



Statement of the International Independent Observation Mission on Nagorno-Karabakh Parliamentary Elections 2015

Independent international observation mission deployed by the European Armenian Federation for Justice and Democracy (EAFJD) reports calm, transparent and orderly Election Day in the 6th Parliamentary elections in the NKR.

Executive Summary

Overall, the electoral authorities succeeded in organizing an election day in a professional and transparent manner. In general the elections fulfilled the criteria enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and OSCE 1990 Copenhagen Document – the fundamental documents used to measure the state of democracy in established states.

The Central Electoral Commission (CEC) of Nagorno-Karabakh Republic announced turnout of over 70 percent.

The 10 delegates of the independent international election observation mission deployed by EAFJD visited 57 polling stations out of 279 across all 11 constituencies. All the observers reported calm, transparent and orderly implementation of the elections, despite irregularities in a limited number of polling stations, such as improperly assisted voting, the presence of two representatives of the same political party in the polling station, presence of candidates in two polling stations and improperly sealed ballot boxes.

- **Election administration:** The electoral authorities conducted the voting process without major irregularities. The CEC had a clear communication strategy, maintained an up-to-date website and was highly cooperative. The CEC had also prepared manuals for its staff, for the political parties, candidate representatives and international observers.
- **Legal framework:** The elections were held under the new Electoral Code, which provides a solid framework for the conduct of democratic elections.
- **Campaign environment:** Due to its short-term character, the international observation mission deployed by EAFJD did not observe the campaign. According to the CEC findings there were a few violations such as posters being placed in illegal places or illegal sizes, and the usage of halls provided free of charge to the candidates.

Voting process

Opening:

- Opening was observed in 5 constituencies, including 3 urban and 2 rural all of which opened on time;
- The opening procedures were followed in all 5 observed polling stations. The polling staff appeared knowledgeable and well prepared, the environment was calm and the process transparent;
- No official complaints were filed during the opening;
- In all 5 polling stations neither international observers nor party/candidate representatives encountered hindrance to observe the process;
- In 3 cases the chairpersons of the polling stations observed were female and in 2 cases male;
- Representatives of political parties and candidates were present in all polling stations observed.

Voting

- Voting was observed in 52 polling stations out of 279 in all 11 constituencies, 60% of the observed polling stations were rural and 40% urban;
- The voting procedures were followed in 96% of the observed polling stations; the layout of polling stations was adequate in 94% of the observed cases, polling staff appeared knowledgeable and well prepared, the environment was calm and the process transparent;
- Violations of the Electoral Code related to the polling environment were noted in 2 polling stations out of 52; these included the presence of campaign material and an overactive behaviour of a representative of the citizen observers;
- In all visited polling stations international observers and party/candidate representatives encountered no hindrance to observe the process;
- 2/3 of the chairpersons of the polling stations observed were female;
- Representatives of political parties and candidates were present in all polling stations observed.

Closing

- Closing was observed in 5 constituencies, 60% of which were rural and 40% urban. The polling stations observed closed on time;
- The closing procedures were followed in 4 out of 5 observed polling stations. The polling staff appeared knowledgeable and well-prepared, the environment was calm and the process transparent. Lack of efficiency by the chairperson was noted in one of the observed polling stations;
- No significant violation of Electoral Code was observed in the closing procedures in the polling stations observed;

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- In all 5 polling stations international observers and party/candidate representatives encountered no hindrance to observe the process;
- In 2 out of the 5 polling stations observed (40%) the chairpersons were female and in 3 (60%) male;
- Representatives of political parties and candidates were present in all polling stations observed.

Counting

- Counting was observed in 5 constituencies, including 2 urban (40%) and 3 rural (60%) polling stations, the counting started immediately in all polling stations observed;
- The counting procedures were followed in 80% of the observed polling stations, polling staff appeared knowledgeable and well-prepared, the environment was calm and the process transparent;
- Some violations of the Electoral Code were observed (see Annex 4, question 15) but no interference to the process was noted in the polling stations observed;
- In all 5 polling stations observed both international observers and party/candidate representatives encountered no hindrance to observe the process;
- Representatives of political parties and candidates were present in all polling stations observed.

Aggregation

- Not observed.

Participation

- **Participation of women:** Although the Electoral Code requires that all electoral lists alternate between female and male candidates, it does not mandate the appointment of female candidates to the head of the lists. As a result, no female candidate led any of the candidate lists. On the proportional list there were 41 women out of 164, which represents 25%, whereas only 5 women out of 42 candidates who had put forward their candidacy according to the majoritarian system were female (9.5 %).
- **Participation of observers and candidate representatives:** More than 100 international observers from 25 countries including Members of different European national Parliaments, the European Parliament observed the elections. 110 local observers from 4 NGOs were accredited.

Background

On 3 May 2015 6th Parliamentary Elections took place in Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR). EAFJD is an international non-governmental organization striving to promote democracy and human rights in the South Caucasus. It was accredited to deploy an independent international election observation mission.

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Acknowledging the crucial role of election observation in democracy-building and promoting human rights, especially in new emerging democracies, including non-recognized entities such as the de-facto authorities of NKR, EAFJD deployed a team of 10 independent, professional international observers across the country in two-person teams. The international observers visited 57 polling stations across all 11 constituencies.

Why an election observation mission in Nagorno-Karabakh?

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict re-emerged during the disintegration of the USSR in 1991. The ceasefire agreement signed in 1994 is still in force as no peace agreement has been signed to date. The NKR declared its independence in 1991 and has held regular presidential and parliamentary elections since 1995. As stated in the preamble of the European Parliament Resolution on Support for the Peace Process in the Caucasus from June 21, 1999, “the autonomous region of Nagorno-Karabakh declared its independence following similar declarations by former Soviet Socialist Republics after the collapse of the USSR in September 1991”. The conflict resolution efforts mediated by the OSCE Minsk Group are deadlocked. EAFJD considers that democratic processes and institution-building in the country should be encouraged rather than ignored by the international community. On the contrary, an active engagement towards democracy support will provide a veritable impetus to the local democratic culture, with a view to a future peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Objectives of the EAFJD election observation mission

The aim of the EAFJD mission was to assess the degree to which the electoral process met national laws governing the organization of elections in NKR together with international standards for democratic elections.

The specific objectives of the EAFJD election observation mission were:

- to provide an impartial assessment of the overall quality of the electoral process,
- to make recommendations for the further consolidation and development of the democratic process in NKR.

EAFJD observation methodology

The EAFJD election observation mission follows the methodological guidelines and codes of conduct established for OSCE/ODHR election observation missions as well as those enshrined in the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation and Code of Conduct adopted by the United Nations in 2005.

The electoral process is assessed against international standards and the national legal framework for genuine democratic elections.

While recognizing that elections cannot be reduced to a one-day event but are rather composed of a series of complex and interrelated processes covering the pre-election, election and post-election phases, the EAFJD election observation mission focused its observation efforts on key aspects of

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- the universal franchise afforded to the voters;
- the immediate polling, counting and tabulation processes;
- media campaign, political and security environment on the election day.

While the assessments made by EAFJD observers largely focus on the aforementioned aspects, we have also considered other elements monitored by our core team of analysts since February 2015, namely the impartiality of the electoral administration and the legal framework governing elections. Other important aspects, such as voter and candidate registration, campaigning, access to the media - before election day, as well as electoral dispute resolution among others are beyond the scope of the EAFJD election observation mission and follow-up after the E-day, and are not covered by the EAFJD mission.

Recommendations

- Access to polling stations for the elderly and people with reduced physical ability should be improved;
- The seals of the ballot boxes were improper in some polling stations. These should be replaced with more solid seals;
- As specified in the Electoral Code voters are allowed to vote with expired identity cards. There should be a time-limit for expiration;
- Logos of political parties and the photos of candidates could be included on the ballot paper to enable visually impaired persons or voters without knowledge of the Armenian language to read the ballot paper more easily.
- Gender balance on the political party lists should be improved. Where possible, female candidates should be appointed at the top of the lists.

The team of the independent international observation mission consisting of highly experienced professionals¹¹ who are nationals of 9 European countries, namely Austria, Czech Republic, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Romania, Switzerland, Netherlands and United Kingdom, deployed by EAFJD endorse the assessment of the NKR National Assembly elections of May 3, 2015 reflected in this report.

Date: 04.05.2015

Place: Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh Republic

¹¹ The observers of the mission to NKR legislative elections of 2015 deployed by EAFJD have participated in numerous long-term and short-term election observation missions of the OSCE/ODIHR, UN, EU, the Carter Centre, etc.