



November 20, 2015

Use of Administrative Resources in Preparation of Referendum

Summary

November 1-16, 2015

On October 5, 2015, Armenia’s National Assembly passed a decision entitled “To Agree on Putting to the Draft Bill on Changes to Armenia’s Constitution to a Referendum”. On this basis, Armenia’s president declared on October 8, 2015 that the referendum would take place on December 6, 2015. The referendum’s official campaign was launched on October 10, 2015.

This summary includes information on the clear use of administrative resources, or their possible use, during the referendum campaign in the first half of November.

1. During the first ten days of November, experts and press reports continued to expose irregularities regarding the number of voters. Official clarifications by Armenia’s Police in response also continued. In particular, the Police explained the 300,000 discrepancy¹ between figures cited by the National Statistical Service and Armenia’s Voter Registry as stemming from the fact that NSS publications hadn’t included data on those who were absent from the country for over one year. In other words, the NSS list only includes permanent residents. The increase in the number of voters, when opposed to the decrease in the population (and in certain cases that the first number is greater), was explained by the argument that, according to Armenia’s Electoral Code, voter rolls kept the names of citizens living outside Armenia since the Police are not permitted to remove the names of voters now living overseas but registered in a given community in Armenia from the register rolls.²
2. During the first half of November, member organizations of the “Civilian Observer” initiative, as well as news outlets, received numerous complaints that campaigning was being conducted in many schools and kindergartens in Armenia, and that employees and their relatives, as well as parents of pupils, were being recruited and listed to ensure their “Yes” vote in the referendum.³ This issue was raised in the National Assembly and a demand was made for the Minister of Education and Science to provide clarifications.⁴
3. On November 3, at a joint session of the National Assembly’s Standing Committee on State-Legal Affairs and the Standing Committee on Financial-Credit and Budgetary

¹ <http://galatv.am/hy/anatylitcs/3-302-424/>, <http://www.ilur.am/news/view/50365.html>

² <http://www.police.am/news/view/p71115.html>

³ <http://armtimes.com/hy/read/73533>, <http://top-news.am/7/1/news/54824.html>, <http://top-news.am/7/1/news/54824.html>,

<http://www.aravot.am/2015/11/13/628512/>, <http://www.aravot.am/2015/11/10/627337/>, <http://www.aravot.am/2015/11/11/627922/>

⁴ <http://www.ilur.am/news/view/50629.html>

Affairs debating the 2016 budget, Syunik Provincial Governor Surik Khachatryan assured reporters that he would guarantee that the largest “Yes” vote in the December 6 referendum would take place in his province and that he would decide on the percentage.⁵ Shirak Governor Feliks Tsovakyan, Gegharkounik Governor Rafik Grigoryan, and Aragatzotn Governor Sargis Sahakyan also made similar promises to reporters that the referendum would pass.⁶

4. On November 3, the 1in.am news website published an article claiming that Gagik Sargsyan, mayor of the community of Arindj in Kotayk, had stated that 80-90% of residents would be voting in favor of changes to the constitution and ruled out the possibility that a “No” campaign headquarters would be set up.⁷
5. A planned rally by the opposition “Nor Hayastan” movement failed to take place in Bouzhakan, a village in Kotayk Province. According to a movement leader, local police had gone from house to house and pressured people into not attending the rally.⁸
6. At a November 6 event in Meghri organized by the Transparency International Anti-Corruption Center NGO to inform residents of the constitutional change issue, the Meghri mayor declared that residents were informed and needed no additional explanations or interpretations on the matter. He said that as the elected mayor residents would act as he told them to. Just a few hours after the event, as a result of the mayor’s overpowering presence and his public statement, three individuals who had expressed a willingness to serve as observers during the referendum (and were members of the Civilian Observer initiative) pulled out.
7. According to a November 6 Armenia Liberty program Republican Party of Armenia ministers would also be participating in the “Yes” campaign alongside Armenia’s prime minister and provincial governors. The official claimed they would participate only after 6pm. For instance, Minister of Diaspora Affairs Hranoush Hakobyan said she plans to campaign for the “yes” camp in her region of Gegharkounik. Armen Ashtoyan, Minister of education and Science and a member of the central campaign headquarters of the “Yes” camp, started to moderate a new Public TV political debate program called “Yerankyun” on November 6. The first program was dedicated to constitutional referendum.⁹ Given such unfair coverage tilted in favor of the “Yes” camp in the media and especially Armenian Public TV, the Armenian National Congress¹⁰ (HAK) filed a complaint with the National TV and Radio Commission¹¹ and Council of Europe expert Laurent Rouy categorically found Minister Ashotyan’s moderating a TV program during the referendum campaign as unacceptable based on accepted norms and best practice.¹²

⁵ <http://www.azatutyun.am/content/article/27343063.html>

⁶ <http://armtimes.com/hy/read/73151>

⁷ <http://www.1in.am/1760043.html>

⁸ <http://www.azatutyun.am/content/article/27347055.html>

⁹ <http://www.azatutyun.am/content/article/27349562.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.ilur.am/news/view/50391.html>

¹¹ <http://www.hrparak.am/?p=93777&l=am/hhk-n+arajin+e+erkir+mediayi+e%D6%82+shanti+isk+hak-y%D5%9D+armeniayi+ev+h2-i+eterum+>

¹² http://www.azatutyun.am/content/article/27358038.html?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=facebook

8. On November 6, GALA TV's website published an item stating that it had received news that lists were being drawn up in a number of villages and that residents were being instructed to vote "Yes". The mayor of the communities of Gharibdjan and Getk said that they were following the instructions of the Shirak Governor, but that the lists were in regard to bringing natural gas to the villages and not about constitutional change. The Shirak Governor also confirmed this. We must point out that for twenty years seven villages have petitioned the government for natural gas, and now they want to resolve the matter on the eve of the constitutional change referendum.¹³
9. On November 7 and 8 respectively, Lilya Abrahamyan (Principal of the Vanadzor branch of the European College) and writer Narineh Kroyan posted on Facebook that individuals visited their apartments, identified themselves as mayoral office employees, and asked if there were civil servants residing within so that they could tell how to vote. They also asked if there were people who would be voting "No" so that they could "work on" them.¹⁴ On November 9, Lilya Abrahamyan posted that the person who visited her wanted to know if she would definitely be voting "Yes" since he would have to present such information to higher-ups. When Abrahamyan said she wanted 5,000 AMD for her vote, the man jotted "Yes-Money" in his list.¹⁵
10. On November 10, Aravot newspaper wrote that employees of the Malatya Medical Center, owned by Republican Party of Armenia MP Samvel Aleksanyan, had received instructions from management to go out and recruit ten "Yes" votes for the December 6 referendum. Blank forms were handed out and employees were told to get first and last names as well as passport data.¹⁶
11. A video clip was disseminated on November 8 showing Armenian Minister of Defense Seyran Ohanyan directly participating in "Yes" camp campaigning.¹⁷ Even though this doesn't formally constitute a violation of the "Law on Referendums", nevertheless what the defense minister says can directly impact the voting habits of military personnel.¹⁸
12. On November 11, Armenia's National Assembly passed a bill allowing citizens possessing identity cards to vote.¹⁹ The authors of this bill only included two proposals out of the many made by opposition representatives for additional monitoring mechanisms designed to prevent double voting. They agreed that on the day of the ballot there be another column on the registration roll noting that the citizen had voted with an ID card, and that the total number of voters using ID cards be noted in the results.²⁰ Nevertheless, given that the voter rolls are still kept secret, such figures cannot be checked or compared. Essentially, these mechanisms can have no impact on the credibility of results or on the monitoring of voting.

¹³ <http://galatv.am/hy/news/129276/>

¹⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/narine.kroyan?fref=nf>, <https://www.facebook.com/lilia.abrahamyan.9>

¹⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/lilia.abrahamyan.9/posts/10153740604019824?pnref=story>

¹⁶ <http://www.aravot.am/2015/11/08/626755/>, <http://www.1in.am/1765413.html>

¹⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/409027245925029/videos/482099295284490?fref=nf>

¹⁸ <http://www.azatutyun.am/content/article/27356494.html>

¹⁹ <http://www.azatutyun.am/content/article/27357985.html>

²⁰ <http://www.azatutyun.am/content/article/27356430.html>

13. On November 11, Helsinki Association President Mikayel Danielyan stated that people were being visited in their apartments with the offer of changing their passports for free.²¹
14. On November 12, members of the opposition “New Armenia” salvation front traveled to the community of Karakert in Armavir to campaign. However, the entire length of the only road leading to the village was filled with cement bags. The village mayor argued that the bags had been placed on the road to organize construction work more effectively. As a result the planned for event never happened.²²
15. On November 13, data from a Transparency International Anti-Corruption Center study were published showing discrepancies in voter rolls and casting suspicions regarding their credibility. In particular, it showed that 5,400 voters were registered at a mere 58 addresses; that 4,700 voters had no address; and more than 37,300 voters lacked a date of birth.²³
16. A reality type show called “Yes and No” has been running on ArmNews TV and the A1+ internet website in Armenia’s northern and southern provinces since November 13. There are claims that in response to those participating in the show voicing complaints, supporters of the “yes” camp promised to resolve their problems. In particular, in the town of Meghri, Republican Party of Armenia MP Karineh Ajemyan promised to raise the residents’ problem of natural gas supplies and that MP Vardan Ayvazyan (of the same party) proposed to develop manufacturing in the region.²⁴ It’s worth noting that it is prohibited to make promises during the campaign according to the “Law on Referendums” and that such violations result in administrative accountability.
17. During the November 14 “Yes and No” reality show, Armenian Prime Minister Hovik Abrahamyan, Minister of Territorial Administration and Emergencies Armen Yeritsyan, and Minister of Urban Construction Narek Sargsyan visited Abaran. Abrahamyan said that he had arrived to help those who had suffered due to the high winds and rains of the previous night. The prime minister spoke to community leaders and residents, and with reality show participants.²⁵ Strong fall and spring winds are commonplace in Armenia and they sometimes result in heavy damage. Nevertheless, it’s not always that the prime minister visits the affected communities. In this case, PM Abrahamyan synchronized his administrative duties and those of the head of the “Yes” campaign headquarters.

²¹ <http://galatv.am/hy/news/129175/>

²² <http://galatv.am/hy/news/129175/>

²³ http://elections.transparency.am/2015/index.php?am_population2001-2015,36

²⁴ <http://hraparak.am/?p=94032&l=am%2F>

²⁵ <http://www.a1plus.am/1417247.html>