

‘Independent Observer’ Public Alliance

Initial Opinion of Short-Term Observation Mission on RA National Assembly Elections of April 2, 2017

Initial opinion of short-term observation mission by ‘Independent Observer’ Public Alliance during the RA NA elections of April 2, 2017

On April 2, 2017, RA NA elections day, the ‘Independent Observer’ Public Alliance carried out a short-term observation mission with the help of about 450 observers at 200 polling stations and 35 territorial commissions in all the 10 marzes (regions) and Yerevan city of Republic of Armenia. Also, there were 45 mobile observation groups to observe the situation outside the polling stations and prevent and solve problems at various polling stations.

According to information obtained at the observed polling stations, the situation below was recorded.

During voting:

1. At 40% of the observed polling stations, cases of several persons entering the voting booth simultaneously were identified, mostly during 8 am-12 pm.
2. At 30% of the observed polling stations, cases of filling out the ballots by the voters outside the voting booths were identified, mostly during 8 am-4 pm.
3. At 13% of the observed polling stations, cases when voters informed the commission members or proxies or simply said aloud for whom they voted were identified, mostly during 8 am-4 pm.
4. At 16.5% of the observed polling stations, cases when persons not entitled to stay at the voting room stayed there were identified, mostly during 8 am-4 pm.
5. At 33% of the observed polling stations, persons without any visible certificates at the polling stations were noticed, mostly during 8 am-12 pm.
6. At 17% of the observed polling stations, attempts by a proxy to instruct commission members, voters or police officers or taking over the functions of chairperson of the commission were identified, mostly during 8 am-4 pm.
7. At 23,8% of the observed polling stations, disputes were observed, mostly during 8 am-12 pm.

During vote count:

1. At each 5th polling station observed, ballots for a person with differing color or shades of pen were noticed.
2. At about 23.8% of the observed polling stations, other items besides the ballot were found in the ballot envelopes.
3. Direct involvement of proxies in the vote count process was identified at 14.4% of the observed polling stations.
4. At 91.5% of the observed polling stations, the commissions showed a non-uniform approach to the process of declaring ballots invalid.
5. As observed by the observers, at 71% of the observed polling stations, the commission members did not know the voting procedure and their functions.

At the same time:

1. The frauds detected based on the information provided by the observers and their feedback was recorded in the registry at 70% of the observed polling stations.
2. According to the observers, the competent authorities, i.e. commission members, police officers and other competent bodies took no measures to reduce frauds at 35.5% of the observed polling stations and no regular and full measures were taken at 12% of the observed polling stations.

It should be noted that on the voting day and the silence day before it, there were many alerts on widespread mass vote-buying by the Republican Party of Armenia, Armenian Revolutionary Federation ('Dashnaktsutyun') Party and 'Tsarukyan' Bloc and reliable information on such incidents was also shared by the mass media and social networks. In spite of this, the law enforcement officers did not record, detect or prevent a single case of vote-buying.

Besides the said frauds, the main frauds typical of the voting day also covered regular overcrowdings of voters near polling stations resulting from taking voters to the polling stations in groups and guiding them in their voting.

During these elections, no information on the polling stations for military servicemen was made known beforehand. At the observed polling stations, the servicemen were brought in lines and voted under command control.

It was impossible to exercise control over the election results at the penitentiaries facilities: the members of the Public Observers' Group Conducting Public Monitoring at the RA MoJ Penitentiary Institutions and Facilities, who were also entitled to observe the elections and had relevant certificates, were not permitted to enter the penitentiary facilities and thus had no opportunity to observe the voting process.

According to the data published by the RA CEC, out of 1487 arrestees and convicts entitled to vote at 11 RA penitentiary facilities, 1318 took part in the voting and 1023 of them (77.6%) voted for the ruling RPA which casts doubt

on the allegations that the voting was free.

Summing up the preliminary data of the observation, we state hereby that at all the observed polling stations, no efforts were noticed on the part of the commission members, proxies or other observers to voice, alert or prevent any election frauds.

The observers representing the 'Independent Observer' Public Alliance also reported cases when persons acting under the names of observation missions acted in favor of other parties.

Summing up the initial results of the observation, we hereby report as follows:

1. The voting was non-free.
2. Many issues identified during the election campaign (widespread and organized abuse of administrative resources, unequal competition conditions for nominated parties and blocs) and the atmosphere of impunity resulting from the improper reaction and inaction of the RA Central Election Commission, the Police and other law-enforcement agencies also affected the election day.
3. During summing up election results and vote count, the arithmetic frauds were not widespread.
4. The actions obstructing and disrupting the elections are not considered grave crimes; as a preventive measure, sanction for election frauds is not efficient.
5. The voting was accompanied by numerous frauds and pressure and control over voters.

The 'Independent Observer' Public Alliance considers the RA National Assembly elections of April 2, 2017 as absolutely non-free.

You can find the list of polling stations where some types of frauds were identified here in PDF and EXCEL formats.

'Independent Observer' Public Alliance represented by:
*Helsinki Citizens' Assembly-Vanadzor
Union of Informed Citizens
Martuni Women's Community Council
Goris Press Club*