ARMENIAN VELVET REVOLUTION AND ITS NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THE STABILITY OF POLITICAL SYSTEM

Magda ARSENYAN
PhD Student at Public Administration Academy of RA

The transition to the parliamentary system of government is a real challenge for the Armenian political system and for the society. It's challengeable character is based on the following two incentives.

First of all, the monopoly governance of the former ruling political party led to the fall of the competitiveness of the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary opposition forces. As a result, the opposition political forces, regardless of being parliamentary or extra-parliamentary, were not perceived as real opposition political actors which led to an absence of public demand for alternative programs in the political agenda.

Secondly, the fact of society's alienation from political socialization processes, conditioned by objective and subjective factors, emerges excessive destructive emo-tions towards the political system, as well as to the deepening of mistrust towards go-vernment decisons, legislative initiatives and actions without exception.

As a result, the low level of development of the opposition institute in the 27 years of independence, the fact of unsatisfied public expectations and demands, public distrust on the effectiveness of parliamentary governance as well as the legitimacy crisis of the parliamentary majority have violated the country's internal stability. Oppo-sition YELQ alliance, having only 9 mandates, was deprived of tools and mechanisms of participating in the process of decision-making, started an extra-parliamentary struggle against the increase in tax burden and price increases in January. Despite the fact that the opposition "Tsarukyan" alliance also criticized the social policy pursued by the government, refused to cooperate on the political agenda presented by the "YELQ" alliance, making criticisms only at the level of statements. As regards the ruling coalition, their response to public demands dissatisfied with social policy, to put it mildly, was unacceptable, which in its turn made the wave of public discontent uncontrollable. The joint struggle of the YELQ alliance continued until the voting on the candidacy of the President of the Republic of Armenia, in the result of which Armen Sargsyan was nominated by the ruling coalition and was elected in the post of the President with 90 votes for and 10 votes against. However, Armen Sargsyan's can-didacy was not the only one in the post of RA President. The YELQ alliance also no-minated its candidate, which is the representative of the Republic party Artak Zey-nalyan. However, due to the procedure of President's election fixed by the Constitution (2015), in order to support Zeynalyan's

candidacy, YELQ alliance called for a vote for a united opposition candidate as they needed the support of Tsarukyan alliance, but the latter preferred to defend RPA nominee, Armen Sargsyan. All this led to the distrust between opposition parliamentary forces and to the deepening of public discontent.

However, the breakthrough came after the official statement made by the Republican party on April 14, 2018, despite the fact that Serge Sargsyan on April 10, 2014, officially announced during the debate on constitutional reform bill that he will no longer be nominated for the post of RA President or Prime Minister. This decision caused a huge wave of protests not only from the opposition, but also among the society, which led to the start of protests against Serge Sargsyan's intentions. "Civil Contract" party (YELQ alliance), the non-parliamentary "Reject Serge" initiative and "For the sake of the state of Armenia" have consolidated their efforts to fight the Serge Sargsyan's regime. The forces chose the street fight, including the option of marches, demonstrations and other protest actions, excluding violence. However, soon the split took place inside the alliance which was conditioned by the absence of consensus between parties on further action plan. Bright Armenia and "Republic" parties preferred not to join the movement. The problem was that very few citizens were present at the rallies on the anti-inflationary measures that had been organized by the alliance in January. And there was anxiety that the street fight would not have any positive results. Besides that, political parties were convinced that social indifference, which was vividly reflected in the parliamentary elections in 2017, alienated the society from important political processes. Additionally, there was also fear inside the alliance that if the street struggle started, authorities would use force as it happened on March 1, 2008. And, as a result of this lack of resources, the oppositional YELQ alliance will lose not only its reputation among the citizens but also there will be human losses.

Thus, on March 31, the "My Step" movement was launched, the leader of which was the leader of YELQ alliance, Nikol Pashinyan. At first time only a couple of dozen people joined him, and they were mainly journalists. By the time the MP and ex-journalist had reached the capital Yerevan on 13 April, thousands more joined his movement resulting in a series of civil disobedience actions turning into panarmenian movement. The road map of actions included civic disobedience actions that would paralyze the whole state management system, such as blocking roads and closing public buildings. It should be noted that months before the revolution, parliamentary and extra-parliamentary forces, in particular, the Tsarukyan alliance, the ANC, the Rule of Law Party (based on the interviews, held from October to December 2017 in Armenian) rejected the idea that there was a public demand for formulating a street fight agenda. According to them, the public consciousness was at the household level and there was no need to formulate an alternative political agenda.

But in response to opposition political parties, thousands of people went out into the street. The pan-national movement gained momentum at a very high speed, followed by new unprecedented political changes. After all, Serzh Sargsyan resigned and Nikol Pashinyan was appointed to the post of prime minister.

In general, the Velvet Revolution generated admiration and excitement not only in Armenia, but beyond its borders. The Armenian people still do not believe that they live in another reality. The entire international community was closely watching the events taking place in Armenia and was expressing its surprise over what happened.

On 24 April the head of the EU Delegation to Armenia hailed the success in the civic disobedience campaign in the country, promising a more intensive process towards the ratification of Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement. Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova praised the peaceful transition, adding that "Armenia, Russia is always with you!...We hope that the situation will develop exclusively in the legal and constitutional field, and all political forces will show responsibility and readiness for a constructive dialogue. We are convinced that the prompt return of life in the country to normal and the restoration of public accord meet the fundamental interests of the fraternal Armenia."

United States: On 23 April US Ambassador Richard Mills praised the Armenian police and anti-government protesters led by Nikol Pashinyan for avoiding bloodshed during their standoff that led to the resignation of Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan. A statement by the US State Department expressed hope that his successor will be chosen in a transparent and constitutional manner. The statement also called on Armenia's leading political groups to "avoid an escalation of the situation and any violent actions." Nevertheless, the Velvet Revolution has both positive and negative conse-quences, that should be taken into account in a very quick way. I would like to stress the reader's attention to one of the main negative consequences:

During the civil demonstrations, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan had an exceptional opportunity to capitalize the society's potential through public diplomacy and securitization[1] policy aimed to secure the social and political behavior of the individual. Though, but in contrast to that, the society again reinforced its ambitions of forming personalized power and fight against personality forgetting that the vicious reality against which he/she was struggling could not have been formed without his participation. The other negative consequences derived from the above-mentioned. As

---

[1] Securitization in international relations is the process of state actors transforming subjects into matters of "security": an extreme version of politicization that enables extraordinary means to be used in the name of security. Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, Security: A New Framework for Analysis (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), p. 25

for the positive consequences, we should estimate them after the upcoming parliamenttary elections, as the latter reflects the level of development of parliamentary political culture. The prerequisite for the development of parliamentary political culture is the establishment of an active and feedback-based dialogue at the national level between the society and the state. Over the years former authorities were accused of lack of constructive dialogue by the opposition and the society. This statement in essence has its objective and subjective side, but nevertheless we can't blame only former authorities in the absence of trust and constructive feedback-based dialogue. Due to the recent internal political processes, the lack of trust has a bilateral character. The question, that has to become the number one in Armenian political agenda is the following. Is the Armenian society ready to talk directly with the authorities about its mistakes, for which it is responsible not to the authorities, but to the state?

Almost every day we witness the revelation of corrupt practices in Armenian reality, but why we continue to think, that we were out of that practices? In this context we should view that power is a relationship between two parties, where both are responsible for the outcome. During the first 100 days of Government's activities National Security Service of Armenia (NSS) has revealed invidious footages from luxurious homes, country houses and business locations of famous members of the former criminal-oligarchic regime. Fight against the corruption targeted Samvel Aleksanyan, the famous Armenian businessman and a member of National Assembly, Manvel Grigoryan, the MP and Yerkrapah Volunteer Union chairman Manvel Grigoryan, Arakel Movsisyan, former MP, Alexander Sargsyan, Serzh Sargsyan's brother, who had unlimited political immunity. They all are representatives of the Republican party (RPA). But there is a need to remember, that in the result of Parliamentary elections of 2017, after the April War (2016) and Hostage Crisis (Daredevils of Sasssoun, 2016), The Republican Party of Armenia gained an absolute majority. The next important thing that we should remember within this context, is that people still asked for election bribe…

The last shocking news was the arrest of the former president Robert Kocharyan, who has been charged with the attempt to overthrow the constitutional order during the post-election events in March 2008, in the result of which 10 people were killed. Despite the fact, that Robert Kocharyan has been released from custody, the only fact that he is viewed as the chief accuser on March 1 has caused great excitement among the society. Undoubtedly, these revelations increased the level of trust and sympathy of the society for the newly formed government, including the heads of the law enforcement agencies. But it shoud be noted that post-election demonstrations were organized by Levon Ter-Petrosyan, the ally of whom was current Prime-Minister Nikol Pashinyan. The footages of post-election demonstrations prove that opposition leaders also provoked people` calling on them to take stones, truncheons to fight and to restore the "justice." Why do

we forget it? The next question, which I would like to raise and again to remain it answerless is the following. Why aftermath of the presidential elections of 2008, people took election bribe and voted for the Republican party? Besides that, various abuses and corruption practices are found in almost all public administration agencies, the most of which are related to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. In this respect I would like to pay reader's attention especially on the state benefits system. The findings in this area testify the abuses committed not only by the representatives of public administration agencies, but also by the ordinary citizens who have payed to be recognized as a disabled or to receive monthly benefit in the case when he or she are not needy. As a result of this, social policy is no more targeted and effective and the final goal of the social state and its social policy is blurred.

On 17 of August in Republic Square the representative of the newly formed government, the Prime Minister and his allies from "Civil Contract" presented the first 100 days activities. That day the most important thesis for the society was missing: " We are the authors of our social and political agenda, and we have to bear public responsibility for our lives and for the future of our state". But instead of this, the society again learned to blame others of not being competitive and responsible citizens of their state. There is a need to stress, that in order to exclude the unilateral character of internal political processes and decisions, the newly formed Government has to form a new social policy and an up-do-date concept of social state, which will be based on the human empowernment and on the balance between the positive and the negative freedom2. This two components are those important variables that ensure the high level of development of social, legal and political consciousness of the society.

Why do we need it? According to an existing public opinion, in the aftermath of the presidential elections in Armenia in 1991, none of the presidential and parliamentary elections recognized as legitimate. The authorities have always made control of the people, thus ensuring their own reproduction. How can society be controlled? If we consider the motive behind the electoral behavior of the society in the last decade and especially in the 2017 parliamentary elections, the answer is unequivocal. The social need makes person's choice manageable. Election bribe is a widespread phe-nomenon not only in Armenia, but also worldwide. But in societies with sustainable social development, in the result of the reduction of the social need the ideological struggle between political parties is gaining a momentum. Political parties spend more resources not for distributing election bribes, but for submitting competitive ideas and programs.

---

[2] Christian Welzel, Freedom Rising: Human Empowernment and the Quest for Emancipation. Cambridge University Press, 2013.
http://assets.cambridge.org/97811070/34709/frontmatter/9781107034709_frontmatter.pdf

Secondly, the creation of a self-sufficient society is directly proportional to the empowernment of the societie's potenial. Due to the Christian Welzel, the basis of this concept is the distribution of equal resources in three different spheres, that are economy, culture and democratic institutions. According to Welzel, we all have certain rights that are enshrined by the Constitution and the laws, due to which we get the opportunity to do something, but this is just one of the preconditions. People need to exercise their rights in order to create new resources that will make a person a self-sufficient citizen who realizes that the person is the only owner of his/her destiny. If we considered the above mentioned in the framework of negative and positive freedom, we have to stress, that the precondition to create a self-sufficient and highly motivated society is to provide very peaceful transition from negative to positive freedom. The description of positive and negative is very well presented by Isaiah Berlin. According to him, "negative freedom is the freedom to do whatever we want unhindered by others. Since my negative freedom can only exist when none else is restricting the acting out of my desires, whatever they might be, its very nature is action-oriented and directed at enemies external to myself." As for positive freedom, due to Berlin, "positive freedom we exercise within ourselves, by controlling our desires; rather than in opposition to the external world, which is where we assert rather than control our desires. He also stressed count that "man should be 'critical,original, imaginative', and strive for 'self-realization' and 'authenticity' as positive liberty. [3]" In Armenian reality, for now we are witnessing the consumption of negative freedom, which can be considered as a national security threat, if we won't initiate the formation of effective social policy, the final goal of which will be the creation of socially-independent society.

Currently Armenian society faces a number of socio-political challenges such as personalistic political tradition of party system formation, the absence of the ideological struggle between political parties and the imperfection of political parties' organizational structure, the absence of consolidated opposition and poor public participation in the political processes taking place in Armenia, having evolutionary background.

Within the ranges of this article this some aspects of this challenges will be viewed. Personalistic political tradition of party system formation.

The foundation of presidential system of government in Armenia since its independence in 1991, has led to the formation of personalistic political tradition. In young democracies presidential systems entail a tendency to polarize the competition among parties [Juan 1990: 51-69]. The presidency is the highest prize to be won in the political

---

[3] Gina Gustavsson, Freedom in Mass Values.
https://www.democracy.uci.edu/files/docs/conferences/grad/Gina%20Gustavsson_Freedom%20in%20Mass%20Values.pdf

game. The concentration of political power in this office impels the parties to focus almost all their efforts on its attainment [Rose-Ackerman, Desierto, Volosin 2011: Volume 29, Article 8].

Besides that, due to the Electoral Code (2016), the proportional representation with open list systems, that is currently functioning in Armenia, obviously strengthens this tendency. According to the Article 78[4] of the Electoral Code (2016), the divi-sion of the state into 13 electoral districts stimulate competition between individual candidates, not parties. Moreover, the proportional representation with open list sys-tems, instead of contributing the institutional development of parties, factually creates preconditions for the use of administrative and financial levers in separate consti-tuencies by strong political individuals.

The absence of the ideological struggle between political parties and the imper-fecttion of political parties' organizational structure (Executive body, Audit Commis-sion, Foreign Relations Commission, Ideological Commission, Organizational Com-mission, Youth Organization, Territorial and Regional organizations).

In Armenia, most of the political parties are ridiculously coloring themselves as both conservatives and progressives with their early policy platform announcements [5]. This is because what united them in their parties or their blocs is not a base political ideology, but rather a common enemy - the ruling Republican Party of Armenia.

The absence of the ideological struggle between parties and the poor organiza-tionnal structure of the most of political parties undermine the foundations of the es-tablishment of party system in Armenia. This two issues are partially the result of the multiplicity of political parties. It should be noted that the terms "multiplicity" and "multiparty" have to be sharply distinguished, as the multiplicity of parties doesn't state that the existence of pluralism and multiparty system. Moreover, due to some views, small parties can become a lever in the hands of a ruling party in order to buy their votes.

The absence of consolidated opposition.

One of the reasons why there is an absence of consolidated political opposition both in the parliament and in the extra-parliamentary political life, is the distrust of opposition parties towards each other and of course the public distrust towards the opposition parties. As in the struggle for power between the opposition and the pro-government political forces, the people were almost always in the status of 'victim.' The

---

[4] Electoral Code of the Republic of Armenia. Date of Acception: 25.05.2016. Accessed October 2017: http://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?docid=105967.
[5] "Elections in Armenia: The Missing Ideological Battle," 10.03.2017. Accessed: October 2017 https://armenianweekly.com/2017/03/10/the-missing-ideological-battle/

vivid proof of these are especially the recent presidential elections, held in 2008 and in 2013. In spite of the fact that the election system was being improved from time to time, however, there was one common feature typical to those elections. Their was no consensus on elections outcomes, which almost always led to the emergence of internal conflicts within the state.

These events had an extremely negative impact on the development of legal and political consciousness of society. Besides that, in the result of the ineffective social and economic policy of the Armenian authorities, a considerable mass of society was alienated from the political processes taking place in the country over time. The other part of the society is looking for a rather radical methods in order to fight against the ruling regime. Among these late street protest movements are Mashtots Park (2012), Electric Yerevan (2015) and Daredevils of Sasun (2016). However, in the case of continuing decline in the level of democracy and political stability, the examples of such civil movements can transform into a permanent form of political action.

The second reason stems from the first. Currently, the alignment of parliamentary parties and after the study of their parliamentary behavior, it becomes very difficult to assess the functioning of at least one of two political parties as an opposition. Both the PAP (currently 'Tsarukyan' coalition) and ARF have been in the coalition with the ruling party for a number of times. At present, ARF and RPA are in the coalition. As for the 'Tsarukyan' coalition, if we try to look back at the recent political events, it will become obvious that in practice, it cannot be a real opposition. It only plays as if it were an opposition.

Poor public participation in the political processes taking place in Armenia.

The analysis of voters behaviour in the parliamentary elections revealed the motives for political participation and voting. The electoral bribery was the major feature of citizens' political participation. Before and after the parliamentary elections, various media[6] and the OSCE / ODIHR Election Observation Mission[7] have published numerous publications that claim about massive election bribing cases by leading political forces a month before the election. It should be mentioned, that the main problem was that citizens demand electoral bribes from parties in order to sell their

---

[6] http://hetq.am/arm/news/13826/hraparak-hhk-i-ev-bhk-i-yntrakasharq-bazhanelu-gortsyntacn-uxekcvum-e-zaveshtali-vitchaknerov.html ; https://news.am/arm/news/381992.html ;
https://168.am/2017/07/03/815453.html; http://uicarmenia.org/3163 ;
http://www.tert.am/am/news/2017/03/29/varuzha+n-hoktanyan/2323787 ;
https://www.civilnet.am/news/2017/04/02/%D /311742 ; http://orer.news/?p=273184&l=am ;
http://www.panarmenian.net/arm/news/242042/
[7] OSCE/ODHIR Election Observation Mission: Parliamentary Elections of April the 2, 2017, Final Report. http://www.osce.org/odihr/328226?download=true

voice, as it is, unfortunately, the only way for the majority of the society to satisfy their daily needs. It is noteworthy that the cases of mass bribe taking place in the parliamentary elections have a national character which highlights not only the extremely low level of development of political culture but also to the parliamentary culture. This is a result of parties' (both opposition and pro-government) ineffective public policy.

We have tried to develop recommendations to address the above mentioned challenges. Curently Change is part of armenian politics. The same is true about the presented challenges and recommendations which we believe are subject to change as well.

In order to strengthen the party system and eliminate the personalistic political tradition of party system formation, there are two options, the one of which has already started. It is a transition to parliamentary system of government. As for the second option, there is a need to use the propotional representation with open lists[8], that is actual particularly for those democratic systems, that are in a transition period. Here parties do not have a solid organizational structure and ideological base and do not possess the technologies of working with voters. The proportional electoral system with open lists creates necessary conditions for the parties to solve these problems, since, on the one hand, they weaken the individual's role in political processes, which is important for normal functioning of the parliamentary system, allowing citizens to choose not only personalities but also party ideas between the programs. On the other hand, this eventually raises the legal and political consciousness of the voters establishing a clear link between the party and its political program. The attitude of citizens towards the open lists has a significant impact on whether or not the candidate will be included in the parliament. It's similar to the rating system, so the name of the party is written on one side of the ballot, on the other, the names of all the candidates represented by that party. The rating system allows the electorate not only to vote for this or that party list, but also to give preference to a certain number of candidates included in the party list. In this manner the voter decides which of the party's candidates deserves the deputy mandate. The proportional electoral system with open lists is considered to be the best because of the possibility to form flexible party lists, ensuring the connection between the voter and the candidate.

In order to overcome the issue, regarding the absence of the ideological struggle between political parties and the imperfection of political parties' organiza-tional

---

[8] European Commission for Democracy Through Law (Venice Commision). Report on Proportional Electoral Systems: The Allocation of seats Inside the Lists (Open/Closed Lists). Adopted by the Council for Democratic Elections at its 50th Meeting, Veniice, 19 March 2015. http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2015)001-e

structure, first of all there is a need to make amendments to the Constitution by which it will be possible to define limitations during the establishment of the political parties depending on their number of members, supporters, ideology and program. The second step towards the strengthening of the political party system has to be the amendments to the Law on Political parties, which has to define some important issues such as the definition of internal democratic mechanisms and guarantees of party ma-nagement, publicity of the preparation of party lists and candidates nomination, as well as guarantees of transperancy of political party's funding sources.

In order to protect the rights of the parliamentary opposition, there is a need to adopt a Law on Parliamentary Opposition, which will grant more precise specific res-ponsibilities. It is impossible to separate the opposition's rights from responsibilities, which are: overseeing the government and carefully scrutinising the work of other frontline bodies, initiating and taking part in legislative process and being involved in the operation of the parliament, all of which are rights that have to be protected. This is a necessary institutional recognition of the opposition, the aim of which is to provide the effective performance of the opposition as a counterweight to the majority. Therefore in order to outline of the content of the Law on Parliamentary Opposition, that will reflect of all the peculiarities of development of this institution within the state, it would be beneficial to organise public discussions involving think tanks and analytical agencies as well as other representatives of the civil society.

In order to ensure the fairness and transperancy of the elections in the future, there are two measures that have to be applied. First of all there is a need to define legal regulations that will penalize the attempts of both giving and taking the electoral bribe. The later is destructing the main principle of the democracy, that is the gover-nance by the people. Secondly, taking into account the poor level of legal, social and political consiousness of the society there is a need to form a securitization policy that will include also an action plan aimed at socialization and re-socialization of the society.

Obviously, the above presented recommendations are not sufficient, but of course important steps that partially can overcome some of the obstacles that hinder the process of development of parliamentary political culture in Armenia.

Magda ARSENYAN

Armenian "Velvet Revolution" and Its Negative Impact on the Stability of Political System

Key words: velvet revolution, social policy, political parties, anti-corruption policy

In order to reveal those motives which have led to the breakout of pan-national movement against the former ruling party the article analyses political situation in Armenia before the "Velvet Revolution." According to the author, the citizen has to take responsibility not only for the crisis of legitimacy of the opposition and the government, but also for the absence of constructive dialogue between the society and the authority. In this context the article highlights the factor of human social empowerment as one the main precondition for the development of socially independent civil society.

Магда АРСЕНЯН

Армянская «Бархатная революция и ее негативное воздействие на стабильность политической системы

Ключевые слова: бархатная революция, социальная политика, политические партии, анти-корупционная политика

В статье анализируется политическая ситуация в Армении до «Бархатной революции» для выявления тех мотивов, которые привели к возникновению всенародного движения против правящей политической силы. По словам автора, гражданин несет равную ответственность не только за кризис легитимости оппозиции и правительства, но и за отсутствие конструктивного диалога между обществом и правительством за долгие годы. В этом контексте в статье подчеркивается фактор усиления человеческого потенциала как необходимой основы для развития социально независимого гражданского общества.

Մագդա ԱՐՍԵՆՅԱՆ

Թավշյա հեղափոխության բացասական ազդեցությունը քաղաքական համակարգի կայունության վրա

Բանալի բառեր. թավշյա հեղափոխություն, սոցիալական քաղաքականություն, քաղաքական կուսակցություններ, հակակոռուպցիոն քաղաքականություն

Հոդվածում վերլուծության է ենթարկվել ՀՀ քաղաքական իրավիճակը նախքան «Թավշյա հեղափոխությունը» վեր հանելու համար այն դրդապատճառները, որոնք հանգեցրին իշխող քաղաքական ուժի դեմ տարվող համազգային շարժման բռնկմանը: Հեղինակի դիտարկմամբ՝ տարիներ շարունակվող լեգիտիմության ճգնաժամի, ինչպես նաև հասարակության և իշխանության միջև կառուցողական երկխոսության բացակայության համար հավասարապես պատասխանատվություն է կրում քաղաքացին: Այս համատեքստում հեղինակը շեշտադրում է մարդկային ներուժի հզորացման գործոնը՝ որպես անհրաժեշտ հիմնասյուն սոցիալապես անկախ քաղաքացիական հասարակության զարգացման ճանապարհին: