

## ***The Challenge Called “Towards Europe” in the Post-Electoral Armenia***

It seems that the challenge “Towards Europe” remains the most comprehensive and urgent issue in today’s Armenia. The frequent question “When will Armenia match the European standards?” belongs to the list of questions with no answers. Indeed, how long will it take and when will it be possible to transform the current social-political situation in Armenia and measure it up to the existing vision? Through what changes will we need to go, what is the scope of these changes? Will we have the sufficient will and resilience? Only time will show. One thing is clear though: the last parliamentary elections did not mark the assumed end of the way towards Europe. On the contrary, they may turn into a new incentive for a bigger effort in this direction.

### **European principles of state governance**

The vision of European governance presupposes three major principles, which according to experts, have nowadays turned into a fundamental challenge for the new EU members. Those are as follows:

1. *Competitive politics, which implies the changeability of ruling elites.* This means that certain conditions should be created in the state and a certain environment be established where the ruling elites can and do change. This is something towards the accomplishment of which we actually have a long and laborious way to go.
2. *Effective and strong system of civil service and apolitical bureaucracy.* If Armenia has already accomplished obvious steps in this direction in terms of form, little has changed in terms of content.
3. *Independent judiciary system.*

Only provided the systemized synchronization of the abovementioned three principles, can the state governance of this or that country be considered identical to the European one. Nowadays this is the top issue in countries, such as Romania, Bulgaria and a number of other new EU members.

One is simply left to imagine on what section of the road called “European standards of state governance” Armenia finds herself today.

### **Human rights and democracy**

Parliamentary elections on May 12<sup>th</sup> and the following developments have proved that it is this very aspect that sooner or later will become the major direction slowing down the speed with which we are moving towards Europe. Moreover, the issue is absolutely out of the realms of legislative improvements.

The serious pitfalls persisting in the field of freedom of speech, an environment of increasing public despondency on the background of scandalous crimes, distrust towards law enforcement agencies, the recent events contributing to the dominance of fear and a number of other similar issues compel the post-electoral Armenia to record regress in the public consciousness and

presuppositions. In the times following the elections on May 12<sup>th</sup> Europe is surrendering in the public psychology of Armenians, whereas it seems that quite the opposite should have been the case.

### **We cannot stop**

After the parliamentary elections Armenia is a little bit different. At least this is how it is perceived both inside and outside the country. Acknowledgement of the effort towards democracy entails political and psychological significance. One can talk of its political, geopolitical and economic consequences for hours; however, what is especially crucial is how it is going to be used by the policy makers in future. This will define whether the achievements will simply fade away with time or they will be actively and beneficially applied.

At the moment the psychological aspect of the issue is even more crucial. It is one thing when the positive changes observed in Armenia are declared to the world and a totally different thing whether it turns into inspiration inside the country itself. Does it become a decisive incentive to raise the level of confidence in one's strength? Does it inject a solution to restore the lost trust? Does it become the first serious step on the road extending for thousands of miles? This is what really is important. Once the ordinary Armenian citizen believes that we are really capable of becoming a civilized democracy, nothing will remain unattainable on this very road.

But the public psychological ascent cannot happen through a discreet or one-time nutrition: like a self-expanding organism it needs a consistent and sufficient nutrition. Not to stop and not to surrender to the wind what has been achieved— this is the only logical thing to do at the moment.

*This paper is elaborated based on the opinions passed by the participants of the discussion on “Current developments in the ENP framework” which took place on May 25, 2007 at ICHD. The round table was attended by independent analysts, government officials and representatives of international organizations.*