

The Armenian General Elections are not due to bring about any Change

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D-7
7 days before
the poll

9 political parties are running in the general elections that are to take place on 6th May in Armenia. These include the 5 parties that are represented at present in the National Assembly, the only chamber in parliament: the Republican Party of Armenia (HHK) of the President of the Republic, Serzh Sargsyan and of Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan; Prosperous Armenia (BHK), led by businessman Gagik Tsukian; the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (HHD) led by Vahan Hovhannisian; Rule of Law (Orinats Erkir, OEK) led by Artur Baghdasarian and Heritage (Z) led by Raffi Hovhannisian, who is standing in a coalition with the Free Democrats led by Khachatur Kokobelian. 4 other parties are also running: the Armenian National Congress (HAK) that rallies 18 parties, the Communist Party (HKK), the Democratic Party and the United Armenians.

The Republican Party, led by the President of the Republic, Serzh Sargsyan, is the main favourite in the general elections. His programme insists on eradicating social inequalities and is planning to implement several measures in support of young people, families, the poorly housed and the elderly.

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation, a government member from 2007 to 2009 (the present government rallies the Armenian Republican Party, Prosperous Armenia and Rule of Law) is putting forward many specific measures to eradicate poverty and to improve the Armenian standard of living. Hence the party wants to increase retirement pensions to 63,000 drams (31,255 drams in 2012) and to raise the minimum hourly wage from 196 to 400 drams. The Vahan Hovhannisian Party is promising the creation of 200,000 new jobs and wants to give 150,000 drams to each citizen to cover medical expenses (63,000 drams at present), to build more apartments for big families and to increase the birth rate in Armenia (by 50,000 births annually).

"There will be infringements on 6th May. To win more votes the authorities are exaggerating the number of voters," declared Heritage MP, Armen Martirosian. The President of the Republic Serzh Sargsyan asked all of those responsible to *"do what is necessary for the elections to be free, fair and transparent."*

Officially Armenia has 2,482,593 voters (figure of 16th April last), i.e. +359,614 in comparison with the last

election on 12th May 2007, just as the most recent census reveals that the country has 400,000 citizens less than five years ago. The Head of State explained that the increase in the number of voters came from the registration on the electoral rolls of Armenians living abroad. Colonel Hovhannes Kocharian, head of the passport and visa department of the Armenian Police Force said that 3000 names had been withdrawn from the electoral rolls including 2000 who have died. He blamed families, who do not do what is necessary when a relative dies, for the continued registration of the dead on the rolls.

The international community and notably the EU are watching the election carefully. *"Of course the way the election takes place will show us how Armenia has developed and this will affect the relations we form with the country,"* indicated Michael Mann, spokesperson of Catherine Ashton, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and the Security Policy.

"No one can say that the next general elections will be free and fair," said Manuel Sargsian, Director of Research at the Armenian Centre for National and International Studies. Likewise, according to a recent poll, more than eight Armenians in ten (83%) believe that the next elections will be neither *"fair nor free"*.

Alexander Iskandarian, Director of the Caucasus Institute stresses that the elections on 6th May are not due to bring any major change to the composition of

General elections in Armenia 6th May 2012

the Armenian parliament. In his opinion no more than 6 parties will rise above the 5% voting mark obligatory to be represented in the National Assembly (7% of the vote for coalitions). The most recent polls credit the party led by the President of the Republic, Serzh Sargsyan with

37% of the vote. He is to be followed by his government partner, Prosperous Armenia, which is due to win 34% of the vote, the Armenian National Congress, 8.5%. The Armenian Revolutionary Federation and Rule of Law are due to win 6.7%. Finally Heritage is due to win 5.5%.

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