

Elections-2007: at least a small step required of everyone

A step: a step backwards?

What kind of elections do we want? Shall we have free, fair and transparent elections, or perhaps we should call those simply 'legitimate' elections? As one should not kill another, should not avoid tax payment, or cross the street on red, one should not violate the legal requirements of the framework regulating elections. Therefore, one simply needs to talk about one thing: we need legitimate elections.

But who should provide for the legitimacy of the process? First and foremost, the state. In fact, the state has got the lion's share in securing legitimate elections, since it has the function of securing legitimacy in general. In this case we are talking of authorities, since in the Armenian reality the state is the governing authority. How willing and interested is the governing authority to ensure legitimacy till the end in this particular field and this particular time? Naturally, the willingness and interest should be minimal in a reality of weak protection of property rights, absolute absence of any mechanism to transfer/submit the wheel of power and in some cases quite a faulty institute of actual guarantees of personal safety after submitting power.

The opposition also has its share in the list of functions. Is it interested today? Words say yes, actions say it's limping. First, because it really has no strength. Second, what should it say after losing in the 'legitimate' elections?

In the result, we have a situation which seems to become natural, and the history wheel seems to turn back.

Possible 'carrots' of legitimate elections

Democratic elections will solve a number of issues. This is a truism which does not need any supporting arguments. It has additional meanings for today's Armenia though. In the conditions of increasing isolation, or it would be better to say quickly spreading perception of isolation, any tangible victory of democracy can become a breakthrough; it can open up at least a small crack of light to tinge both the reality and its perceptions. On the waves of disappointment visible on various levels there is self-confidence, self-confidence that you are democratic. This should be a nice feeling...

We won't reinvent the wheel if we claim that the lawful and exemplary implementation of the future elections will directly influence the negotiations over Nagorny Karabakh issue. On the world stage of "conflict resolution" Armenia is already compelled to offer a counterbalance against the Azerbaijani oil and democratic Armenia is the only alternative to suggest parity with the 'oil-rich' Azerbaijan. Currently, this is the only "historical truth".

Today it is already clear that the upcoming elections in a way are a test which should clarify the future diameters of the channels through which financial aid is pouring. We can certainly claim that closing down a few taps will not change much in an economy suffering from foreign

currency inflow. However, for one who's looking a step ahead this sounds 'flat', totally not ambitious.

What to do?

It is the responder's lifestyle that defines the variety of the responses, which given a few rigorous efforts can be summarized in the following options:

a) Nothing

Yes, you do absolutely nothing. Though you're not blind and deaf, you're tired. Meanwhile you've managed to create your comfort zone outside of which the reality does not bother you.

b) Boycott

Boycott the very process of voting, since you are already deprived of a chance to make a choice as such. Legitimate, i.e. free, fair and transparent elections are possible only in the case when you have had a chance to witness free and independent perspectives, be an active part of the political and civil process where clashes happen between opinions and ideologies, rather than people before voting. It has been too long since Armenia has not seen such a practice, and the only escape from acting as a puppet during the voting is to boycott it.

c) Highlight the consequences of falsified elections everywhere and every time

This is actually the hardest and longest of the ways. At the same time it is the only one that may lead to a qualitatively new outcome. Does every Armenian citizen understand what washboard s/he will have to face were the elections falsified? Most probably, no, since these scenarios are being silenced out. They are not being discussed. Thus, the conscious citizen falters in a quagmire, sensing that 'something is wrong', but not being able to name this something. Its name is clear enough though: endangered values, endangered security and irrevocable polarization.

Now let's choose the correct option.

This paper is elaborated based on the opinions passed by the participants of the discussion on the topic of elections-2007 which took place on February 12, 2007 at ICHD. The round table was attended by independent analysts, government officials and representatives of international organizations.