’ struggle, not considering his movement as the continuation of the previous one. By his contemptuous attitude towards the past struggle of the Congress, Hovhannisyan hurt the people who had been in the same square five years already. He did not understand that these were the same people, the same society.

Hovhannisyan’s movement seemed to correct many of the deficiencies of the Congress, but at the same time he refused to accept its fundamental achievements in organizing a social struggle, its rules and values, its experience and text. At the City Council elections in May 2013, the Heritage received an offensive 8% of the votes and gave up its public activism for the time being. We can say that the Heritage manifested itself as an alternative not to the government, but to the previous opposition. In many respects it was really a positive opposition, which corrected the mistakes of the previous one. However, in core matters, i.e. how to unite the society, how to make the oppositional movement a free and responsible place for the self-expression of people, it did less than its predecessor, both from the conceptual and the practical points of view.

### **Prosperous Armenia: A Continuously Failing Alternative?**

Prosperous Armenia is the party of Gagik Tsarukyan, a businessman and an oligarch. In fact, it is based on the same values as the ruling RPA, on the idea of the unity of big business with the government. For a long time it was RPA’s coalitional partner. However, in 2010 this party left the governing coalition and announced itself not an opposition, but an “alternative” to the ruling party. Tsarukyan made the impression on some part of the society that he was going to help everybody to prosper like him, and activate a social lift that will not require the change of the present political-economic system (oligarchy). In this system only the minority is able to prosper politically, economically and culturally, through repressing the majority’s rights. So, it is not clear what plan Tsarukyan suggests to overcome this circumstance. We don’t know any serious concept or program either that would express Tsarukyan’s vision of Armenia’s future and the reforms the party intends to make. In spite of, or due to that, Prosperous Armenia arouses romantic hopes among quite a great part of the voters, and it has a big, though not very influential (about 20%), factions in the Parliament, City Council, as well as in the regional local government bodies. Probably, Tsarukyan manages to maintain some inner life, inner interest inside his party. This interest is possibly based merely on his personal career. The Congress

leader Ter-Petrosyan had hoped that Prosperous Armenia would join the oppositional movement and become a party that protects the interests of the majority. This, in its turn, would break the vicious link between business and the government, and would serve as an example for the other businessmen, stirring their wish to establish a constitutional order or, in Ter-Petrosyan’s words, to make a bourgeois-democratic revolution. However, Tsarukyan did not accept that co-operation, though in separate matters his party co-operates with the parliamentary fractions of the opposition. It is not clear why the big bourgeoisie should go for that revolution. They have already made such a revolution, uniting with the government, becoming its social basis. The democratic revolution and the establishment of a constitutional order can endanger their monopolistic-oligarchic positions, turning them into ordinary businessmen.

In any case, the uncertainty of principles, adopted by Prosperous Armenia and considered by some to be the party’s advantage (since the party, as an instrument, could be used to promote any principles that it adopts), seems to become its deficiency. If Tsarukyan used to play the role of a powerful “joker” in the political field, whose support was needed by both the government and the opposition, now he will probably start playing the role of an unnecessary factor, unreliable for both the government and the opposition, as well as for the society. Anyway, the failures of the opposition at the latest elections worked not in favor of Tsarukyan, but in favor of the government. Tsarukyan just maintained his previous rating, which, probably, is a failure for him.

### **ARF-Dashnaksutyun<sup>1</sup>: With Whom and For What?**

The ARF-Dashnaksutyun is probably the only party in Armenia not focused on the cult of personality. It has an inner structure, operating regulations, and comparatively decentralized and localized institutions. The party has a 100 year history and a great reputation in the Diaspora; being a member of the Dashnaksutyun is in some sense a way of living, an identity. However, in the last 10 years, the Dashnaksutyun has failed to obtain a reasonable, programmed and ideological form, text and position. During Kocharyan’s rule it was part of the governing coalition, but then it left the government and declared itself an opposition. The party refused to join the Congress. However, it joined Hovhannisyan’s movement, but here too failed to display a stable political position. It did not even try to modernize its socialist origins, while there is probably public demand for such a position in Armenia. The party’s nationalistic

<sup>1</sup> In Armenian “Dashnaksutyun” means “coalition.”

posture is modernized to some extent, but here it has strong rivals in the face of the RPA and Hovhannisyan's Heritage as well. The Dashnaktsutyun has a small faction in the National Assembly, which co-operates with the other members of the opposition in specific cases. It didn't receive the minimum of 5% of votes at the City Council elections. Since it has a system for leader elections and rotation inside the party, it will remain in Armenia's political life, and perhaps the new generation leaders will help it to restore its ideological identity and social basis.

### Conclusion

The main problem of Armenian political life still remains unsolved: the construction of a democratic state, i.e. the return of the majority of the citizens to an active political, economic and cultural life, and the release of all these spheres from the monopoly of the minority, exemplified by the RPA. It is obvious that, on the one hand, the leading party cannot satisfy this demand, as the party is based on the minority, and its being in power is based on fundamentally illegitimate actions of rigging elections several times; and, on the other hand, the temporary defeat or retreat of the political opposition does not mean that the society will give up this demand. This means that oppositional political unification is unavoidable. It is impossible to predict when this will happen: we can only enumerate some of the priorities for future opposition's success or failure, judging by the experience of Armenia's social-political struggle.

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Success requires a large social movement, a coalition of political forces, and encouragement of the creation of new activist groups, public creativity, identities and factions during the movement. It also requires institutional growth, formation of procedures and formats. At the same time, it demands great responsibility. Additional factors are: presence of a clear political text without nationalistic, populist and elitist deviations; awareness of the fact that the struggle is for the majority and for the restoration of everyone's rights; localization of the movement to the communities level; involvement of different social groups (lawyers, ecologists, students, small and big businesses, etc.) into the process, permission for them to speak on the podium. The successful movement should declare itself a successor of the previous public movements, which means to examine and evaluate the past movement, involving the participants of the previous stages. The new movement should not be allowed to privatize the struggle as it doesn't belong to the parties and their leaders: they are only instruments for the struggle that belongs to the society. But the society, in its turn, should understand its leaders and be grateful to them, for they are also members of the society and have done everything in their power, perhaps much more than the rest.

If all these conditions are met, the establishment of a republic in Armenia is unavoidable.

*Translated from the Armenian by Tatevik Mkhitarian*

## Oligarchy in Armenia

David Petrosyan, Yerevan

### Abstract

This article provides a history of Armenia's oligarchs with the intention of defining ways to reform the system to end the country's stagnation.

### Introduction

Oligarchs in Armenia are individuals who live in the country and hold exceptional financial power (in comparison with the majority of inhabitants) and quite often a monopoly of power over a particular economic sphere.

Since the mid-1990s they have penetrated into government structures in order to maintain their power. At the same time, some state figures often turn into oligarchs making use of their possibilities in the government. Many experts consider Armenia a country ruled