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Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)

Honouring of obligations and commitments by Armenia

Information note by the co-rapporteurs on their fact-finding visit to Yerevan (23 to 25 May 2018)

Co-rapporteurs: Mr Giuseppe Galati, Italy, Group of the European People's Party and Ms Yuliya Lovochkina, Ukraine, Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group

¹ Document declassified by the Monitoring Committee at its meeting on 27 June 2018.

I. Introduction

1. This visit took place in the context of a dramatically changed political environment in Armenia following the mass protests and subsequent change of power in the country. The visit explored the causes of the events leading to the change of power and the priorities of the new government, including with regard to the consolidation of its capacity to govern the country.

2. During our visit we met with, *inter alia*, the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the National Assembly, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Defence, the Minister of Justice, the Head of the National Police, the Prosecutor General, the Ombudsman, the leadership of all parliamentary factions in the National Assembly, the Chairman and members of the Armenian Delegation to PACE, former President and Prime Minister Sargsyan, as well as representatives of civil society organisations and of the diplomatic community in Yerevan. The programme of our visit is attached to this note in Appendix 1.

3. We would like to thank the Armenian National Assembly for the excellent programme and hospitality, and the Head of the Council of Europe Office and her staff for the support given to our delegation. Lastly, we would like to express our gratitude to the Ambassador of Italy in Yerevan for the hospitality extended. The statement issued at the end of our visit is attached in Appendix 2.

II. Background

4. The new Constitution of Armenia implemented a change of the political system - from a presidential to a parliamentary system - in Armenia. This change of political system was to come into effect at the end of President Serzh Sargsyan's presidential term,² with the election of the new Prime Minister by the National Assembly of Armenia. When the Constitutional reform process was initiated, many opposition parties and civil society organisations alleged that these constitutional reforms were mainly intended to allow President Serzh Sargsyan to remain in power after his two term limit as President. This was strongly denied by President Sargsyan and the ruling majority, with the President stating publicly, including to the rapporteurs on various occasions, that he was not interested in the position of Prime Minister, or any other formal position beyond being the leader of the Republican Party.

5. The new Constitution was developed in close co-operation with the Venice Commission and was positively assessed by them and the rest of the international community, including the Parliamentary Assembly. The new Constitution addressed many of the concerns and recommendations of the Council of Europe concerning the previous Constitution, including with regard to important areas such as the independence of the judiciary and the system of checks and balances. As such, it contained many of the wishes that were expressed by the opposition and civil society during the 2005 Constitutional reforms, but which were not accepted by the ruling majority at that time. A key area where the Venice Commission, as well as the Monitoring rapporteurs, expressed certain reservations were some provisions included to ensure the formation of a stable government, including provisions that give an automatic bonus for the party that wins the largest number of votes in an election, the so called Italian model. While recognising that these provisions were not contrary to European standards, the need for such exceptional provisions in the Armenian political environment were not sufficiently clear.³ For their side, the opposition parties and civil society largely boycotted the constitutional reform process, which they intended to turn into a plebiscite on the government of President Sargsyan.

6. Following the adoption of the Constitution, a new electoral law was elaborated, on the basis of a consensus between all political stakeholders. This was the first time in the recent history of Armenia that an electoral law was adopted on the basis of a consensus between all political parties.⁴ As part of this electoral reform, a number of measures proposed by the opposition parties and civil society organisations with a view to ensuring the integrity of the election process were adopted. The new electoral legislation was welcomed by the Venice Commission.

7. On 2 April 2017, parliamentary elections took place in Armenia on the basis of this new election code. According to the international observers, there was marked progress in the electoral process. In this context, the the new legal framework for the elections was a clear improvement, although it was noted that the complexity of the election system and election procedures at times led to confusion among voters and election commissions, affecting the overall public trust in the election process. The improved accuracy of the

² President's Sargsyan's second term ended on 9 April 2018.

³ See As/Mon(2015)28 rev § 17 and 18.

⁴ See As/Mon(2017)03.

voters' list and the mechanisms introduced to counter the possibility of voter impersonation and multiple voting, such as the publication of the signed voters' list and the introduction of Voter Authentication Devices, had contributed to the integrity of the vote. However, regrettably, allegations of widespread vote buying by all election contestants, as well as reports of abuse of administrative resources, often in favour of the incumbent authorities, tainted the election process. The elections were won by the Republican Party, which formed a governing coalition with the Armenian Revolutionary Federation.

8. However, following the elections, the ruling coalition did not announce who would be their candidate for the post of Prime Minister, which increased tensions in the political environment and widespread speculation that President Sargsyan would in the end be the candidate of the ruling coalition for the post of Prime Minister. During the visit of the co-rapporteurs in November 2017, President Sargsyan again informed them that he had no intention of taking up the position of Prime Minister. However, in the light of the on-going speculation and suspicion, we repeatedly stressed that, in our view, it was clear that, if President Sargsyan recanted his publicly announced position that he were not a candidate, it would taint the constitutional reform process and the positive changes this process had brought to the country.

III. Recent Political Developments

9. On 2 March 2018, Mr Armen Sargsyan (no relation to former President Serzh Sargsyan), former Ambassador to the United Kingdom, was elected President of Armenia by the National Assembly⁵ on the proposal of the ruling coalition. He was sworn in on 9 April 2018.

10. Subsequently, on 14 April 2018, former President Serzh Sargsyan was nominated by the Republican Party for the position of Prime Minister. This nomination was supported by the coalition partners of the Republican Party, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation. On 17 April, Mr Sargsyan was appointed as Prime Minister by the National Assembly with the votes of both parties.

11. As expected, his appointment led to widespread popular protests in Armenia. It is important to stress the popular and spontaneous nature of these protests. Not orchestrated by political parties, they were spontaneous, dominated by young people and students and cut across the social strata of the country, especially within the larger cities. Most interlocutors agreed that the outbreak of these spontaneous protests was the result of a combination of anger directed at Mr Sargsyan for recanting what was seen as his promise not to seek appointment to the Prime Minister's post, and the fact that, for many, his personality had become a symbol of stagnation and therefore his appointment was seen as a sign that change and reform in the country would be postponed indefinitely. In the view of many of these interlocutors, the events of April 2018 would not have happened had the ruling coalition put forward another candidate for the post of Prime Minister.

12. The popular protest was soon joined by the YELK coalition. Its leader, Mr Nikol Pashinyan, who had been the most outspoken critic of Mr Sargsyan's appointment, quickly evolved into the unofficial leader and spokesperson of the protest movement. Although the protests were of a modest nature at the outset, they soon evolved into a massive movement and campaign of civil disobedience. Initial negotiations between authorities and the protesters broke down and Mr Pashinyan, as well as two other MPs from the YELK faction, were briefly detained by the police, which only seemed to galvanise the protests. On 23 April 2018, Prime Minister Sargsyan suddenly resigned, stating the "Mr Pashinyan was right and I was wrong". In our conversation with him, Mr Sargsyan stated that his decision had been the result of his wish to avoid any escalation into violence - to avoid a repetition of the events in 2008 - as well as his wish to ensure the stability of the country in order to allow it to confront the many challenges it is faced with. With his resignation, Mr Sargsyan ended the escalating political crisis and avoided what easily could have become a violent confrontation. This is not a common form of action in Armenia or the region and he should be commended for what was, in all aspects, a courageous decision.

13. Following the resignation of Prime Minister Sargsyan, the largest opposition party, Prosperous Armenia of Gagik Tsarukyan,⁶ announced that it was joining the protesters, while the Armenian Revolutionary Federation left the ruling coalition calling for a solution to the crisis within the existing legal constitutional framework. Subsequently both parties announced that they would support Mr Pashinyan for the post of Prime Minister.

⁵ According to the new constitution the President is indirectly elected by the parliament.

⁶ This party is considered close to former President Kocharian, although some interlocutors have mentioned that the relations have cooled somewhat in recent times.

14. According to the Armenian Constitution, if the Prime Minister resigns or the post otherwise becomes vacant, the National Assembly has a maximum of two votes to appoint a new Prime Minister. If the National Assembly fails to appoint a Prime Minister during the second attempt, pre-term elections will automatically be called.

15. On 30 April 2018, Mr Pashinyan was nominated for the post of Prime Minister by the YELK, Prosperous Armenia and Armenian Revolutionary Federation factions, giving his nomination the support of more than one third of the members of the National Assembly, as required by the Constitution. For its side, the ruling Republican Party announced that it would not nominate a candidate for the post of Prime Minister but did not express its support for the candidature of Mr Pashinyan either. On 1 May 2018, a vote took place in which Mr Pashinyan failed to get a majority of the votes, leading to renewed protests. On 3 May 2018, while denying that negotiations with the Republican Party had taken place, Mr Pashinyan announced that he had obtained the support of the ruling Republican Party for his candidacy and asked his supporters to cease their protests. On 8 May 2018, Mr Pashinyan was elected Prime Minister with sufficient votes from the Republican Party to give him the required majority in the National Assembly. While this support was reportedly controversial among some of the Republican Party MPs, it is clear that, without exception, all political forces felt that it was in their own best interest to avoid calling early elections at that particular moment. Without wishing to speculate about the reasons, it is clear that this has allowed for stability and a more consensual political environment in the immediate aftermath of the protests.

16. According to the Constitution, a newly appointed Prime Minister has up to 15 days to present his government to the President for appointment, after which the new government has up to 20 days to present its programme to the National Assembly for approval.

17. On 13 May 2018, President Sargsyan appointed the last of the 20 members of the new government. The new cabinet is made up of members of the three factions that proposed Mr Pashinyan for the post of Prime Minister, namely the YELK faction (Pashinyan's own Faction), Prosperous Armenia and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaksutyun). The Republican Party announced that it considered itself to be in the opposition and did not wish to be considered for any cabinet positions. Nevertheless, this government includes, on key positions, a number of non-partisan experts that held key positions under the previous government. These include the Ministers for Foreign Affairs,⁷ Defence and Finance. In line with constitutional requirements, the government presented its programme to the National Assembly on 7 June 2018, which was adopted with 62 votes in favour and 35 against.⁸

IV. Political Climate and early elections

18. The new cabinet contains a large number of new people, most of them considered experts and technocrats. The new cabinet is politically inclusive and broad based, also as a result of the non-partisan experts that held key positions under the previous government. It can be considered a genuine government of national accord that has the trust of the Armenian public, as well as international community. This should be strongly welcomed and Mr Pashinyan deserves to be commended for it.

19. For its side, the Republican Party has announced that it intends to play the role of constructive opposition and will give the new government the support it needs to govern and adopt legislation. Following our visit, a number of MPs of the Republican Party announced that they would leave the Republican Party faction and continue to serve as independent MPs. As a result, it seems the Republican Party has lost its absolute majority in the National Assembly. However, it is not sure that the defected MPs would now support the government in all votes and the Republican Party remains by far the largest party in the National Assembly. Good co-operation between the opposition and ruling majority therefore remains essential to govern the country. While challenging, this should also benefit the post change stability of the country.

20. As mentioned, the new Constitution was positively assessed and welcomed by the Council of Europe, including the Venice Commission and the Parliamentary Assembly. In this context, it is important to highlight that ironically, while the notion that former President Sargsyan initiated the constitutional reform to remain in power was one of the root causes for the protests, many interlocutors conceded that it was actually the new constitution that allowed for a peaceful change of power via legal and constitutional means. This, in turn,

⁷ Important for the Council of Europe is the appointment of Ambassador Zurab Mnatsakanian as Minister of Foreign Affairs. Ambassador Mnatsakanian was Armenia's Ambassador to the Council of Europe from 2008 to 2012 and in that capacity played a key role in the efforts of the Assembly to resolve the political crisis that ensued following the 2008 Presidential elections.

⁸ The government programme was adopted after our visit had taken place and its discussion therefore beyond the scope of this information note.

ensured the political stability of the country in very tense circumstances. It is questionable whether this would have been possible in the zero-sum political climate that is inherent to the Presidential system of the previous constitution.

21. Due to its regional and security particularities, Armenia has traditionally followed a multi-vector foreign affairs policy based on equally close and cordial relations with Russia, Europe, the United States, as well as neighbouring Iran, despite the sometimes conflicting demands made by these partners from Armenia. For a number of political actors, including some close to the new authorities, Armenia's joining of the Eurasian Economic Union at that time, perceived by many as influenced by considerable Russian pressure,⁹ to a certain extent undermined Armenia's capability to fully and freely pursue such a multi-vector foreign policy. It is therefore in this context important to note that all actors underscored that the protests and resulting change of power were purely a domestically driven event and did not have a geopolitical connotation. At the same time, the Prime Minister is perceived to be a proponent of a strong European vector in Armenia's foreign policy, reportedly causing some inquietude in Moscow. For his side, Prime Minister Pashinyan has tried to lay these worries to rest and announced he was not planning any substantial changes to Armenia's foreign policy direction.

22. The expectations and demands of the Armenian public from the new government are expectedly very high. It is clear that it will take time to fully implement many of the changes in line with democratic standards. Managing the multitude of different expectations and demands of its supporters and the Armenian public, and maintaining support for its inclusive and pragmatic policy approach, will be one of the key challenges for the new authorities.

23. Following the change of power there have been calls within some segments of society for transitional justice, raising fears of possible political retribution. In that respect we have strongly welcomed the unambiguous statements by the new Prime Minister and his political allies that the justice system will be fully independent and work free from instructions or political interference, at the same time stressing that there can be no impunity for criminal actions, including by politicians or their supporters, irrespective of their political colour and sympathies. This should lay fears for political retribution to rest. At the same time, in a number of municipalities, including Yerevan, protests erupted demanding local authority representatives to resign and there have been reports of local officials, including school and university directors, resigning because of their, alleged, links to the Republican Party. The new authorities understandably consider that this undermines their inclusive approach and hinders the stability in the political environment. They have called on their supporters to act strictly within the accepted democratic and constitutional framework, however, reportedly, not always with success. It is important that the authorities continue to make clear and unambiguous statements to their supporters in this respect.

24. As mentioned in previous information notes, the previous Armenian authorities have reacted at times harshly to civil disobedience and (unauthorised) protests they deemed to be destabilising. A number of leaders and initiators of such protests have received heavy, often disproportionately high, prison sentences which are considered politically motivated by a significant segment of the Armenian society. Following the change of power, there have been calls by a number of civil society organisations for the immediate release of what they consider to be politically motivated prisoners and detainees, including those related to the June 2017 events and subsequent protests when the so-called "Daredevils of Sasun",¹⁰ stormed a police station in central Yerevan during which they killed two police officers and took 9 persons hostage. In a similar vein to what we mentioned above, the authorities have made it clear that they consider this an issue that is in the hands of the judiciary which can and should independently adjudicate in these cases, and their appeals, in which the new authorities have made it clear they will not interfere or give instructions.

25. A number of Republican Party MPs and officials complained about hate speech and threatening language used by protesters on social media. This was confirmed by the Armenian Ombudsperson who has publically expressed his concern about this phenomenon. A number of protest leaders have called upon their supporters to refrain from hate speech and threatening language and to respect democratic discourse and principles. A number of interlocutors felt that these calls have had only moderate success and that more could be done, including, possibly, a clear statement to this effect by the Prime Minister. A number of Republican Party MPs also complained about personal attacks and threats, but both the Head of the National Police as well as the Prosecutor General informed us that no official complaints to this extent had

⁹ AS/Mon(2014) 19 § 10

¹⁰ Most civil society organisations clearly draw the line with the "Daredevils of Sasun" themselves whose imprisonment – despite having questions about the legal procedures – they do not consider to be politically motivated as such.

been filed and that such attacks could therefore not be confirmed. They informed us that any such complaints, if filed, would be fully investigated as a matter of priority¹¹.

26. The newly elected President Armen Sargsyan, using his constitutional role as non-partisan unifier of the nation, played a key role during the events as a mediator between protesters and the ruling majority and is widely credited by both sides for his contribution to the peaceful and constitutional resolution of the crisis. Some interlocutors suggested that President Sargsyan was contemplating forming a new political movement which he publicly denied.

V. Early elections

27. One of the key demands of the protesters was the resignation of Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan and the organisation of early parliamentary elections. Following the changes, Armenia is now governed by a minority government which needs the support of the opposition to govern and pass legislative initiatives and reforms. Prime Minister Pashinyan has repeatedly stated that one of his priorities is to organise pre-term parliamentary elections. However, he has also stated that these pre-term elections should only be organised when all the conditions are in place for the organisation of genuinely democratic elections, which is to be welcomed.

28. The calling of pre-term elections is governed by strict conditions set by the new Constitution. Pre-term elections will be called if the National Assembly fails to adopt the government programme or when it fails to appoint a new Prime Minister after two rounds of voting after the post has become vacant. In the current political context, these provisions would imply that there should be some form of agreement between opposition and parties supporting the government to organise pre-term parliamentary elections.

29. Prime Minister Pashinyan and the political parties that support him consider amending the election code to address shortcomings noted during the 2017 elections as one of the key conditions that need to be in place before the early elections can be organised.

30. As mentioned above, allegations of widespread vote buying and the abuse administrative resources had tainted the 2017 conduct of elections. Several stakeholders alleged that the continued existence of a regional component in the election system, i.e. the system of ranking of regional candidates on the ballots, provided an incentive for vote buying and abuse of administrative resources. This is one of the key issues that the authorities wish to address in the amendments to the election code. Other stakeholders have also cited the composition of the election commission and the need to further strengthen the implementation of the voters' identification process as priority areas for reform. As we mentioned, the current election code was adopted on the basis of a consensus between all political forces. Therefore it is important that any changes to this election code are similarly based on a consensus between all political stakeholders. Moreover, European standards for democratic elections demand a stable legal framework before the elections are organised. According to Venice Commission guidelines, this means that there should normally be a year between the adoption of changes to an election code and the organisation of elections.

31. During our meetings with the parliamentary political parties, it was clear that, rhetoric aside, none of them wished immediate pre-term elections and all of them supported the principle that the necessary conditions for genuinely democratic elections should first be in place before pre-term elections could be organised. In his public speeches, the Prime Minister has announced that he would favour organising pre-term elections in autumn 2018, which seems very rapid if indeed the election code is to be changed. Many of the members of the government and political factions we met were more cautious with regard to a possible election date. The Minister of Justice mentioned that, from the point of view of technical preparations, spring 2019 would probably be the earliest possibility for early elections and this on the condition that a new consensual election code would be adopted before the summer recess. Other influential government members have reportedly mentioned two years as a reasonable estimation of time before pre-term elections can be organised.

32. It is clear that the organisation of democratic elections, that are perceived and accepted as such by all political stakeholders and political competitors, would be a crown on the democratic and constitutional

¹¹ We were informed that several MPs of the Republican Party had reported the threats and abusive protests in front of their private residences at the time of the protests to the acting Head of the Police, after which appropriate measures were taken.

change of power that took place, and an important step forward for the democratic consolidation of the country. Therefore, while expressing our full understanding and support for the need for early elections, we urge the authorities, and indeed all political stakeholders, to ensure that the changes to the election code will be made on a consensual basis, that all political forces will get proper and sufficient time to prepare themselves for these early elections and that European standards and Venice Commission guidelines for democratic elections are adhered to.

VI. State of on-going Reforms

33. The adoption of a law on domestic violence and a law against discrimination have been long standing recommendations by, inter alia, the Assembly. The subject matter of both laws, but especially of the anti-discrimination law with regard to gender identity and sexual orientation, has been very sensitive and controversial in the generally conservative Armenian society. Reportedly this was compounded by opposition of the Armenian Apostolic Church to a number of possible provisions of these laws. The previous authorities had made the adoption of these laws one of their stated priorities. In a welcome development, the Law on Domestic Violence was adopted in December last year and Armenia signed the Istanbul Convention in January 2018. However, its ratification is still pending in the National Assembly. Several women's associations we met indicated that further amendments to the law of domestic violence would be necessary to address outstanding concerns, in particular with regard to obligatory mediation and with regard to the limitation of the law to domestic violence committed within the traditional family.

34. The draft anti-discrimination law was finalised and discussed in the National Assembly in its first reading early 2018. Reportedly, the number of amendments made to this law was high and the law was sent back to the Ministry of Justice for reconciliation. Interlocutors indicated that the law is on the whole in compliance with Council of Europe standards but civil society organisations, especially those representing women and LGTBI persons, have raised a number of concerns, in particular with regard to the special privileged status given to the Armenian Apostolic Church in the law and the fact that gender identity and sexual orientation are not specifically mentioned as prohibited grounds for discrimination. The Minister of Justice indicated that the adoption of this law will be a priority for his Ministry and that the concerns expressed with regard to the privileged status of the Armenian Apostolic Church as well as the direct mentioning of gender identity and sexual orientation as grounds on which discrimination is prohibited will be addressed in the reconciled version. However, the Minister did not want to give a clear timetable for the adoption of the anti-discrimination law, or ratification of the Istanbul convention, as he feared that the opposition would oppose the adoption and ratification. This was strongly denied by the opposition who reiterated its support for these issues. We therefore urged the authorities and National Assembly to ratify the Istanbul and Lanzarote conventions, and adopt the anti-discrimination law without delay.

35. We welcome the fact that all stakeholders, both from the government and its supporters, as well as opposition, stressed that the on-going reform of the judiciary, the fight against corruption and illegal enrichment, would remain priorities for the country.

VII. Conclusions

36. The recent change of power in Armenia took place peacefully and in line with the provisions of the new constitution, which was a crucial instrument in ensuring the stability of the country. The Armenian people and all political stakeholders should be congratulated for the political maturity and adherence to democratic principles during the change of power. The developments in the coming period, and the manner in which the political processes will be managed by all political actors, are crucial for Armenia's democratic consolidation. The demonstrated maturity of the political system during the April and May events bodes well for the country in that respect, and it is important that the international community, including the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly, offer their full support for these processes.

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APPENDIX I

Programme of the fact-finding visit to Yerevan (23 to 25 May 2018)

Co-rapporteurs: **Mr Giuseppe GALATI, Italy, Group of the European People's Party**
Ms Yuliya LOVOCHKINA, Ukraine, Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group

Secretariat: Mr Bas KLEIN, Deputy Head of the Monitoring Department of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Main topics:

- Recent political developments, state of reforms, political climate
- Human Rights including:
 - o Law on Domestic Violence and Anti-Discrimination Law
 - o Ill treatment in places of detention, prison conditions, allegations of disproportional police actions against protesters
 - o Minorities including sexual minorities

Wednesday, 23 May 2018

Early morning: Arrival of members of the Delegation in Yerevan

12:30 Briefing on current situation by the Head of the Council of Europe Office. Lunch meeting (*)

Meetings organised by the Council of Europe Office in Yerevan:

14:00-15:30 Round table thinks tanks on recent political developments and reform process (*)

- Styopa Safaryan, AIISA founder & head, Armenian Institute of International Security Affairs
- Hrant Mikaelyan, Caucasus Institute
- Stepan Grigoryan, Analytical Centre for Globalisation and Regional Cooperation

15:30-16:30 NGO Roundtable overall human rights situation in Armenia (*)

- Lusine Lalayan, Protection of Rights without Borders
- Sona Ayvazyan, Executive Director, Transparency International
- Avetik Ishkhanyan, Chairman, Helsinki Committee
- Lusine Hakobyan, President, Europe in Law
- Boris Navasardyan, Yerevan Press club

16:30-17:30 Roundtable with Civil Society on political reforms (*)

- Larisa Minasyan, Open Society Foundation
- Artak Kirakosyan, CSI Director, Civil Society Institute
- Arthur Sakunts, Helsinki Vanadzor Association
- Gayane Abrahamyan, Article 3 Club
- Daniel Ionnisyan, Programme Director, Union of Informed Citizens

17:30-18:30 Meeting with HRW researcher in Yerevan, Anahit Chilingaryan (*)

20:00 Dinner with the Diplomatic Community hosted by the Italian Ambassador in Yerevan (**)

Thursday, 24 May 2018

09:00-09:40 Meeting with PINK Armenia and Right side NGO (*)

- Mamikon Hovsepyan
- Lilit Martirosyan, Vrezh Varzhapetyan, Edgar Zatikyan, The Right Side

09:40-10:20 Meeting with women organisations (*)

- Lara Aharonian, Gohar Shahnazaryan, Women's Resource Center
- Susanna Vardanyan, Women Rights Centre
- Avnik Melikian, Society Without Violence
- Maro Matosian, Women Support Centre

Meetings organised by the National Assembly of Armenia

- 11:00 Meeting with "ARF" Parliamentary Faction
- 11:45 Meeting with "Way Out" Parliamentary Faction
- 12:30 Meeting with "Tsarukyan" Parliamentary Faction
- 13:15 Meeting with "RPA" Parliamentary Faction
- 14:10 Meeting with the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia
- 16:30 Meeting with the President of the Republic of Armenia
- 17:30 Meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia
- 19:00 Dinner with Head and Members of the Armenian Delegation to PACE

Friday, 25 May 2018

Meetings organised by the National Assembly of Armenia (Cont.)

- 08:45 Meeting with the Minister of Defence of the Republic of Armenia
- 10:30 Meeting with the Head of the National Police of the Republic of Armenia
- 11:30 Meeting with the Prosecutor General of the Republic of Armenia
- 12:30 Meeting with the Minister of Justice of the Republic of Armenia
- 13:30 Lunch
- 15:00 Meeting with the Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Armenia
- 16:00 Meeting with the Ombudsperson of the Republic of Armenia
- 17:00 Meeting with the Former President of the Republic of Armenia, Mr Serzh Sargsyan

(*) organised by Council of Europe Office in Yerevan

(**) organised by PACE Secretariat / Council of Europe Office in Yerevan

APPENDIX II

Statement by the co-rapporteurs, 28 May 2018

Monitors compliment Armenian people on peaceful change of power

The co-rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) for the monitoring of Armenia, Giuseppe Galati (Italy, EPP/CD) and Yuliya Lovochkina (Ukraine, SOC), have congratulated all political forces, and above all the Armenian people, on the restraint and political maturity displayed during the recent protest and subsequent change of power in Armenia, which took place peacefully and in line with constitutional provisions and principles.

“The manner in which the change of power took place, and the subsequent appointment by Prime Minister Pashinyan of an inclusive and broad-based cabinet, highlights the maturity of the political system as well as the commitment of all political forces to the consolidation of democracy in the country. All political forces should be rightfully lauded for this,” said the co-rapporteurs.

The co-rapporteurs noted the extremely high expectations of profound and rapid reforms in the country placed by the Armenian people in the new authorities. In that context, the rapporteurs highlighted that the appointment of a politically inclusive cabinet, and the new Prime Minister's clear intention to create a stable and democratic environment, had created the necessary conditions for on-going democratic reforms and the national security of the country.

“In addition, the signals given by the new Prime Minister and his political allies that the justice system will be fully independent and will operate free from instructions and political interference should lay to rest any fears of political retribution, which we heard calls for during our visit,” said the co-rapporteurs, while stressing that there can be no impunity for criminal actions by politicians, irrespective of their political colour. At the same time they reiterated their concern about “hate speech” against the previous authorities on social media, which they called on all political actors to condemn.

During their visit from 23 to 25 May 2018, the co-rapporteurs were informed by the authorities of their wish, and the need, to organise pre-term elections as soon as the conditions would be right for their democratic conduct. In addition, they understood that the authorities, to create these conditions, wished to amend the election code, based on a broad consensus between all political forces. While expressing their full understanding of the call for early elections, the rapporteurs highlighted the standards of the Venice Commission with regard to stable election legislation before elections, as well as the need to allow sufficient time for all political stakeholders to prepare themselves properly for these pre-term elections.

The co-rapporteurs welcomed the clearly expressed wish by the new authorities to continue furthering and deepening the human rights legislation in the country. In this context the rapporteurs expressed their hope that the adoption of the anti-discrimination law in final reading, as well as the ratification of the Istanbul and Lanzarote conventions, would soon be placed on the agenda of the National Assembly.

The co-rapporteurs stressed the readiness of the Council of Europe and the Parliamentary Assembly to assist Armenia on its path of democratic consolidation.