

European
Elections monitor

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Analysis

The outgoing Head of State Serzh Sargsyan is due to be re-elected as the Armenian President

Abstract :

On 18th February next the Armenians will be appointing their President of the Republic. According to article 51 of the Constitution the presidential election has to be held at least 50 days before the end of the mandate of the outgoing Head of State. The registration period for the candidates was reduced this time round from 15 to 10 days and 1988 polling stations will be opened across the country including 450 in the 13 electoral districts of Erevan. The electoral campaign started on 21st January and will end in the evening of 16th February.

Outgoing Head of State Serzh Sargsyan (Republican Party HHK) is running for a second term and is the favourite in the polls. The only real issue at stake is whether he will be re-elected in the first round or whether a second round will be necessary.

The Presidential Office in Armenia

The President of the Republic is elected for 5 years by direct universal suffrage. His term in office is renewable once. The Head of State has a number of

powers notably that of being able to dissolve the Azgayin Zhoghov, the only Chamber in Parliament He is the Commander in Chief of the Army and guarantees the country's territorial integrity along with its security.

Reminder of the Presidential Election Results of 19th February 2008 in Armenia

Turnout: 69.25%

| Candidates | Number of votes won | % of votes won |
|---|---------------------|----------------|
| Serzh Sargsyan (Republican Party, HHK) | 862 369 | 52.82 |
| Levon Ter-Petrosyan | 351 222 | 21.50 |
| Artur Baghdasaryan (Rule of Law, OE) | 272 427 | 17.70 |
| Vahan Hovhannisyan (Revolutionary Federation, Dashnaktsutyun, HHD) | 100 966 | 6.20 |
| Vazgen Manukyan (National Democratic Union, AzhM) | 21 075 | 1.30 |
| Tigran Karapetyan (People's Party) | 9 791 | 0.60 |
| Artashes Geghamyan (National Unity Party, AM) | 7 524 | 0.46 |
| Arman Meliqyan | 4 399 | 0.27 |
| Aram Harutyunyan (National Solidarity Party) | 2 892 | 0.17 |

Source : Armenian Interior Ministry

Presidential election in Armenia 18th February 2013

8 people are officially running in the presidential election on 18th February next [1]:

- Serzh Sargsyan, outgoing President of the Republic, former Prime Minister (2007-2008) and leader of the Republican Party (HHK), supported by Rule of Law (Orinats Erkir, OEK), a member of the government and led by Artur Baghdasarian, as well as by the National Accord Party led by Artaches Geghamian (former opposition candidate in the presidential election on 19th February and 5th March 2003) and the Union for Constitutional Rights led by Haik Babukhanian;
- Raffi Hovhannisyán, leader of Heritage (Zharangutiun, Z), a centrist liberal party which he founded in 2002 supported by the Socialist Labour Party (HASK) of Moses Shahverdian;
- Hrant Bagratyan, former Prime Minister (1993-1996) and leader of the Freedom Party (Azatutuyn), member of the Armenian National Congress (HAK), a coalition of 13 parties chaired by former President of the Republic (1991-1998), Levon Ter Petrosyan;
- Paruyr Hayrikyan, leader of the Union for National Self-Rule, former member of the Revolutionary Federation Dashnaktsutyun (HHD) ;
- Arman Meliqyan, former Foreign Minister of the Nagorno-Karabakh (2004-2005) and present advisor on the political stakes for refugees and the civil society network;
- Aram Harutyunyan, chairman of the National Solidarity Party and candidate in the presidential election on 19th February and 5th March 2003 (2.8% of the vote in the first round) and of 19th February 2008 (0.17% of the vote);
- Andrias Ghukasyan, political analyst;
- Vardan Sedrakyan, folklore specialist.

Every candidate has to pay 8 million drams (i.e. 14,784 €) in registration fees (the average monthly wage is 230€ in Armenia). Some candidates believed that this measure was "anti-constitutional".

The Armenian Political Landscape

Many people in the opposition have given up their bid to run in the presidential election on 18th February next. Aram Sargsyan, leader of the Republican Party said that in his opinion the election was of little purpose

since the outgoing Head of State would retain power. He decided to support none of the candidates running. However, he said that he was convinced a new era would start after the election. Parour Airikian, leader of the National Identity Party and supporter of the establishment of a parliamentary regime and the use of proportional voting in the general elections gave up his bid. Aram Karapetian, leader of New Times and Tigran Karapetian, leader of the People's Party did the same, saying that the result of the election was "a foregone conclusion". The first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party Ruben Tovmasian, said he was sure that this election "*will be as corrupt as the previous parliamentary election (6th May 2012).*" Finally, Levon Ter Petrosyan, the unfortunate candidate in the last presidential election on 19th February 2008 (21.50% of the vote), has also withdrawn his candidate bid. He says he is too old (he has just turned 68) saying that Armenia was "*in the hands of a group of criminals*".

The Revolutionary Federation Dashnaktsutyun (HHD) led by Hrant Markaryan will not be taking part in the presidential election and will not support any of the candidates. The Armenian National Congress gave up the race too and decided to support none of the eight candidates. The party coalition accused the government in office of "*making democratic elections impossible and for having perfected the techniques of electoral fraud*" over the last five years.

The leader of Prosperous Armenia (BHK), businessman Gagik Tsarukian qualified "*as the only potential rival to the outgoing President of the Republic Serzh Sargsyan*" by the director of the Caucasus Institute, Alexander Iskandarian, announced his withdrawal from the presidential race on 12th December in a written declaration. He declared he supported none of the candidates on 18th February next.

In February 2011 the Republican Party, Rule of Law (Orinats Erkir, OEK) and Prosperous Armenia signed an agreement not to oppose each other in the general elections on 6th May 2012 and to support the outgoing Head of State during the next presidential election. Prosperous Armenia – a member of the coalition in office alongside the Republican Party and Rule of Law since March 2008, did however choose, after the last general elections on 6th May 2012, not to take part in

1. <http://www.elections.am/announcement/id-61/>

the government led by Tigran Sargsyan (HHK). At the time Gagik Tsarukian stressed that it was vital to build an alternative to the Republican Party and in June 2012 voted against the new government that was formed after the general election.

According to Galust Sahakian, leader of the parliamentary group of the Republican Party, several members of Prosperous Armenia had chosen to support the outgoing President Serzh Sargsyan in the next presidential election.

Heritage will therefore be the only opposition party running in the presidential election with its leader Raffi Hovhannisyan. He said that Serzh Sargsyan was his only real rival. He also indicated that if there was any electoral fraud on 18th February he would call the people to come out on the street.

Raffi Hovhannisyan launched his electoral campaign on 21st January in Freedom Square in Yerevan. To help in this he has called on Levon Baghramian a young 30 year old Armenian living in the USA and who worked on the last presidential campaign of Barack Obama. The Heritage leader has also just achieved the support of rock singer Serj Tankian.

Many political analysts think that some opposition members prefer not to get involved in the presidential election in the hope of obtaining a government position after the election. *"It is the first time in Armenia's history that the opposition is not taking part in an election, as if it were admitting defeat,"* analyses Gevorg Poghosian, director of the Institute for Sociology and Philosophy.

The President of the Republic Serzh Sargsyan announced that he was standing on 15th December last. Modernisation and re-armament are the two catchwords in his programme. With his motto *"Towards a safe and prosperous Armenia"* the outgoing Head of State is promising that every Armenian will enjoy a "better life" in 2018, i.e. by the end of the next presidential mandate. He is drawing particular attention to the acknowledgement of the Armenian genocide (1915-1916) by the international community and hopes to continue relations with neighbouring Turkey. Serzh Sargsyan will be supported by the largest minority living in Armenia, the Yezidis (a population of 40

000) of which Aziz Tamoyan, Chair of the Yezidis Union of Armenia and the world is the representative.

Hrant Bagratyan presented his economic programme on 11th January last. Entitled *"One Hundred Steps towards Social Justice"* he plans for a rise in revenues, employment and the birth rate; a reform of taxation; the modernisation of the budgetary policy; an improvement in the economic environment and the reduction of the parallel economy.

On 11th January political analyst Andrias Ghukasyan called on all candidates in the presidential election (except for outgoing President Serzh Sargsyan) to withdraw and unite within a civic movement to demand real change. Some days later he changed strategy and finally only called on Serzh Sargsyan to withdraw.

Brussels has asked the Armenian authorities to hold a *"transparent, fair presidential election on 18th February which falls in line with international standards."* *"The quality of the election will influence the association agreement with the European Union,"* declared Willem van der Geest, the EU's advisor in Armenia. *"A successful election, which is free and fair, is really important and vital for relations between Armenia and the European Union. Without this the continuing process of reform that we want to see may be compromised,"* stressed the European Commissioner for Enlargement and the Neighbourhood Policy, Stefan Füle who recalled the need for Armenia and Azerbaijan to avoid action that might increase tension in the Nagorno-Karabakh. *"Before the presidential election next month additional progress is necessary in the implementation of the present legislative framework as recommended by the OSCE,"* said Stefan Füle. *"After the parliamentary elections on 6th May 2012 the OSCE made several recommendations to improve the electoral process. If I am not wrong of the 26 recommendations, 18 have been adopted,"* indicated Andrei Sorokin, head of the international organisation's office in Yerevan.

In December 2012 Brussels and Yerevan signed an agreement on facilitating visas (which still has to be approved by the European Parliament). This does not involve the UK, Ireland and Denmark but will make it easier for Armenians who want to travel to Europe to obtain visas. Moreover Armenia lifted visa requirements on European citizens on 10th January.

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According to the most recent poll by the Centre Sotsiometr 20% of Armenians are about to vote for the outgoing President Serzh Sargsyan and 5.5% for the Heritage leader Raffi Hovhannisyan on 18th February next. Slightly more than half of those interviewed (52%) said they were interested in the election and one third (32%) were certain to turn out to vote. The director of Sotsiometr, Aharon Adibekian, said that the votes of people supporting Prosperous Armenia would be divided between the outgoing head

of state and the leader of the Freedom Party Hrant Bagratyan. *"I cannot see any rival to President Serzh Sargsyan, Raffi Hovhannisyan and Hrant Bagratyan will fight for second place. Paruyr Hairikyan is due to come fourth. The others are just clowns,"* he stressed.

Turnout will finally produce one thing. In 2005 most of the opposition parties called for a boycott of the referendum on the constitutional amendments. The high abstention rate made the election illegitimate.

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