

# REGIONAL POST

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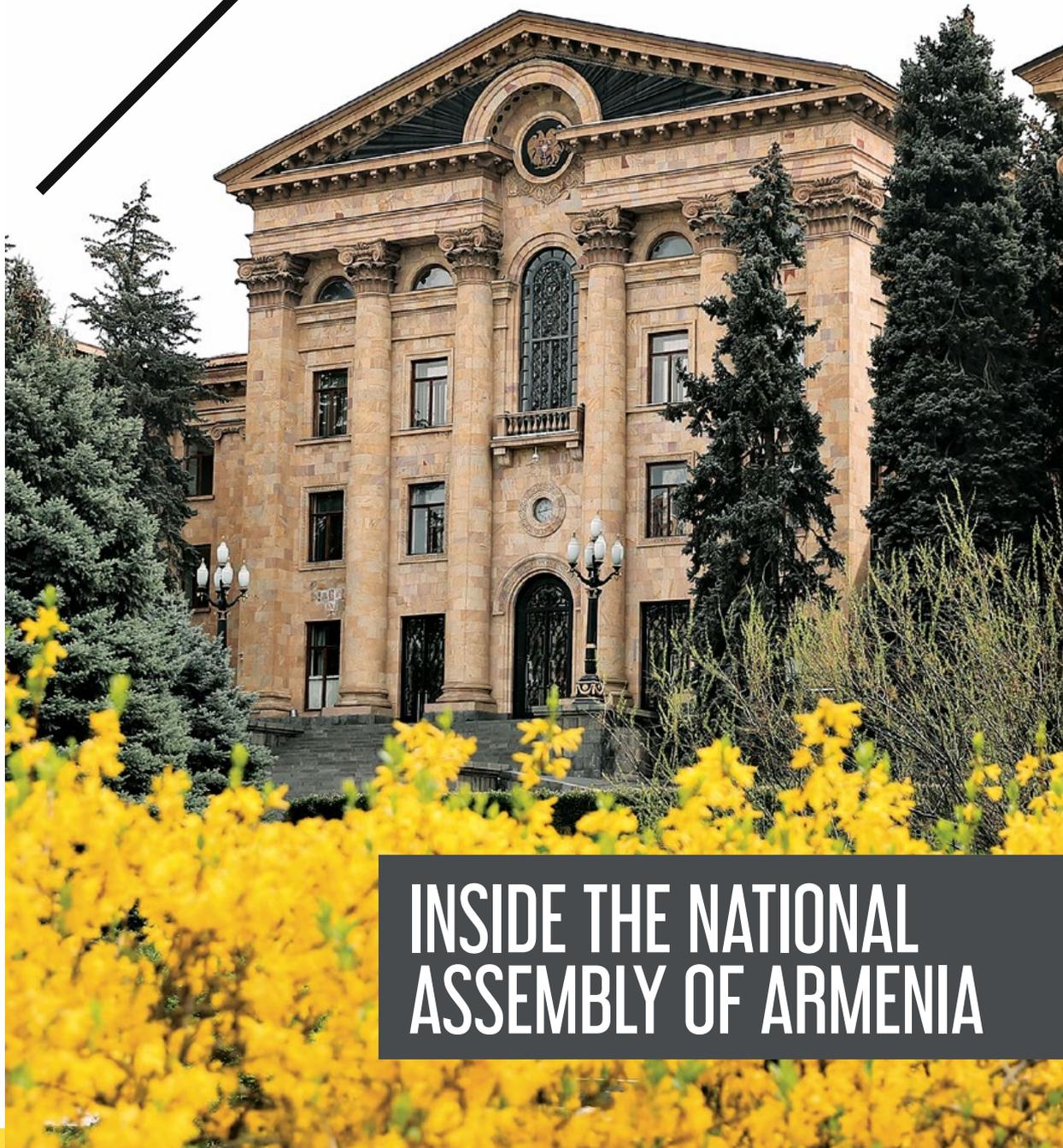
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**MUSCARI**  
Caring for Land, People & Culture

# Gyumri Ceramics

## Revival of Armenian ceramics in the 21st century

The Family Care Foundation and the Muscari Association are working together to improve the life conditions in Armenia. Their activities are concentrated especially in Gyumri, which has an invaluable historical, patrimonial and cultural wealth.

After the earthquake of 1988, which caused the death of tens of thousands of inhabitants, this city tries to get up and regain its once undeniable radiance.

Following this tragic event, the Family Care Foundation was created by the will of implementing projects for the economic and cultural development of Armenia in the fields of tourism, art, handicraft and restoration of traditional values with a strong ethical requirement.

Regarding Muscari, created in 2016, its purpose is to valorise Armenian culture and French-Armenian exchanges. It works for education in France and Armenia and it promotes a better knowledge of peoples, cultures and languages.

This complementarity gives life to projects such as the ceramics workshop in Gyumri, which allows currently many families to live with dignity, thanks to arts and crafts inspired by among others Armenian potters from Kütahya in the former Ottoman Empire, the golden age of their activity being in the 18th century. Always having the desire of revitalizing and valorisation of Armenian material and immaterial heritage, special energy is devoted to the architectural restoration of the city's historic buildings.

The ceramics of Gyumri's workshop are on sale in the following addresses in Armenia:

- o Villa Delenda : 22 Yeznik Koghbatsi Str., Yerevan*
- o Villa Kars : 182 Abovyan Str., Guymri*

[www.familycarearmenia.org](http://www.familycarearmenia.org) / [www.muscari.fr](http://www.muscari.fr)

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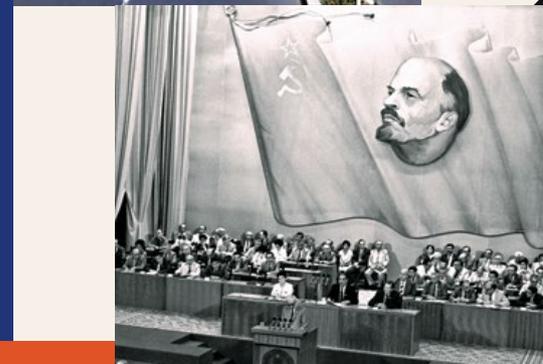
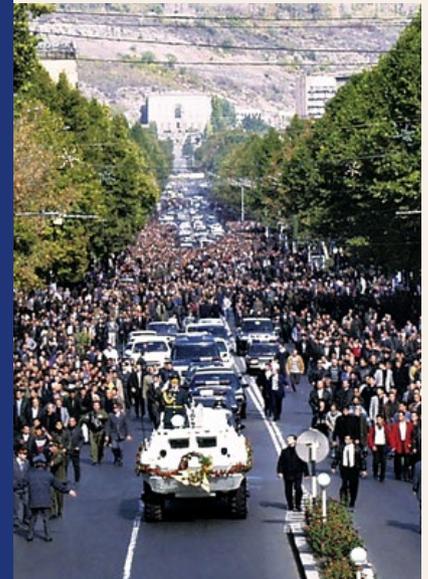
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# ARARAT MIRZOYAN:

## “Society has expectations from the National Assembly”

At the end of the term of seventh National Assembly of Armenia, Regional Post asked NA's president Ararat Mirzoqan a few questions about what has been done during the previous two and a half years.

INTERVIEW : AREG DAVTYAN / PHOTO : ARAKS KOCHARYAN

**How would you assess the parliament's performance during this convocation in general? Please, note the main successes as well as incomplete projects or failures.**

— The National Assembly of the seventh convocation was destined to function as the legislative body of the country during perhaps the most tragic and hardest period in Armenia's recent years' history. In that respect, it is rather difficult to speak about success and failure. On one hand the 44-day war, and on the other hand the pandemic created numerous obstacles on our way, therefore, we had a number of unfinished projects. And if in the conditions of pandemic, the idea that the whole world was experiencing that kind of hardship and that we had to live and create on was comforting for everybody, the case of war was totally different. Despite that, the National Assembly of the seventh convocation has had a heavily overloaded working schedule and the working climate during that period has been super tense. Let me note that in 2020 alone we have held

more than 200 extraordinary and regular sessions, passing 722 laws and National Assembly decisions while adoption of only 380 laws scheduled. Hence, I think that we have to appreciate the work done by the National Assembly, in which certainly, there were shortcomings and omissions as well. The opposition factions – with whom at the initial phase of the National Assembly of the seventh convocation we had a rather efficient cooperation in a constructive atmosphere – also had an essential role in the work done.

**One of the specific features of the National Assembly of the seventh convocation was the absolute majority of the My Step Faction. Did it help or on the contrary, did it disrupt the efficiency of the parliament's performance?**

— It is impossible to unequivocally say that the My Step Faction's absolute majority was helpful or detrimental in certain matters. You surely must know that we have been attaching great importance to our inner party democracy. Various rejected legislative initiatives by a member of

our faction or even the Government are a proof of that. It testifies to the high level of our inner democracy. On the other hand, we cannot but hold in high regard the firmness of our team, when despite a number of seemingly deadlock situations, My Step Faction remained steadfast as a consolidated unity.

**Does the National Assembly fully perform the role it was assigned to following the constitutional amendments?**

— We speak about a governance system, whose chief characteristic trait should be a well-established multi-party system. In this respect, certainly, both the National Assembly and the political parties still have greater roles to play and things to





do, and maybe at the same time, as a society we have put some efforts to achieve a fully established party system, and hence, for shaping a solid parliamentary state. Therefore, we should do our best for all the parties to remain faithful to the values they preach in the first place, and also to enjoy inner democracy, by which their longevity will be guaranteed. In that aspect, the existence of different newly-created parties is welcoming, however we must do our best that each one of them carried in itself the values of pluralism, ideological alternative and never created fault lines in the society and that those parties did not artificially rally its supporters from election to election, disintegrating after it, but became increasingly solid through many years.

**WE SHOULD DO OUR BEST  
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BE GUARANTEED**



It looks like the Armenian society does not yet quite see the new political role of the National Assembly. What is being done to fix this situation?

— In my answer to the previous question I noted that though it is hard, it is not an impossible task. And we, as a society, will start to see little by little the essential role of the National Assembly. We already enjoy its fruits; various protest rallies taking place just outside the National Assembly gates on the one hand being a proof of democracy, on the other hand are indicators of the growing importance of the National Assembly in the eyes of the people. This – albeit strange it might seem – is rather good news. It means that the society itself has expectations from the National Assembly, as they hold their protest rallies there. ♦



# INSIDE THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF ARMENIA

The path modern Armenian parliament passed in three decades, results of the seventh National Assembly, and what to expect in the future from the legislative body of Armenia.



# Parliamentary Hour

The main dates and events in the history of the parliament of the Third Republic.

PHOTO : ARMENPRESS



## 1990

On the eve of independence, the Supreme Council of the first convocation of Armenia was formed by majority count (260 deputies), in two stages – on **May 20, 1990** and **June 3, 1990**. The new parliament, which took office on July 20, was represented by two political forces: the Communist Party and the Armenian National Movement.



At its first session on August 23, the RA Supreme Council of the 1990 first convocation adopted the “Declaration on the Independence of Armenia”, which announced the beginning of the process of establishing an independent state. Immediately after the adoption of the Declaration, on August 24, based on the “Declaration of Independence of Armenia”, the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR decided to rename the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia to the Republic of Armenia, and consider the Supreme Council of the twelfth convocation the Supreme Council of the Republic of Armenia.



On September 10, 1990, the Supreme Council of Armenia adopted the “Law on State Property of the Republic of Armenia”, according to which the property of all the state enterprises, associations, institutions and organizations located in the territory of the Republic was declared the property of the Republic of Armenia.

On November 5, 1990, the Supreme Council adopted a decision to depoliticize the State entities, enterprises, institutions, organizations, educational institutions and military units.

## 1991

On November 26, 1991, the Parliament adopted the law on “Social-Political Organizations”, which formed a multi-party system in the Republic.

On September 23, 1991, based on the results of the September 21, 1991 referendum on secession from the USSR, the Supreme Council of the Republic of Armenia declared the Republic of Armenia an independent state.



On October 16, 1991, Levon Ter-Petrosyan was elected President of the Republic of Armenia, and Gagik Harutyunyan was elected Vice President.

On November 11, a special sitting of the RA Supreme Council was convened which was dedicated to the swearing-in ceremony of the RA President.

The Supreme Council of the Republic of Armenia of the first convocation started its work on July 20, 1990 and ended on May 15, 1995.

During that time, 1169 decisions and 185 laws were adopted, 104 of which were “mother” laws, and 81 were amendments to existing laws. 148 international treaties were ratified.

In May 1991, the parliament moved to the current building which was the former seat of the Communist Party.



In September 1991, the ANM, ADL, ARF, ANC, CPA party factions were formed in the parliament. The parliamentary groups “Republican” (38 deputies), “Artsakh” (11 deputies), “Liberal Democrats” (10 deputies), “National Progress” (10 deputies) were formed in the Supreme Council. The ARF faction was transformed into a parliamentary group (12 deputies).

## 1992

In August 1992, the Law on “Privatization and denationalization of unfinished construction facilities of state-owned enterprises” was adopted, which initiated the process of privatization of the industrial section in the country.

## 1995

The first convocation elections of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia took place on July 5, 1995. The following parties entered the parliament: “Republican”; “Shamiram”; CPA; NDU, and the “Union for National Self-Determination”. Also, the parliamentary group “Reforms” was established in the National Assembly. Later, the “Yerkrapah” part was formed.

On November 7, 1995, the National Assembly adopted the law “On the administrative territorial division of the Republic of Armenia”, according to which 37 administrative regions of the republic were unified to create 10 Marzes. >



Abrahamyan, Armenak Armenakyan, and the Minister of Operative Affairs Leonard Petrosyan were killed. At the special session of the National Assembly convened on November 2, a new leadership of the National Assembly was elected.

## 2003

The elections of the National Assembly of the RA third convocation took place on **May 25, 2003**. Six parties crossed the 5% threshold; the “Republican Party of Armenia”, the “Justice” bloc, the “Rule of Law” party, the “Armenian Revolutionary Federation”, the “National Unity”, and the “United Labor” party.



On **October 27, 1999**, on the last day of the three-day sitting of the National Assembly and Government, during the Q&A of the National Assembly and Government, five armed men broke into the sitting hall of the parliament and opened fire on the deputies and members of the government. The speaker of the National Assembly Karen Demirchyan, the Prime Minister Vazgen Sargsyan, the deputy speakers of the National Assembly Yuri Bakhshyan and Ruben Miroyan, MPs Mikael Kotanyan, Henrik

## 2004

In **2004**, the check-point area of the NA building was replenished with one more structure; the section for citizens’ reception and letters was separated from the main buildings.

## 2007

The selections of the National Assembly of the RA fourth convocation took place on **May 12, 2007**.

## 1996

Dissatisfied with the results of **the September 1996** presidential elections, the opposition, led by Vazgen Manukyan, organized demonstrations of protest. On **the 25th**, the opposition attacked the building of the National Assembly, which ended in clashes.

## 1999

On **May 30, 1999**, the elections of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia of the second convocation took place. The 5% limit set by law was exceeded by six parties and blocs – the “Unity” bloc, CPA, “Law and Unity” bloc, ARF, NDU, and “Rule of Law” party.



## 2007-2008

Additional elections by majority vote took place **in August 2007** and **in 2008**. **On August 24**, five parliamentary factions were formed; “Republican Party of Armenia”, “Prosperous Armenia”, “Armenian Revolutionary Federation”, “Rule of Law”, and “Heritage”.

## 2009

**In 2009**, the construction of the second building next to the main building of the National Assembly was completed. It was designed by “Armproject” research institute. The architect is Marat Rustamyan.

**In 2009**, ten years after the atrocity of October 27, 1999, a replica of Yervand Kochar’s “Biblical David” sculpture, created in 1953, was erected in the park of the National Assembly.



## 2010

**On October 22, 2010**, the official opening ceremony of the reconstructed sitting hall of the RA National Assembly took place. The Oval Hall was designed by Anahit Tarkhanyan.

## 2012

The elections of the RA National Assembly of the fifth convocation took place **on May 6, 2012**. Six parliamentary factions were formed; “Republican

Party of Armenia”, “Prosperous Armenia”, “Armenian National Congress”, “Rule of Law”, “Armenian Revolutionary Federation”, and “Heritage”.

## 2015

**On December 2, 2015**, constitutional amendments took place, as a result of which Armenia passed to the parliamentary model of government.



## 2017

The RA National Assembly elections of the sixth convocation took place **on April, 2017**. As a result of the elections, four political forces, two parties and two alliances of parties were voted into the parliament: the Republican Party of Armenia, the “Tsarukyan” alliance of parties, and the “Armenian Revolutionary Federation” party.

## 2018

**On October 2, 2018**, mass protests demanding the dissolution of the National Assembly took place in Yerevan, and in different settlements of Armenia. The demonstrators demanded early parliamentary elections with peaceful protest action in front of the NA building. Their demand was met and early parliamentary elections were held on December 9 of the same year.



**On December 9, 2018**, special elections to the National Assembly took place. As a result of the elections, the “My Step” bloc received 88 seats, the “Prosperous Armenia” party – 10, and the “Bright Armenia” party – 7 seats. According to Article 96 of the Constitutional Law of RA Electoral Code, 16 and 11 additional seats were added to parties “Prosperous Armenia” and “Bright Armenia” respectively.

## 2019

The first session of the National Assembly of the seventh convocation opened **on January 14, 2019**. Three factions were formed: “My Step”, “Prosperous Armenia”, and “Bright Armenia”. On the same day, the President of the republic appointed the candidate of the parliamentary majority, Nikol Pashinyan, as Prime Minister. Ararat Mirzoyan was elected speaker of the National Assembly, Alen Simonyan, Lena Nazaryan and Vahe Enfiadjyan were elected Deputy Speakers. ♦





# THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND THE MECHANISMS OF CONTROL AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE GOVERNMENT

The Republic of Armenia is a sovereign, democratic, social state governed by the rule of law. Power in the Republic of Armenia belongs to the people, exercised through free elections, referendums, as well as state and local self-governed bodies and officials provided by the Constitution. State power is exercised under the Constitution and laws, based on the division and balancing of the legislative, executive, and judicial powers. With the constitutional amendments made in 2015, the Republic of Armenia transitioned to the parliamentary system of government. This is how it actually works.

TEXT : ARTAK BEGOYAN / PHOTO : ARAKS KOCHARYAN



## THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The National Assembly is the representative body of the people of the Republic of Armenia, which exercises legislative power. The National Assembly exercises control over the executive power, it adopts the state budget and performs other duties defined by the Constitution. The transition from semi-presidential to the parliamentary form of government presupposed a new logic of activity and approaches in the state system.

The formation of the National Assembly is based on the principle of a stable parliamentary majority, which is guaranteed by the Electoral Code. Redistribution of additional minority and majority seats ensures that one party or bloc of parties in the National Assembly has at least 54% of the total number of seats, thus ensuring a presence of a stable majority.

At the same time, the Electoral Code stipulates that the total number of seats of other parties may not be less than one-third of the total number of seats in the National Assembly, thus creating preconditions for the existence of parliamentary opposition.

Along with many other changes in the public administration system, the Constitution also increased the scope of control functions of the National Assembly.

## THE OVERSIGHT POWERS

The National Assembly, as a body endowed with a primary mandate by the citizens, forms a Government and exercises constant control over the executive body. The role of the National Assembly to exercise parliamentary control over the executive power is directly defined in Article 88 of the Constitution.

The aspects of the exercise of parliamentary control are mostly regulated by the constitutional Law “Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly”. The most important condition for the relationship between the Parliament and the Government is the philosophy of values and approaches that intend to avoid both polarization and fusion of the parties.

The parliamentary form of governance and effective implementation of parliamentary control over the executive power balance is heavily dependent on the parliamentary opposition. The constitutional reform of 2015 significantly expanded the oversight powers of the parliamentary minority. Some tools of parliamentary control are by their very nature intended to empower the minor players.

However, no matter how these numbers are fixed, and the distribution of executive and legislative powers allows the country to be governed by the parliamentary model, in practice, there are challenges, which are conditioned by the social-political peculiarities of the given country. One of the biggest challenges of the parliamentary model in the Republic of Armenia was the Electoral Code itself, which had finally transformed the electoral system to a fully-proportional one on March 24th, 2021. Tools and procedures are already being introduced aimed at implementing the whole logic of the parliamentary system as effectively as possible and creating a competitive political environment.

## THE GOVERNMENT

The oversight functions of the National Assembly extend to both the election of the incumbent and the performance of their duties. One of the key procedures that the National Assembly is responsible for is the nomination of the head of the Government.

This process is regulated by Article 149 of the Constitution, according to which the President of the Republic immediately after the beginning of the term of office of the newly elected National Assembly appoints the candidate nominated by the parliamentary majority as Prime Minister.

If the Prime Minister is not elected, a new election of the Prime Minister shall be held seven days after the voting, in which the candidates nominated by at least one-third of the total number of Deputies have the right to participate. If the Prime Minister is not elected by the majority of votes of the total number of deputies, the National Assembly is dissolved by force of law.

The powers of the National Assembly in the formation of the Government are not limited to the election of the Prime Minister. Within twenty days after the formation of the Government, the Prime Minister is obliged to submit the Government Program to the National Assembly, which approves or rejects the Program within seven days by a majority vote of the total number of Deputies.

If the National Assembly does not approve the Government Program and does not elect a new Prime Minister, the National Assembly shall be dissolved by force of law. If the National Assembly elects the Prime Minister but again does not approve the Government Program, the National Assembly is dissolved by force of law. ➤

## OTHER CONTROL MECHANISMS

The aforementioned might be the most familiar responsibilities of the National Assembly, but the control mechanisms extend to many other areas methods of implementation, which are fixed and represent a specific set of tools. Those can be divided into several groups or causes.

Field-specific standing and temporary committees: those are the committees on Defense and Security, European Integration, Protection of Human Rights and Public Affairs, Foreign Relations, and others, 18 at the moment of writing this article.

Oral and written questions of the deputies, inquiries that, depending on the outcome, may lead to the expediency of individual members of the Government or a vote of no confidence in the Prime Minister.

Parliamentary hearings, which are often defined as information gathering and spreading mechanisms used by parliamentary committees as a way for analyzing and designing policies and for oversight and scrutiny purposes. Parliamentary hearings benefit awareness, legitimacy, alternative knowledge, empowerment, trust, conflict resolution.

Annual reports are directly submitted to the National Assembly by the Human Rights Defender, the Central Electoral Committee, the Audit Chamber, the Television and Radio Committee, and the Central Bank.



## THE STATE BUDGET

To carry out its oversight functions, the National Assembly also establishes independent bodies outside the Government's control, such as the Human Rights Defender, the Audit Chamber, the Television and Radio Committee, the Central Electoral Committee, and the Central Bank.

These bodies provide an opportunity to identify and effectively control the activities of the executive branch by submitting an annual report on their activities to the National Assembly.

The most comprehensive of these cases is the adoption of the state budget in terms of its control over the departments and the control over its implementation. The adoption of the state budget and further control over its implementation is aimed at the overall control over the efficiency of the executive power. The control over the implementation of the Government Program,



the annual reports of the state bodies are also directed to the general control.

The National Assembly adopts the state budget upon the presentation of the Government. The state budget includes all state revenues and expenditures following the law. The Government submits the draft state budget to the National Assembly at least ninety days before the beginning of the budget year.

Upon the conclusion of the Audit Chamber, it discusses and decides on the annual report on the implementation of the state budget submitted by the Government.

The National Assembly exercises control over the implementation of the state budget, as well as the use of loans and credits received from foreign countries and international organizations. The next and most important mediums are the Inquiry Committees.

### **THE INQUIRY COMMITTEES**

The institute of inquiry committees was first introduced to the Republic of Armenia in 2015, in Article 108 of the Constitution, which elaborates in detail the procedure for the establishment and activity of these committees. Issues of public importance and state importance become the subject of the working discussion of these committees. The inquiry committees are important tools of the parliamentary minority, as the number of votes of the constitutional majority is not required for the formation of one.

At the request of at least a quarter of the total number of Deputies, an Inquiry Committee shall be established by law to find out the facts concerning the issues within the competence of the National Assembly and public interest.

The seats in the inquiry committee are distributed in proportion to the number of deputies included in the factions. The number of members of the inquiry committee is decided by the National Assembly. The inquiry committee is chaired by one of the deputies submitting the claim.

At the request of at least a quarter of the members of the inquiry committee, state and local self-governance bodies and officials are obliged to provide the committee with the necessary information in the area of competence of the committee, if its provision is not prohibited by law.

The powers of the inquiry committee in the field of defense and security may be exercised only by the competent Standing Committee of the National Assembly at the request of at least one-third of the total number of Deputies.

### **INTERNATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

Having inter-parliamentary friendship groups – at the same time not limiting its functions only to that, the National Assembly has the right to coordinate, ratify and reverse international treaties.

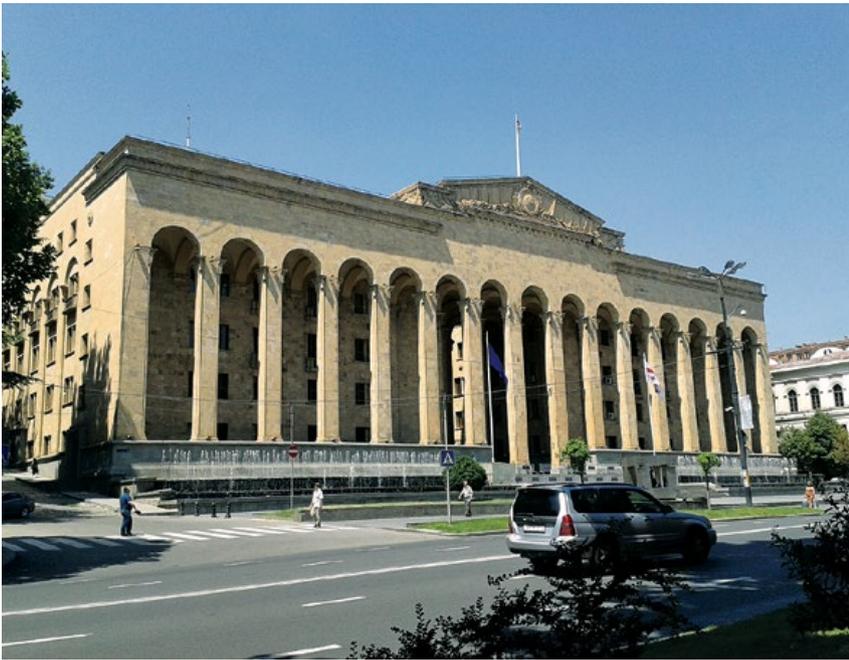
This might not be the complete guide to the functions of the National Assembly, meanwhile, this should give the reader a better view of the role of the National Assembly, the parliamentary system, and its powers overall.

The National Assembly applies its powers due to the continuity and wide toolkit that has been provided by the Constitution to achieve constant accountability to the citizens of the Republic of Armenia. ♦

# THE PARLIAMENTS OF THE REGION

The three countries of the South Caucasus are all former Soviet republics that broke apart in 1991. Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan have different government systems today: Armenia and Georgia have parliamentary governments, while Azerbaijan has a semi-presidential administration. Here is a closer look to the parliaments of the region.

TEXT : ARTAK BEGOYAN



of powers, along with increased public discourse, provides for greater representation and participation in decision-making. This has a huge positive impact. Second, parliamentary systems provide much more consistency between successive governments. Due to the single-person character of the post, transitions between presidents in presidential regimes are frequently rapid and tumultuous.

## THE PARLIAMENTS OF SOUTH CAUCASUS

Thus, after a certain reference, let us consider the parliaments of the three republics. All three are members of the European Parliament, which is one of three legislative branches of the European Union.

The members of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia

**D**ifferent types of institutions are used by countries all over the world to implement democracy. In today's world, however, most democracies use the parliamentary system rather than the presidential one. Canada, the United Kingdom, Italy, Japan, Latvia, the Netherlands, and New Zealand are just a handful of the many parliamentary democracies.

A parliamentary system or parliamentary democracy is a system of democratic governance of a state where the executive derives its democratic legitimacy from its ability to command the confidence of the legislature, typically a parliament, and is also held accountable to that parliament.

A semi-presidential system, also known as a dual executive system, is a form of government in which a president coexists with a prime minister and a cabinet, the latter of which reports to the state legislature. The prime minister and cabinet report to both the president and the parliament in the president-parliamentary system. The president appoints the prime minister and cabinet, but only with the approval of a parliamentary majority.

## WHICH SYSTEM IS MORE EFFECTIVE?

There are two compelling reasons why parliamentary systems are more beneficial to the economy. First, the parliamentary system's stronger division



are elected by party-list proportional representation. The number of seats must be at least 101, and it may increase if extra seats are required. The d'Hondt method is used to apportion seats, with a 5 percent election threshold for parties and a 7 percent election threshold for multi-party alliances. Regardless of the performance of the third-best performing party or alliance, a minimum of three political parties will enter parliament.

If a party receives a majority of the vote but does not win more than 54 percent of the seats, it will be given additional seats to make up the difference. If one party wins more than two-thirds of the seats, the losing parties that crossed the threshold will be allocated additional seats, decreasing the winning party's seat share to two-third.

Azerbaijan has a president and a legislature that is elected on a national basis. The President of Azerbaijan is elected by the people for a seven-year term; previously, the role was limited to two mandates according to a constitutional referendum in 2009. The Milli Meclis (National Assembly) has 125 members. Before 2005, single-seat constituencies elected 100 members for a five-year term, whereas proportional representation elected 25 members. Since 2005, single-seat constituencies have been used to elect all 125 members. The 125 members of the National Assembly of Azerbaijan are elected using the first past-the-post system in single-member constituencies. In a first-past-the-post electoral system, voters vote for their preferred candidate, and the candidate with the most votes wins.

In June 2019, "Georgian Dream" announced plans to change the electoral system to full party-list proportional representation without an electoral threshold. Despite being supported by opposition parties, fewer than the required 75% votes were received to change the electoral law.

After the proposed reforms failed to receive the required 75 percent of votes from parliamentary deputies, the government and the opposition held



several rounds of talks, culminating in a memorandum of understanding released by all the parties in early March 2020. According to the new election legislation, 120 deputies will be elected using proportional representation, with the remaining 30 being elected using single-member constituencies. For proportional representation seats, the electoral threshold is 1%. For single-member constituencies, a candidate will gain the status of a parliamentary deputy if they gain 50% of the votes in the first round. Without at least 40% of the vote from the people, no party can win a majority of seats. It might be reasonable to say that the parliaments of South Caucasus have significant differences in their structure, role, and forming processes. At the moment, the Armenian parliament has 132 deputies, the Georgian parliament has 150, and the Azerbaijani parliament has 125. The "My Step" faction, which forms the parliamentary majority of the Republic of Armenia, is currently represented by 83 deputies. The Georgian Parliament's ruling majority, the "Georgian Dream", is represented by 84 deputies. The "New Azerbaijan" is represented in the Azerbaijani Parliament by 70 deputies. Interestingly, the number of independent deputies is about 3 times more than the representatives of the opposition parties in Azerbaijan.

#### THE SALARIES

The deputies of the parliaments of the three countries receive a rather comparable salary, in the case of Armenia, it is about \$15,200 a year, in Georgia – \$16,800 and in Azerbaijan – \$18,300.

It is supplemented with monthly additions in Armenia, unless in the event of a state of emergency, in which case all additional funds are devoted to the State's needs. Deputies of the Milli Meclis of Azerbaijan are paid monthly monetary security that is tax-free and equal to half of their official pay to cover the costs of exercising legislative functions. Armenian Deputies receive 3.3 times the national GDP per capita, whereas Georgian and Azerbaijani Deputies receive around 3.8 times the national GDP per capita.

#### COMPARED TO THE GOVERNMENT

Meanwhile, Government officials in Georgia and Azerbaijan earn much more than those in Armenia. The salaries of the Georgian Prime Minister and President are around \$90,500 apiece, the Azerbaijani President receives around \$225,000, and the Armenian Prime Minister is about \$29,500 each year. In contrast, the wages of parliamentarians in three South Caucasus states are relatively similar. And it's worth noting that these countries' GDPs are somewhat different: Armenia's is \$13.67 billion (2019), Georgia's is \$17.48 billion (2019), and Azerbaijan's is \$48.05 billion (2019). While GDP has an impact on the salaries of Government officials in these countries, it has less of an impact on the pay of parliament members. Of course, this is not an absolute guide, but the figures offered may give some insight into how the countries value the work of parliamentarians and where the authority to make essential decisions is concentrated. ♦

# THE MOST IMPORTANT LAWS OF THE LAST 2.5 YEARS, THAT DID OR WILL IMPACT THE SOCIETY MOST

On 9 December 2018 snap elections to the National Assembly of Armenia. The National Assembly of the 7th convocation was formed with three factions represented in it – the opposition Prosperous Armenia and Luminous Armenia and the ruling My Step, having a constitutional majority of seats. The following is an attempt at a reflection of the past 2.5 years of the Armenian parliament's activities, highlighting those bills which are standing out for their public impact, usefulness or high popularity. Those bills are from a broad variety of spheres, including social, economic and societal values.

TEXT : NVARD AVETISYAN

## HEALTHCARE FOR THE PEOPLE

The adoption of the bill on Amendments to the Republic of Armenia Law on the Public Healthcare and the Law on Population Protection in Emergency Situations are relevant in several respects. First of all, they are important in terms of meeting the population's needs of medical care and assistance, of generating necessary logistical capacities for responding to emergency situations, as well as of setting up and periodically updating the coordination between local administration, self-government and interagency institutions. Apart from that the legislative regulations regarding obtaining, distributing and updating personal protective equipment, mechanisms of designating authorities responsible for their implementation were defined and clarified.

Meanwhile the Law on Supplements and Amendments and to the Administrative Offenses Code, in fulfillment of the constitutional right to health care, regulates organizing the medical service and assistance, disease prevention, legal, economic and financial aspects of those measures as well as the legal relationships relating to the sell and purchase of medical items.

## RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY

The Law on assessing capacity for work of a person defines the organizational and legal premises as well

as the aims of that practice. It also defines the jurisdiction of the government or any other government agency in assessing capacity for work and regulates other legal relationships related to it.

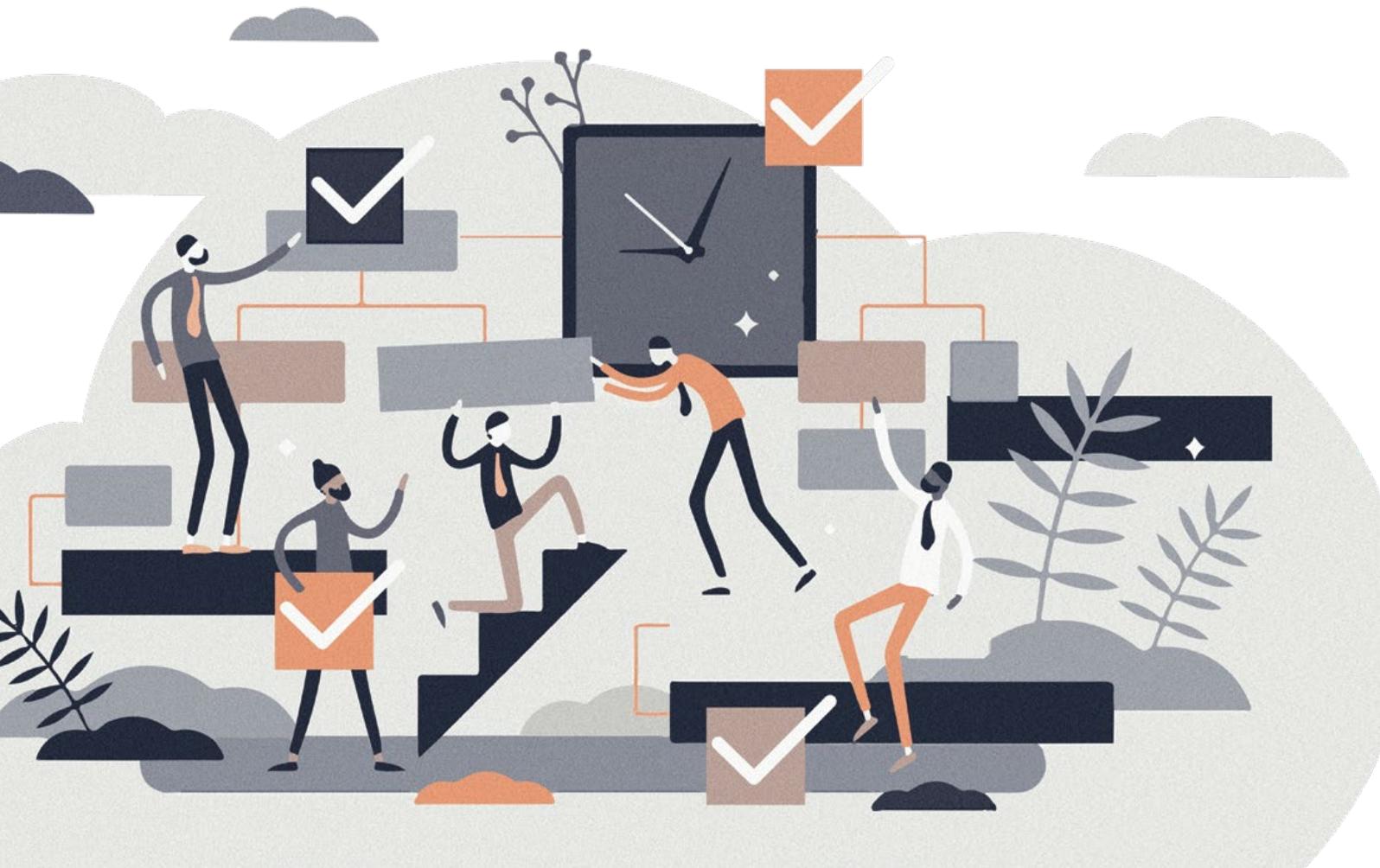
The aim of the law is introducing the system of Work Capacity Assessment, setting up legal premises for delivering services adequate to the assessed needs of the people with disabilities, in compliance with the requirements of fundamental human rights.

## LAW ON MINIMUM WAGE

A bill on the amendment to the Law on Minimum Monthly Wage was adopted, according to which/which stipulates increasing the minimum wage/salary from 55,000 AMD to 68,000 AMD since 1 January 2020. According to/as per the amendment the sum of the contract workers with full-time engagement and paid per work or per hour/the minimal hourly rate was increased from 330 AMD to 406 AMD.

## TAX CODE

The bill on amendments and supplements to the Tax Code and the package of bills on related laws was aimed at restructuring the taxation system, rising competitiveness of the national economy and implementing a redistribution of the tax burden for enhancing attractiveness to foreign investment flows.



The following regulations were intended in particular: cuts in income and benefits taxes, introduction of a special taxation system for micro-enterprises, changes creating incentives for the development of the capital market, improving the mechanisms of VAT refunds.

#### **PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP**

As per the regulations suggested by the package of draft laws the necessary institutional and legislative bases have been created for designing, implementing and strengthen successful public-private partnership projects. In accordance with the legislative regulations procedures for public-private partnership have been introduced. In the meantime the legislative provisions are aimed at strengthening the public-private partnership providing it with the most possibly full legal definition.

#### **PROTECTION OF ECONOMIC COMPETITION**

The law package has significantly widened and strengthened the legal and institutional bases of the Republic of Armenia National Assembly Standing Committee on Economy: it namely stipulates a simplified procedure on corporate merger assessments, introduction of a control mechanism over individual contracts, deals and reorganizations within specific groups of legal entities, the normative basis for the

bylaws to be specified by the Committee. In the meantime institutional guarantees were set up for the Committee members' independence, the powers of the inspecting body have been widened to include the powers of sealing any premise or document pertaining to the business entity where such checks are being carried out. The inspecting body was granted the power of making use of the equipment owned by the business entity controlled, while an administrative liability was established for a number of offenses by individuals, a mechanism of coordination was set up with the Police Intelligence and Tracking units, and the remit of each specific body engaged in the defense of competition as well as mechanisms of coordinating their actions were identified more clearly.

#### **TAX ON PROPERTY**

The Law on Property Tax regulates the tax rate, the legal relationships relating to the tax rate calculation and the tax payment, identifies those entities and persons who are liable to pay the tax, and the legal responsibility for breaking those provisions.

The aim of the amendments to the law is to substitute the cadastral value with the market value for the property as the base of the property taxation rate to make the taxation more adequate. >

## GOVERNMENT PENSIONS

The purpose of the Bill on Amendments to the Law on State Pensions is to introduce efficient mechanisms for the implementation of the government policy in this matter.

The government policy in this matter suggests particularly the introduction of integrated social service, which should be based on a unified system of assessing social needs.

The section 4.2 of the Government Program approved by the National Assembly on 14 February 2019 states that the introduction of integrated social service will improve the efficiency of the social protection system's management as well as the quality of social services, the latter being achieved through an integrated service package tailored to the needs of a specific person or a family as well as through a continuous development of the professional skills of the staff providing those services.

In compliance with the Government Program, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of the Republic of Armenia has initiated structural reforms with an aim of establishing a fundamentally new unified system of assessing social needs under which the process of complex assessment of the beneficiaries' needs will be conducted based on a single methodology and by a single institution while a full range of social support, including employment, health and social assessment while other complex services will be provided by the communities in close cooperation with other stakeholders, such as such as the healthcare, education and other state agencies.

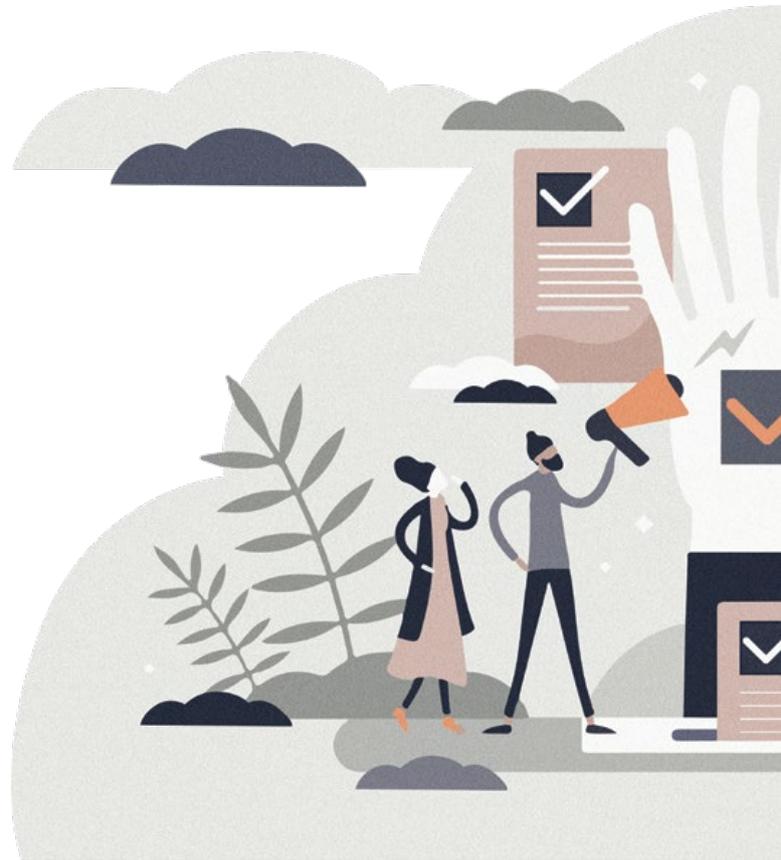
As a result of the action undertaken the Law on Amendments to the Law on Social Support was drafted and adopted, while an action plan for the implementation of the provisions of the law was confirmed by a prime ministerial decree.

Its expected outcome will be ensuring a more complex and targeted assessment of the population's social needs, providing a more accessible, quality and continuous flow of a full range of social services tailored to specific needs and relying heavily on local communities with the help of a new set of more flexible and efficient tools.

## ON PERSONS AFFECTED DURING THE EVENTS OF 1 MARCH 2008

The Law on Support to Persons Affected During the Events of 1 and 2 March 2008 in Yerevan regulates the legal relationship on the indemnification of those whose life or health was affected on 1 to 2 2008 during the violent dispersal of the protest rallies that erupted following the disputed presidential elections of 19 February.

The purpose of the law is providing indemnities to those who were affected by the events on 1 to 2 March 2008 in Yerevan. During the named events the government of the Republic of Armenia failed to secure the life and safety of those people and therefore now – when attempts are made at establishing public solidarity and restituting with the help of transitional justice rights of those who were unlawfully denied them – this law is yet another step in the direction of fulfilling those aims.



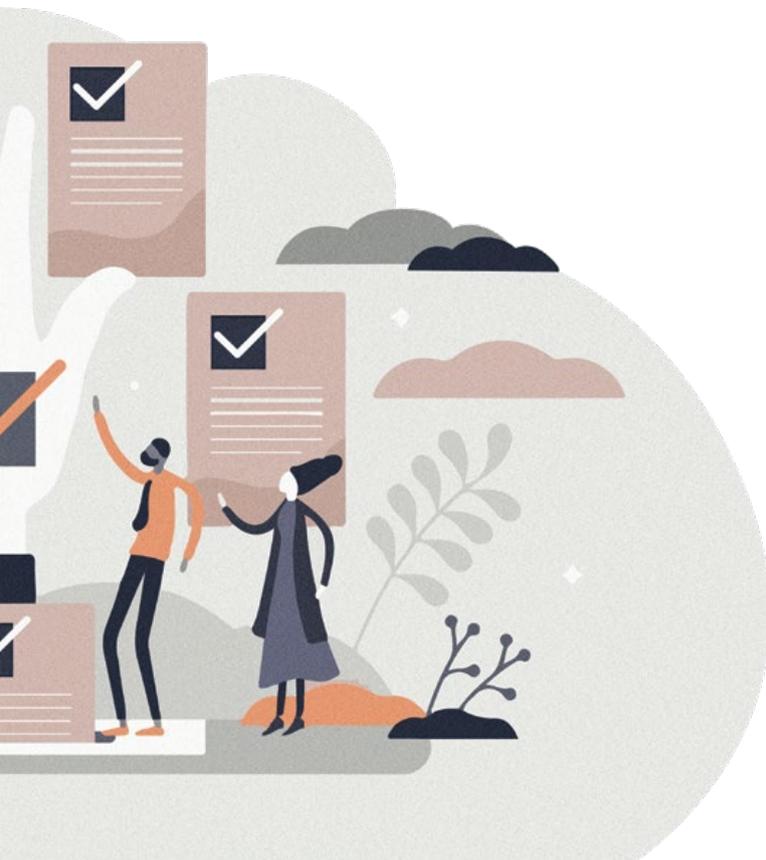
## ELECTORAL CODE

The initiative of reforming the Electoral Code in Armenia has been launched since the democratic revolution of 2018.

The amendments to the Electoral Code can be divided into two groups. The first one of them is the abolition of the score system of voting, which will come into force by the upcoming parliamentary elections to be held in June. The second is about lowering the electoral threshold for political parties, while raising it for alliances, which will be enacted by the next elections.

The initiative of reforming the Electoral Code launched in 2018, started to take shape in the same year when a special Commission on Electoral Code Reforms was set up by the Prime Minister's administration and the commission soon came up with a relevant project. The bill based on the project failed to receive the necessary number of votes by the National Assembly, and the parliamentary snap election of December 2018 was held in accordance of the unchanged Electoral Code. Nevertheless the election of 9 December 2018 was assessed as essentially free and fair, which created solid bases for introducing such changes into the Electoral Code which would be perceived by the people as enhancing legitimacy of the parliament and strengthening democratic institutions.

As a result of such moves, free and fair elections would turn into a rule rather than an exception.



### **ROAD POLICE REFORMS**

Since 1 January 2020 the penalty point system of road traffic regulation has entered into force. Initially the system was valid in case of traffic offenses registered only by traffic cameras, however since September 2020 it includes also those registered by the Road Police.

In accordance to the new regulations each holder of traffic license is awarded 9 points per year which are to be deducted automatically in case of a registered offense. Foreign citizens residing in Armenia who hold a valid driving license will be provided with those points on the day of their registration in the State Register of Population. The penalty points remaining by the end of the one-year period are not transferred to the next one.

### **AUDIO-VISUAL MEDIA**

The Law on Audio-Visual Media was adopted during the mentioned period, which seemingly, did not have any direct or significant impact on the daily social life of the citizens, however it fundamentally changed the whole philosophy of functioning of the television and radio.

The law defines the status of those providing audio-visual media service, broadcasting audio-visual news, regulates the procedure of obtaining license, authorization or announcement, the bases of rights and obligations connected to that kind of activities as well as the legal relationship arising thereof.

The law is called upon to serve the purpose of ensuring everyone's right to receive reliable information, guaranteeing editorial independence, the freedom to express one's own views as well as safeguarding the independence of the body which regulates functioning of the audio-visual media. The law is equally called upon to ensure, support and develop diversity of the audio-visual materials broadcast by media and to protect and develop the national audio-visual media space.

A single important clause of the law refers to the state language of the Republic of Armenia – which is Armenian – stipulating that the language of audio-visual media in the country is Armenian with the exception of cases specified by the law. Audio-visual broadcasting in languages, other than Armenian, should be accompanied by adequate voice-over translation or subtitles in Armenian, with the exception of materials produced for the purpose of learning foreign languages as well as in case of musical compositions. Broadcasting audio-visual material in a foreign language with Armenian subtitles is acceptable only in case the language of the material is the original one.

According to the law the musical programs of an audio-visual media service should contain at least 30 per cent of Armenian content, which should be broadcast between 7 am and 11 pm. The names of the media outlets providing audio-visual services in case of being used in foreign languages should be transliterated from Armenian.

It is worth noting that those provisions do not apply to those audio-visual materials broadcast exclusively for the foreign audience or for the national minorities in Armenia.

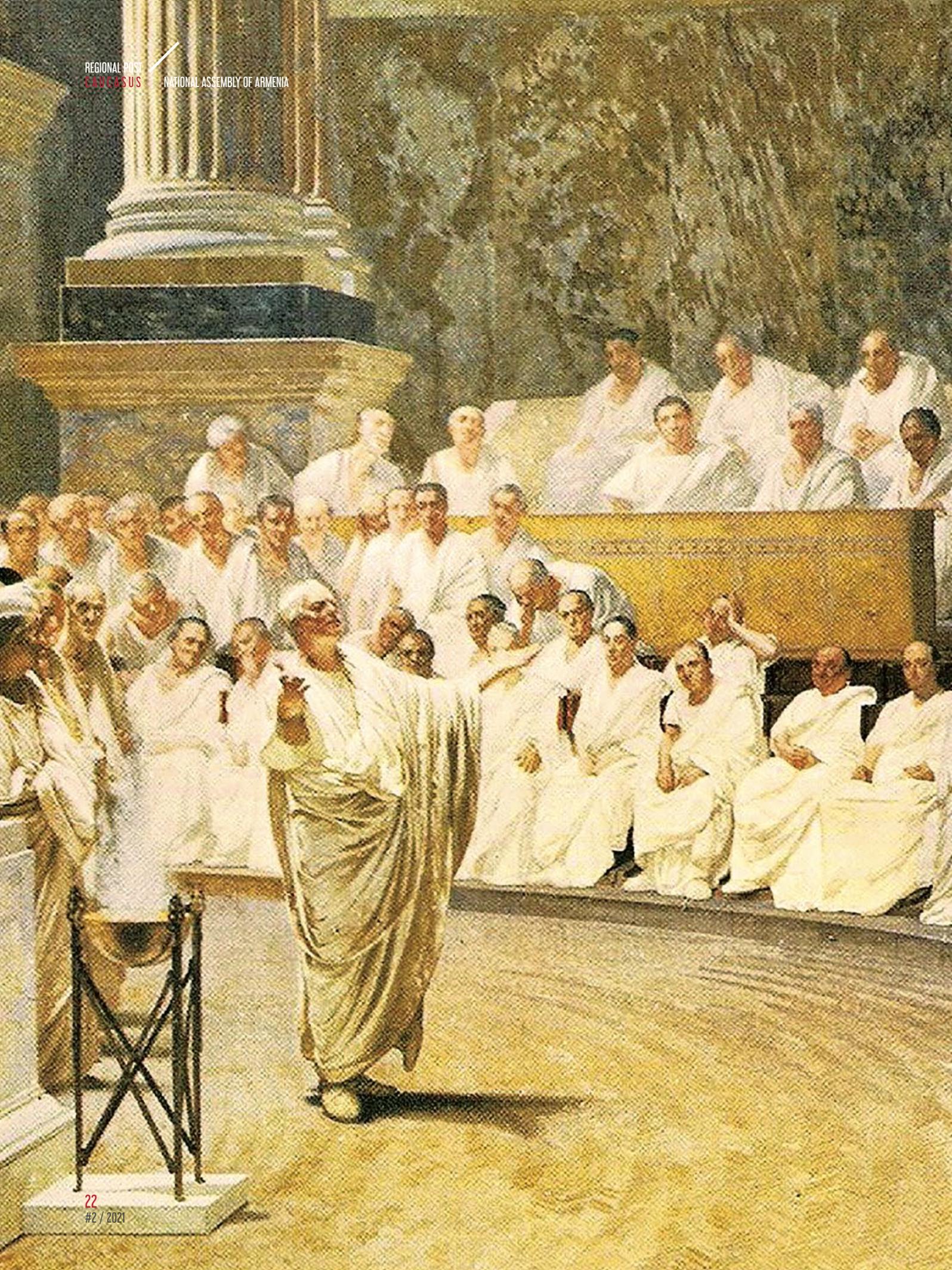
The audio-visual media outlets which broadcast also news programs or programs for children as per the provisions of the law should ensure accessibility of information for those with impaired hearing broadcasting at least once in a day, at a time specified by a relevant state agency, a children's and/or news program which will be accompanied with a simultaneous sign language translation or subtitled in Armenian.

### **PATERNITY LEAVE**

The prime goal of the supplements to the Labor Code is to introduce the Article 16 of the Constitution of Armenia into legal practice, which stipulates that the family is a natural and fundamental unit of the society and a base of reproduction of the population as well as the maternity and that the childhood is under the protection of the state.

Within 30 days after the birth of the child upon the decision of the father he is provided with five days of paid leave at the expense of the employer.

The regulation offers more solid guarantees for employees' right, particularly of women, as well as encouraging their economic activities, increasing their protection in the professional environment. ♦

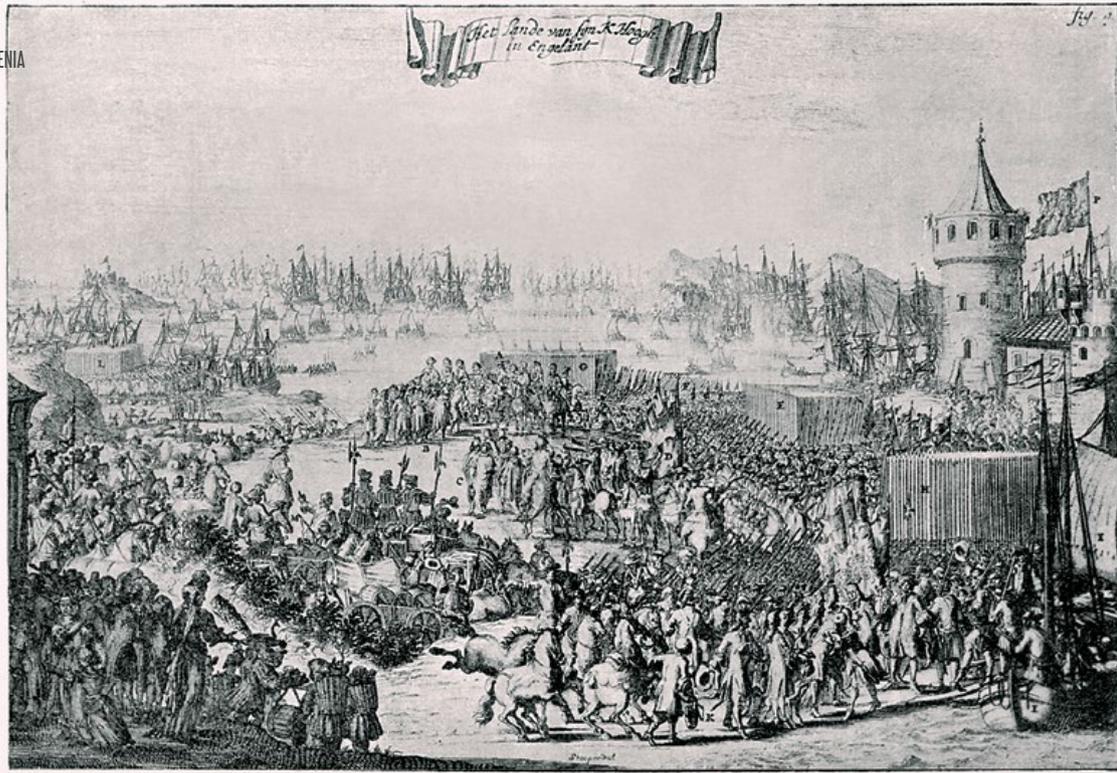




# PARLIAMENTS AND PARLIAMENTARISM

Today it is virtually impossible to imagine the government of almost any country without parliamentarism. But what is the story behind the legislative body that many of us take for granted today?

TEXT : HAMAZASP HAROYAN



LANDING OF WILLIAM OF ORANGE, 1688.

> Glorious Revolution of 1688

### IS PARLIAMENTARISM A WORD?

If you try to google “parliamentarism”, one of the questions suggested by the search engine is “Is parliamentarism a word?”. Merriam-Webster’s dictionary defines “parliamentarism” as “parliamentary system of government”, i.e. a system of government having the real executive power vested in a cabinet composed of members of the legislature who are individually and collectively responsible to the legislature. Political scientists usually distinguish between “parliamentary” and “presidential” systems of democratic government, depending on whether the cabinet of ministers is appointed by the president or the parliament. However, even in presidential systems, the parliaments play a major role. In fact, there are few democratic states in the world that can be described as “pure” presidential systems, the majority belong to the so-called “semi-presidential” systems, in which the parliaments retain significant influence on the executive government. However, there is also a wider understanding of the term, which refers to the importance of parliament and parliamentary politics in any system of democratic government. It is hard to overestimate the significance of parliaments for modern democracy. The parliament has an immense role in a modern democratic state, whether a parliamentary republic, a presidential republic or a constitutional monarchy.

There is even an international day of parliamentarism, introduced by the United Nations, celebrated on June 30. According to the UN website, “This Day celebrates parliaments and the ways in which parliamentary systems of government improve the day-to-day lives of people the

## THE PARLIAMENT HAS AN IMMENSE ROLE IN A MODERN DEMOCRATIC STATE, WHETHER A PARLIAMENTARY REPUBLIC, A PRESIDENTIAL REPUBLIC OR A CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY

world over... It is also an opportunity for parliaments to take stock, identify challenges, and ways to address them effectively”. The specific date was chosen to honor the day in 1889, when the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the global organization of parliaments, was established. This is how the UN website explains what is the significance of the International day of parliamentarism, or in other words, why parliaments are important:

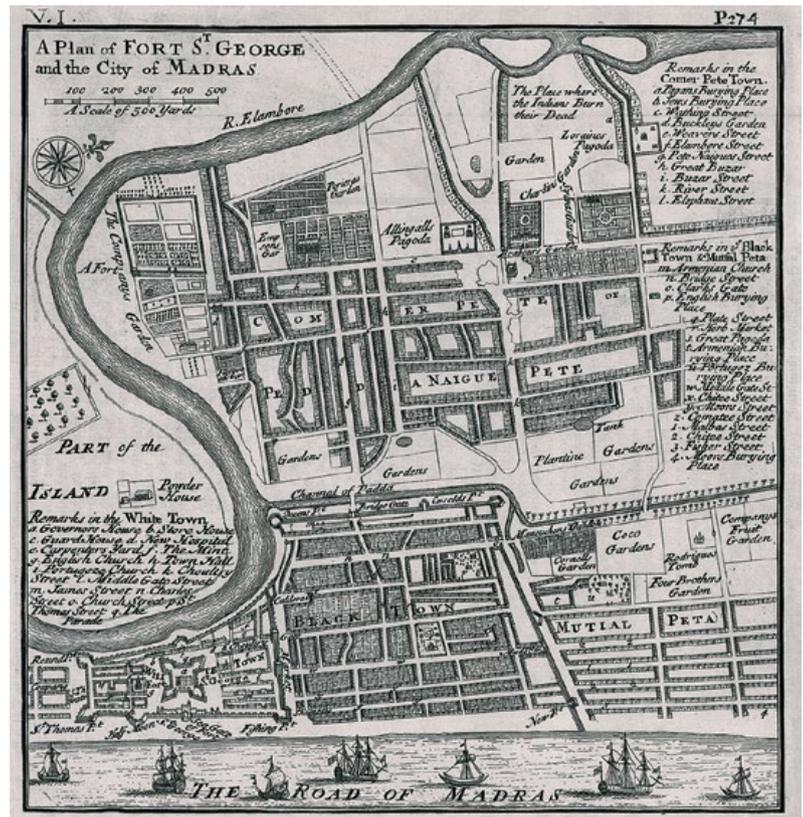
*“strong parliaments are a cornerstone of democracy. They represent the voice of the people, pass laws, allocate funds to implement laws and policies, and hold governments to account. They work to make sure that policies benefit all people, especially the most vulnerable.”*

Whether in well-established democratic systems or emerging democracies, parliaments play a key role. Obviously, their main objective is to create laws, which govern the life of the country and its citizens. But, apart from that, they have many other functions, from providing an oversight over the executive power, representing the citizens, which should also include giving voice to minorities and underprivileged groups, to ratifying international agreements and executing parliamentary diplomacy.

▼ Monument to Alfonso IX in, Baiona, Spain



➤ Indian Madras, one of the centers of the Armenian diaspora in the 18th century



### PARLIAMENTS BEFORE PARLIAMENTARISM

While today parliaments play a key role in the majority of the countries of the world, this has not always been the case. In fact even in the 19th century only a handful of countries had functioning parliaments with a significant role in the political process. The idea that countries should be run by parliaments is in fact one of the contributions of the so called “Age of Enlightenment”: it emerged in the works of political philosophers of 17-18th centuries, and came into reality in the Western world through the revolutions and reforms mostly in the late 18th and 19th centuries, while the rest of the world mostly caught up with the idea of parliamentarism in 20th century. However, today parliaments seem universally accepted, countries that do not have parliaments are today a tiny minority, even though the degree to which parliaments actually influence the state affairs might vary significantly from one country to another.

So how old is parliamentarism? When was the first parliament formed? Where does the word “parliament” come from and what does it mean? In fact, the answer to the last question is the easiest. As any French speaker would easily guess, it is related to the French verb “parler”, “to speak.” The word “parlement” was recorded in old French as early as 11th century, and initially it referred to any kind of discussion. Later it began to be used in reference to a certain type of court. However, it received its contemporary meaning, an elected legislative body, in medieval England, where the first elected legislative body was assembled in 13th century.

It is more difficult to answer the question when and where the first parliament was formed. The answer to this question also depends on what can be considered “parliament.” Through-

out history, from the ancient times, there existed councils, which took part in the governance, however most of these did not fit the definition of parliament, since they had no legislative power, and were not elected, but rather appointed by the ruler, or formed from the representatives of aristocracy.

The great republics of the ancient world, Athens and Rome, came somewhat closer to the emergence of parliamentarism, but they were still quite far from our modern understanding of the term. Thus, the famous Athenian Republic was more of a direct democracy: main decisions were taken by the council of all citizens, which was called “ecclesia”. There was a smaller elected council of 400 members, called “boule”, but its role was secondary to the general council of citizens. And in any case, when we talk about Athenian democracy, we need to remember that only a minority of actual inhabitants of Athens had the status of citizens: women and migrants did not have voting rights, not to mention slaves.

As for the Roman republic, it represented more of an aristocratic system of government, albeit with some elements of democracy. Thus, the famous Roman Senate was not an elected body, but one whose members were appointed by the consuls: after a Roman magistrate, in other words an executive official, served his term in office, it usually was followed with automatic appointment to the Senate. In fact there was another elected body in the Roman Republic which was closer to our understanding of the parliament, it was called “comitia” (this is where the word “committee” comes from), but its participation in the state affairs, while quite significant, was not as dominant as that of modern parliaments.

The first parliaments that resemble modern parliamentarism emerged in medieval Europe. While most people would

probably think that the first “real” parliament was convened in England, in fact the first elected legislative bodies in medieval Europe were convened on the Iberian peninsula, in what today is Spain and Portugal. In 1188 in the kingdom of Leon, in what is today Spain, the king Alfonso the 9th summoned an elected council called “cortes”, a fact recognized by UNESCO as the beginning of European parliamentarism. According to UNESCO, the Decreta of Leon of 1188 is the oldest documentary manifestation of the European parliamentary system. In addition, UNESCO granted the 1188 Cortes of Alfonso IX the title of “Memory of the World” and the city of Leon has been recognized as the “Cradle of Parliamentarism”.

The roots of the English parliament go back to the so called Magna Carta of 1215, a document signed by the king John, who was faced with an uprising of English aristocracy, or, as they were referred at the time, the barons. Unable to quash the uprising he had to come to an agreement with the insurgents, according to which he promised not to levy and collect taxes, without the consent of a council. However, this council was still not a proper parliament, since it consisted only of the lords, i.e. members of the nobility. It was later in the same century, under the king Henry III, that elected representatives of “commons” joined the parliament, and in this case it was also a result of a rebellion against the king. In 1265 Simon de Montfort, a member of the aristocracy who led a rebellion against the king Henry the 3rd, summoned a parliament, which included not only the members of the aristocracy and church hierarchy, as had been the case with such gatherings before, but also representatives of “common people”. Thus, it is often considered that the parliament of 1265 was the beginning of the history of parliamentarism in England.



◀ Magna Carta, 1297 version

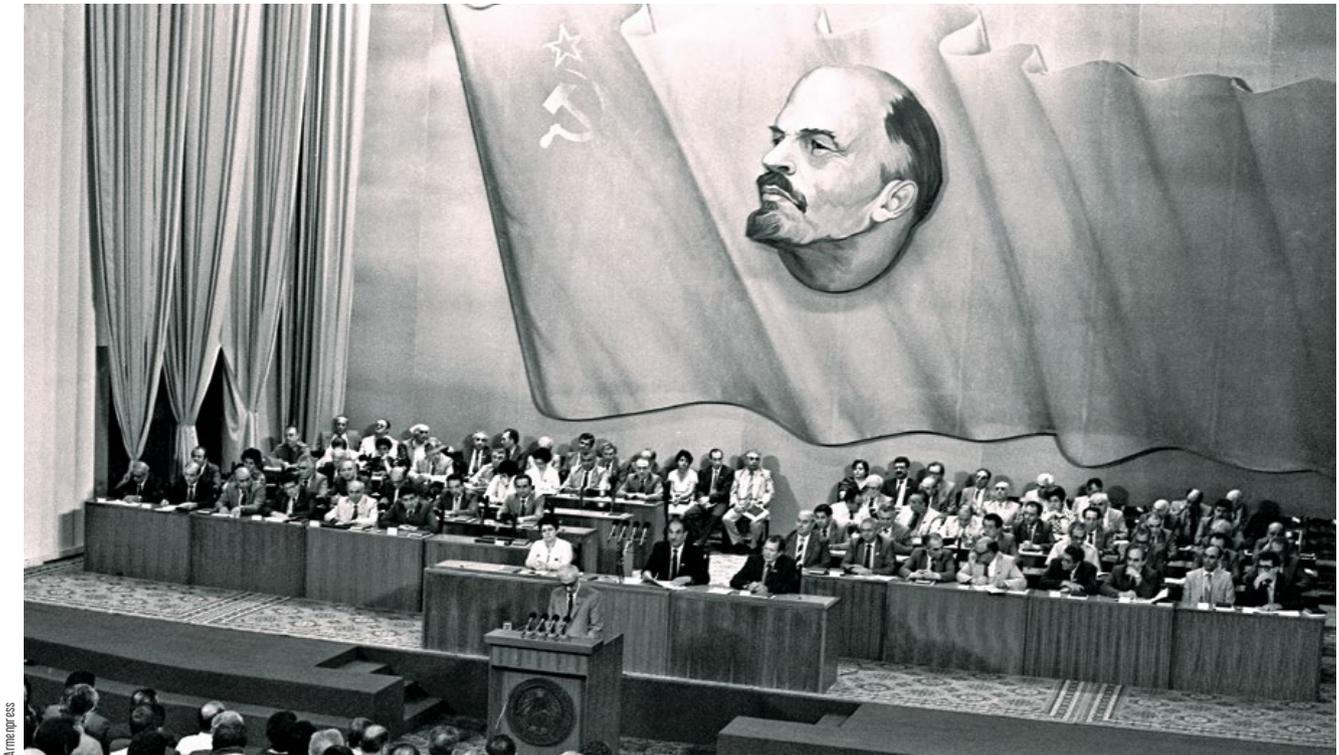
▶ Soviet Armenia's Supreme Council, 1980's

## ENGLISH PARLIAMENT IN ITS CURRENT FORM WAS ESTABLISHED IN 1707, AND ITS FORMATION WAS A RESULT OF ALMOST A CENTURY OF REVOLUTIONS AND CIVIL WARS

### THE CIVIC CONTRACT THEORY AND THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN PARLIAMENTARISM

Obviously, all these medieval parliaments were very far from modern parliaments, both in terms of the scale of representation of the population, and in terms of the scale of their power and their influence on the state affairs. In fact, the emergence of parliaments in their modern form is a phenomenon of modernity. The first European parliaments of the modern type started to emerge in the 17-18th century. In most cases, this was related to revolutions, civil wars, and other political perturbations., since the kings and the aristocracy were not willing to give up their power to the elected representatives of “the common people”. Thus, the English parliament in its current form was established in 1707, and its formation was a result of almost a century of revolutions and civil wars, which culminated in the so called “glorious revolution” in the late 17th century. In France the so called “Etats generales”, which resembled the medieval forms of parliamentarism were transformed into “Convent” in the course of the French revolution that started in 1789.





Armenpress

In America, the colonists that rebelled against the English king and created their own “United States” established the Congress, which remains one of the oldest functioning parliaments in the world.

The philosophical bases of modern parliamentarism were created by the European political philosophers of these ages, including thinkers like Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Voltaire, Jean Jacques Rousseau. The ideological basis of the parliamentarism was the concept of the civic contract, the idea that the state was a result of an agreement between the citizens and the government, in which the citizens, who are the source of power, delegate that power to the state officials. While in early forms of the civic contract theory, it was the monarch that received the power from the people, it was only logical that the development of this theory would lead to parliament being the primary form of government elected by the people. What better way of delegating power can one imagine, than electing representatives from the people, who would adopt laws and appoint government officials.

The ideas and practices of parliamentarism spread from Western Europe first to Central and Eastern Europe, and then to the rest of the world. Today there are virtually no countries that do not have parliaments, even though the design and functions of the parliaments may vary greatly. There are countries that have a classic parliamentary system of government, in which the cabinets are appointed by parliaments, and the president or the monarch has mostly symbolic and representative functions. There are countries with a presidential system, the US being the most well-known example, but even in these systems the parliament has an immense role in the government.

Finally, many countries have mixed systems, as has been the case in Armenia before the recent constitutional reform. It is also important to understand that in some countries, more specifically the ones with authoritarian regimes, the influence of the parliament in real life may be more limited than on paper. However, the general trend in the world is toward expanding the role of the parliaments, rather than restricting it. Today it is virtually impossible to imagine the government of almost any country without parliamentarism. And, as more and more citizens around the world engage in political participation, parliamentarism is becoming more and more important.

#### **OLDER THAN YOU MAY THINK: ARMENIAN PARLIAMENTARISM**

So what about parliamentarism in Armenia? How far back does the story of Armenian parliamentarism go? In the middle ages there had been councils of aristocracy and church elders, which were devoted to solving important issues. Thus, in 449 a council of feudal lords and church elders gathered in Artashat rejected Persian king Hazkert’s order to abandon Christianity for Zoroastrianism, which became the beginning of the famous uprising led by Vardan Mamikonyan. Throughout the Middle Ages there were also church councils that adopted rules, which served as laws that governed Armenian communities in the periods when there was no Armenian statehood. Of course, these councils cannot be considered as forms of parliamentary rule. If we are talking about the history of Armenian parliamentarism per se, we need to go back at least to the 18th century.

It was in the 18th century that the ideas of parliamentarism were voiced by Armenian intellectuals, and it happened quite far from Armenian lands, in India. At the time Armenian lands



were under foreign rule, and the largest centers of Armenian intellectual life were located outside of Armenia, and one was in Madras (or Chennai, as it is called since 1996) in India. In the 18th century India had quite a wealthy and influential Armenian community, and some of its intellectual leaders were making plans of restoring Armenian statehood. India's Armenians had links with Europe, particularly with England, so the Armenian intellectuals of Madras were well-aware of the ideas of enlightenment. In fact, their writings were so progressive for their time, that they scared some of the compatriots back in Armenia. Thus, a book called "Nor Tetrak vor Kochi Hordorak" ("New book called Exhortation") written by Movses Baghramyan, a native of Artsakh, who had moved to India, was banned. The catholicos Simeon Yerevantsi issued orders to burn any copies of the book that could be found. Probably, one of the ideas of the book that scared conservative Armenians, was Baghramyan's view that monarchy should be replaced by parliamentary government, since no single man can govern without mistakes, and mistakes of the ruler can be deadly for the country.

Another member of the Madras community, Shahamir Shahamiryan went even further: publishing a draft constitution for the future state of Armenia in a book called "Vorogayt Parats", the title of which is translated as "Entrapment of Glory" (apparently, Madras Armenians had a somewhat specific taste in book titles). Shahamiryan envisaged for Armenia a government, which was not only republican, but also parliamentary, quite a radical view for his times. The new Armenian state was supposed to be ruled by a parliament called "Hayots Tun" ("Armenian house"), elected by the population, and which in turn would appoint a cabinet of ministers, led by prime-minister, whom Shahamiryan called "nakharar" (old Armenian word which designated feudal lords, which today has come to signify members of the government).

Obviously, at the time when Armenia was divided between the Persian and Ottoman Empires, the chances of implementation of the progressive ideas of Shahamiryan and Baghramyan were bleak. However, the liberal-democratic ideas of this



group became the basis upon which intellectuals and political activists based their struggle for liberation of Armenia in the 19th century. The chance to put these ideas in practice came in the 20th century, when the Russian Empire collapsed and the independent Republic of Armenia was created. The parliament of independent Armenia was not created from scratch. When Bolsheviks captured power in Russia, the Transcaucasian Seim was created, which assumed power in the region. The Seim was comprised of deputies who were elected by the people in Transcaucasia to serve in Russia's Constituent Assembly, the legislative body that was supposed to create a constitution for Russia, but was violently disbanded by Bolsheviks. Armenian Revolutionary Federation Dashnaksutyun had a faction of 27 members in the Seim. In April 1918 the Seim proclaimed the independence of the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic, which, however, proved to be short-lived, lasting a little more than a month. Parallel to the Transcaucasian Seim there was also a body that represented the Armenians of the Transcaucasia, the Armenian National Council, which consisted of 15 members,



## ARMENIAN ELECTORAL LAW WAS QUITE PROGRESSIVE FOR ITS TIME, SINCE IT ESTABLISHED UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE FOR EVERYONE OVER 20 YEARS OLD. THIS INCLUDED WOMEN

<  
Inter-Parliamentary  
Union congress  
in Russia

who were chosen by the Armenian National Congress that took place in Tbilisi in October 1917 and had delegates from Armenians from all over Russian Empire (except Bolsheviks, who boycotted the congress).

The Transcaucasian federation collapsed in late May 1918 and the Armenian National Council declared Armenia an independent state on May 28. As the Republic of Armenia was created, it needed a supreme legislative body. But the situation in the country was dire: after the war and genocide Armenia was full of refugees and ravaged by hunger and disease. Since it was impossible to hold proper election in this situation, the first parliament was created on the basis of the Armenian National Council. The number of its members was tripled, and representatives of national minorities were added. Thus, the first provisional Armenian parliament was created.

The first proper elections to the Armenian parliament took place in June 1919. The parliament had 80 members, including three women. Armenian electoral law was quite progressive for its time, since it established universal suffrage for everyone over 20 years old. This included women, while even in many European countries women could not vote at the time. For example in UK, usually considered the cradle of parliamentarism, women received the right to vote in 1918, but this referred only to women with college education, and only in 1928 full suffrage for women was introduced. Not to mention that in Switzerland, another age-old bastion of democracy, women received the right to vote in federal elections as late as in 1971.

As the first Republic of Armenia collapsed under the blows of Turkish Kemalists and Russian Bolsheviks, the Soviet Armenia, often referred to as “the Second Republic” was established. Soviet Armenia, as it is obvious from the word itself, was supposed to be ruled by “Soviets”, i.e. councils of workers and farmers. The elective legislative body of the Soviet Armenia was called the Supreme Council. The Supreme Council had 340 members, all elected from majoritarian districts, and its term lasted 5 years. Throughout the Soviet period the Supreme council played mostly a formal role, as all the decisions were

taken by the Communist leadership. In fact, it was only the Communist Party that took part in elections, or rather, as it was called in the Soviet “newspeak” the alliance “of Communists and non-partisans”. Often there was only one candidate running in each district, so Soviet elections could be described as a certain type of ritual rather than a real political process.

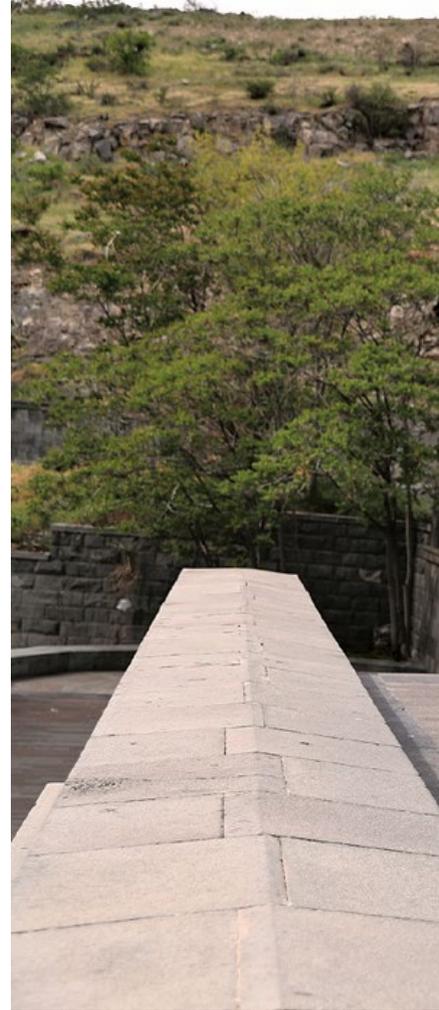
However, by 1990, when the Soviet system was in crisis, conditions emerged for the Supreme Council to be transformed into a real parliament. In 1990 for the first time competitive elections into the Supreme Council took place and for the first (and last) time in the history of Soviet Armenia, the ruling political power was changed through elections: opposition Armenian National Movement gained majority, beating the Communists. As the USSR was collapsing and Armenia declared independence The Supreme Council became the first parliament of the Third Republic of Armenia.

In 1995 the Supreme Council was replaced by the new legislative body, the National Assembly. It was also then that the first constitution of Armenia was adopted in a referendum. The constitution made Armenia a presidential-parliamentary republic with strong presidential power. Later changes in the constitution somewhat shifted the balance of power from the president to the parliament, but presidentialism was predominant until 2015, when the constitution was changed once again, opening the road to transfer to a parliamentary republic in spring 2018. The transfer to parliamentary republic was a subject of heated debates at the time, which still continue till this day. While some argue that parliamentarism is a more democratic form of government, an argument supported by the example of majority of European countries, others claim that Armenian political system is not ready yet for such a system, or that presidential system may be better suited for responding to crisis situations, of the kind that Armenia is going through today. Today, as Armenia is approaching its 8th parliamentary election throughout independence the jury is still out on the merits of parliamentary and presidential systems. However, one thing is clear: a strong parliament is the best guarantee that the people’s voice is heard. ♦

# PARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY

The international diplomacy and the NA's impact on the international scene, highlight of the work of the international relations committee, explained.

TEXT : ARMEN GARUNTS / PHOTO : ARAKS KOCHARYAN



## WHAT IS PARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY?

When we think of diplomacy, usually we think of heads of states or ministers of foreign affairs conducting negotiations or the work of embassies and consulates around the world. This is understandable since in modern states conducting foreign policy is one of the prerogatives of the executive power, but parliaments have important functions in foreign policy as well. First of all, parliaments, especially in parlia-

mentary republics, appoint the executive government and thus share the responsibility for the foreign policy of the government. Another important function of the parliament with regard to foreign policy is the ratification of interstate agreements, which is necessary for such agreements to enter into force. These are important functions, but apart from that there exists a line of parliamentary work, which is usually referred to as “parliamentary diplomacy.” Parliamentary diplomacy is usually defined as the means by which two or more parliaments conduct an ongoing dialogue with regard to key international issues. Parliamentary diplomacy is an important addition to the contacts between executive governments, which adds depth to relations of Armenia with other countries or Armenia's participation in international organizations. It is coordinated by the Standing Commission on Foreign Relations. Armenian parliament, however, also has two other commissions, which deal with issues related to parliamentary foreign affairs: the Standing Committee on European Integration, and the Standing Committee on regional and Eurasian integration. Parliamentary diplomacy has several formats. One of the most well-known and publicized formats is the parliament's participation in legislative bodies of international organizations, such as the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Euronest or the Parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Another format is the interparliamentary Committees, which are usually





◀ Delegation of the Iraqi parliament visiting Matenadaran

**P**ARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY IS USUALLY DEFINED AS THE MEANS BY WHICH TWO OR MORE PARLIAMENTS CONDUCT AN ONGOING DIALOGUE WITH REGARD TO KEY INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

established by two friendly parliaments. An important tool of parliamentary diplomacy is represented by interparliamentary agreements, which are concluded between two friendly countries. Finally, there is the format of friendship groups, where usually formal and informal communication takes place between parliaments of two friendly countries.

**PACE: WHAT HAPPENS IN STRASBOURG (DOES NOT STAY IN STRASBOURG)**

The National Assembly's participation in international parliamentary organizations is probably the most publicly well-known sphere of parliamentary diplomacy. Let us start with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), the parliamentary arm of the Council of Europe (CoE). CoE is a 47-nation international organization dedicated to upholding human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Obviously, Armenia, just like other Eastern European countries, has not been a member of CoE since its foundation in 1949, but joined it after the collapse of the USSR, in 2001. In fact, joining the CoE was not an easy task: it took years of diplomatic efforts on the part of successive Armenian governments. It was only on January 25 2001 that Armenia became a member of the Council of Europe, becoming the 42nd member of that organization. Today CoE is one of the most influential international organizations in Europe, uniting countries with a total population of about 820 million. >



^ Ambassador of Bulgaria in Armenia Georgi Karastamatov with MP Vahe Entijyan, head of Armenia-Bulgaria friendship group

➤ MP Anush Beghloyan, head of Armenia-Lithuania-Latvia-Estonia friendship group, and Ambassador of Lithuania to Armenia Inga Stanytė-Toločkienė



└ Swiss ambassador Stefano Lazzarotto and head of Armenia-Switzerland friendship group Arman Yeghoyan

PACE is one of the two statutory bodies of the Council of Europe, along with the Committee of Ministers, the executive body representing governments. PACE is often viewed as the “locomotive” of the whole organization, since it is here that governments are held to account on human rights issues. Among the prerogatives of PACE are the election of the judges of the European Court of Human Rights, of the Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights and its Secretary General, as well as of the members of the Committee for the Prevention of Torture. PACE sessions are taking place in Strasbourg, which has a symbolic significance. Strasbourg is the capital of the region Elsass-Lorraine, which has been a contested land between Germany and France for decades, and now has become one of the symbols of united Europe.

The Assembly has a total of 648 members in total – 324 principal members and 324 substitutes – who are appointed or elected by the parliaments of each member state. Delegations must reflect the balance in the national parliament, so they contain members of both ruling parties and oppositions. Thus, the delegation of The National Assembly of Armenia consist of 8 members, from which 5 members are from faction “My Step”, 2 member from faction “Prosperious Armenia”, 1 from Faction “Bright Armenia. The head of the delegation is Ruben Rubinyan from faction “My Step”. PACE is also the oldest interparliamentary body of which the Armenian National Assembly is a member of. The Assembly held its first session in Strasbourg on 10 August 1949, making it one of the oldest international assemblies in Europe. PACE often becomes a place of heated discussions, as some of its member countries find themselves under criticism for various human rights issues. Hence its importance



for Armenia’s foreign policy, especially for issues related to the Karabakh conflict, which became obvious once again in April 2021, when the PACE discussed the issue of Armenian POVs and hostages in Azerbaijan, and the Monitoring Committee of PACE called for their immediate release.

#### PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION IN EUROPE, EURASIA AND EVERYWHERE

Armenia’s position on the crossroads of different regions is reflected also in the diversity of the parliamentary organizations that Armenian National Assembly is a member of. Thus, Armenian NA is a member of EuroNest, the parliamentary assembly of EU’s Eastern Partnership, and at the same time a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of Commonwealth of Independent States; a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of



Head of Armenia-UK friendship group Lilit Makunts with Chargé d'Affaires of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to Armenia David Moran (on the right)

CSTO and an associate member at the parliamentary assembly of NATO, member of the Interparliamentary Assembly of Orthodoxy (IAO) and a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (PABSEC). Let us start with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is a regional intergovernmental organization of nine (originally ten) members, plus two founding non-member, post-Soviet republics in Eurasia. It was formed following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The Interparliamentary Assembly (IPA) is an interstate body of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The IPA CIS is composed of the parliamentary delegations of the Member Nations. The delegates are appointed or elected by the national parliaments. As a rule, the IPA CIS Council meets twice a year. Also, the IPA CIS holds plenary sessions twice a year. Delegation of The National Assembly of Armenia consists of 16 members, of which 11 members are from faction "My Step", 3 members are from faction "Prosperous Armenia", 2 are from Faction "Bright Armenia". The head of the delegation is Ararat Mirzoyan from the faction "My Step". Another important inter-parliamentary body is the Parliamentary Assembly of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO; also known by its Russian abbreviation ODKB). CSTO is an intergovernmental military alliance in Eurasia that consists of the following post-Soviet states: Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan. Delegation of The National Assembly of Armenia consists of 16 members,

**EUROPEAN DIRECTION IS ALSO AN IMPORTANT DIRECTION OF ARMENIA'S FOREIGN POLICY. ARMENIAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IS A MEMBER OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP "EURONEST"**

of which 11 members are from faction "My Step", 3 members from faction "Prosperous Armenia", 2 from Faction "Bright Armenia. The head of the delegation is Ararat Mirzoyan from the faction "My Step". European direction is also an important direction of Armenia's foreign policy. Armenian National Assembly is a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Eastern Partnership "Euronest". The Euronest Parliamentary Assembly is a parliamentary forum to promote political association and further economic integration between the European Union and the EU's Eastern European partners. Euronest strengthens and develops the Eastern Partnership; it is responsible for parliamentary consultation, supervision and monitoring. The Euronest Parliamentary Assembly consists of a Delegation of The the European Parliament and delegations from the EU's Eastern European Partners – countries that participate in the Eastern Partnership initiative: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The European Parliament has 60 delegates, and the Eastern Partners have 10 each. For the time being, Belarus does not take part in the Assembly's activities for political reasons. However, as the two components of the Assembly have agreed, Belarus's members

will be welcomed once the country has fulfilled the political requirements in the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly's Constituent Act. Delegation of The National Assembly of Armenia consist of 9 members, from which 6 members are from faction "My Step", 2 members from faction "Prosperious Armenia". The head of the delegation is Viktor Yengibaryan from faction "My Step".

Another important inter-parliamentary body that Armenia is a member of is the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (PA OSCE). The Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE (OSCE PA) is an institution of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, an organization that seeks to preserve peace and security in Europe. Its roots go back to the 1975, when the West and the Soviet block decided to establish a platform for a dialogue on issues of peace and security, and signed the famous Helsinki Final ACT, creating the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which was transformed into OSCE after the end of the Cold War.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly was originally established by the 1990 Paris Summit to promote greater involvement in the OSCE by national parliaments of the participating States. By passing resolutions and issuing formal recommendations to the OSCE's governmental side and to parliaments, it aims to pursue the implementation of OSCE objectives by participating States, including through legislative action. The importance of this inter-parliamentary format for Armenia is especially high since OSCE, or more precisely the OSCE Minsk Group, is handling the negotiations process in the Karabakh conflict. Delegation of The National Assembly of Armenia consists of 6 members, of which 4 members are from faction "My Step", 1 member



## ARMENIAN NA HAS INTER-PARLIAMENTARY AGREEMENTS OF COOPERATION WITH THE PARLIAMENTS OF GEORGIA, KYRGYZSTAN, ARTSAKH, FRANCE, LEBANON, SYRIA, EGYPT AND RUSSIA



Meeting of the  
Armenia-Slovakia  
friendship group



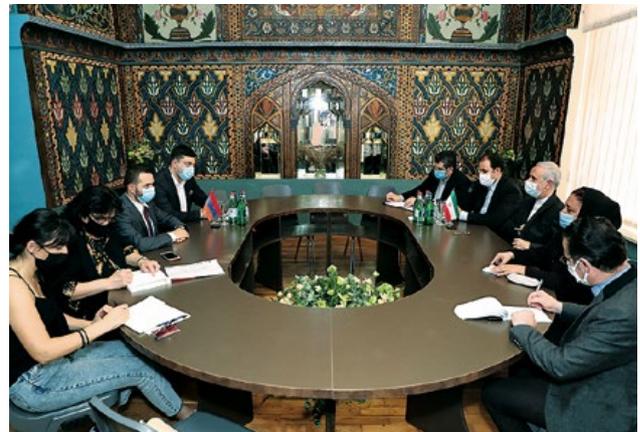
Head of Armenia-Iran friendship group Mkhitar Hayrapetyan with a delegation from Iran in Yerevan

from faction “Prosperous Armenia”, 1 from faction “Bright Armenia. The head of the delegation is Hayk Konjoryan from the faction “My Step”.

#### PARLIAMENTS CAN BE FRIENDS: BILATERAL PARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY

So far we told the reader about the multilateral inter-parliamentary formats that Armenia is a member of. However, bilateral contacts are no less an important part of parliamentary diplomacy. One of the forms of such contacts is represented by inter-parliamentary agreements, which are concluded between two friendly countries. Thus, Armenian National Assembly has inter-parliamentary agreements of cooperation with the parliaments of Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Artsakh, France, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation.

Another high-profile mode of bilateral cooperation is the establishment of inter-parliamentary committees. Establishment of such committees reflects an extremely high level of parliamentary cooperation, so it is no surprise that Armenian National Assembly has only four such committees. These include Interparliamentary Committee on Cooperation between the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia and Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, Interparliamentary Committee on Cooperation between the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia and National Assembly of the Artsakh Republic, Interparliamentary Committee on Cooperation between the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia and National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus, Interparliamentary Committee on Cooperation between the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia and the House of Representatives of the Republic of Cyprus.



A more common and somewhat less formal way of cooperation between parliaments is the establishment of friendship groups. Currently, Armenian parliament has friendship groups established with parliaments of 64 countries from all parts of the world. Obviously, the majority of these include regions that have close links with Armenia, particularly Europe, Central Eurasia and the Middle East. However, there are also friendship groups with the parliaments of the countries of Africa, North and South America, South-East Asia, and so on. Friendship groups have various important functions: from being a channel of political dialogue on foreign policy issues, to exchange of best practices in law-making and facilitation of business contacts. The toolbox of parliamentary diplomacy would have been extremely poor without the existence of the friendship groups. ♦

# PRESENTABLE PROTOCOL

The world changes all the time, while traditions are stable going on through centuries. The traditions shaped in any state are reflected at best in the official protocol of that state. While putting the bag of the monarch of Britain on the right or on the left chair can play a decisive role during a meeting, the official delegations visiting Armenia are also met according to a certain protocol. The Head of the National Assembly's Protocol Department Artak Hovhannisyan, who has come a long way during his more than twenty years of service [in the Protocol], to shed light for the first time on some nuances of his delicate job.

TEXT : ELEN BABALYAN / PHOTO : ARAKS KOCHARYAN

## MOTORCYCLES FOR SARKOZY AND PUTIN

Let us begin with the well-known facts, therefore – with conservative England. Barack Obama's former Chief of Protocol C. P. Marshall revealed one of the secrets of the British monarch's bag. During a meeting in the Buckingham Palace she tried to take the Queen's bag away, but the security officers unexpectedly forbade to do so: "Nobody has the right even to touch the Queen's bag."

The surprised American would know later that the Queen's bag and its position have a quite important meaning: if it's above the wrist, then the meeting was successful. If Elizabeth II puts the bag down, the subjects understand that it's the time to end up the meeting and that the Queen does not enjoy the talk. The Head of the National Assembly Protocol Department Artak Hovhanni-

syan knows everything about the Armenian protocol traditions. Though at the beginning of the talk he, contrary to my assumptions, stated that the official protocol is free of manifestations of "Armenian specificities", however, as it turns out, there are certain nuances here as well.

While the 1990s, the Protocol Division of the National Assembly of the newly independent republic had merely 3 or 4 employees, it currently employs more than 20. Armenia as a state had grown in importance and the number of official visits has increased. The main protocol points on how to receive and what kind of visits are to offer to presidents, ambassadors, official delegations more or less uniform throughout the world and the mission of the knights of the protocol is to maintain that order. Admittedly there can be

some peculiar cases, like for instance the Ambassador of our neighboring Georgia. He showed up at the ceremony of handing his credentials dressed in the Georgian national costume decorated with gazys (pockets for bullets) and a dagger. However, the world's fashion in protocol is currently minimalism: the least possible flamboyance or luxury and most possible respectful attitude. And, yes, we already seldom meet guests accompanied with a cortege of motorcycles. By the way, the last state officials, who were accompanied with such a cortege from Zvartnots Airport to the Government's Home of Official Receptions, were President of France Nicolas Sarkozy and the Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin. Things like motorcycle corteges have gradually turned into forgotten traditions.



^  
Baroness Caroline  
Cox at the Genocide  
Memorial, Yerevan



➤ The Head of the National Assembly's Protocol Department Artak Hovhannisyanyan

**T**HE HEAD OF THE PROTOCOL DEPARTMENT NOTES THAT THEY ARE ESPECIALLY ATTENTIVE TO THE ARMENIAN FLAG, AS IN CASE IT IS RAISED UPSIDE DOWN ARMENIA BECOMES COLUMBIA



### **MOUNTED ESCORT FOR SHOW**

Artak Hovhannisyanyan, studying the nuances of the state traditions in the National Assembly since 2000, remembered his first encounters with high-ranking foreign officials: “The President of the French Senate Christian Poncelet was a legendary man, who passed through war with Charles de Gaulle, used to respect the law, order and strictly followed the established timetables. To work with such people is not only easy, but is also pleasant.” Hovhannisyanyan says that after the visit in Paris and seeing the French Cavalry Presidential escort, they came up with a plan of creating an Armenian Ayrudzi mounted unit. However ultimately the decision was made not to waste money from the state budget for show. The parliament protocol is restrained, modest and at the same

time highly respectful. “I say with full responsibility that in the whole state system of the Republic of Armenia the protocol is among the most well-established services. Here all of us know our job, duties and remits. As our country is in a vulnerable position in the diplomatic sense, in permanently exposed to precarious situations, it has never provoked awkward situations or created additional obstacles for negotiations which were already tough enough.”

### **PROTOCOL EMBARRASMENTS**

All of us witness hard negotiations and changing hierarchies in the world, but few of us notice its details. One of the protocol's classical failures is German Foreign Minister Steinmeier's official visit to Indonesia, when stepping off the airplane the first thing the high ranking official saw was the flag of the

Democratic Republic of Germany – extinct decades ago – raised instead of his own country's flag in the airport. In general, the national flag is a problematic topic, and the Armenian flag is no exception. The Head of the Protocol Department notes that they are especially attentive to the Armenian flag, as in case it is raised upside down Armenia becomes Columbia. In our country we must pay great attention to the sites of visits by the foreign guests. “It could happen that the program includes visits to Garni and Geghard, but just ten minutes before hitting the road a landslide in the village of Voghjaberd destroys a section of the road. We quickly pick another suitable destination and take the guests to Zvartnots or to other place.” In this field there are no textbooks, training courses or workshops,



These rules could have been written on the blackboard of the Protocol Department office.

1. During the official meetings the flags of both countries are installed in the background only in case, when the state officials are of equal status.
2. During the meeting of the Prime Minister and an Ambassador only the flag of the Prime Minister's country is installed.
3. Water must be served in glass bottles. Glass only.
4. At the meeting sparkling or cold cannot be put in front of the interpreter.

◀ Central American Parliament's delegation at the TUMO center

moreover, this profession demands politeness and courage of making unexpected decisions.

#### WHERE TO GO?

The visits with an average duration of three days besides the official meetings include some cultural element. Paying tribute to the Genocide victims in the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute, leaving a note in the Memory Book is a mandatory point in the protocol. "There were states that refused such visits there, for example, Iraq, Iran or China. The reasons could be different, either they did not want to create unnecessary tension with Turkey, or they have unsolved problem inside their country. In such cases, the Armenian side does not view such visits to Armenia as official resulting in their lower diplomatic status," Artak Hovhannisyan says.

Another mandatory point in the protocol is also the visit to the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin. The visits to other cultural places, like Matenadaran, Museums of Sarian, Charents, Komitas and Parajanov are arranged according to the national preferences of the delegation members. For example, we take a Georgian delegation to Parajanov Museum, guests from

Russia – to the Museum of Russian Art. We cannot go remote places, the farthest sites being Noravank and Khor Virap monasteries. In response to the question "Who has made up the list of places to go?" Artak shrugs his shoulders: "That is how it works."

#### FROM THE TRADITIONS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Speaking about the traditions of the parliament, Hovhannisyan mentioned about the creation of the alley with silver color fir-trees: "We have a good tradi-

tion: during a foreign parliament speakers first visit to Armenia we plant trees." Promenading in the section bearing the conventional name "the Speakers' Alley" we can make a distinct picture of the countries from different continents that have not disclosed Armenia. They are, by the way, many. However, it is better to mention those, which have brought their traditions to Armenia. For example, the Japanese delegation visiting Armenia liked it so much they even asked us to provide a small place



Only four holidays are of protocol character in Armenia.

1. Armenian Genocide Day – April 24
2. First Republic Day – May 28
3. Republic of Armenia's Independence Day – September 21
4. Victory and Peace Day – May 9

➤ Iranian parliament's delegation visits Matenadaran



in the Parliament Park for planting traditional Japanese cherry trees – sakuras. And now, every year in April, a special delegation comes to see their trees. Baroness Caroline Cox made another beautiful innovation as a sign of British friendship, planting English apple trees in the National Assembly Park.

#### ABOUT ARTSAKH REPUBLIC

The first thing that what the officials of the Protocol Department specify, are the members of the visiting delegation and the schedule. Accordingly, they begin to develop a visit program specifying those who in charge of meet the guests at the airport, those in charge of placing and organizing catering for them etc. “Previously inter-parliamentary committees were active, but since long no guests from Cyprus and Belarus have not appeared, they discontinued the format in Georgia, now we work only with the Committees of Russia and Artsakh. By the way, we always treated Artsakh as an equal, honoring the President with a flag, etc,” Artak Hovhannisyanyan has said and added that the protocol is created between the countries to put equals of sign. There are no more empires, big and small countries. Artsakh has also a full-fledged republic.

## THE FIRST THING THAT WHAT THE OFFICIALS OF THE PROTOCOL DEPARTMENT SPECIFY, ARE THE MEMBERS OF THE VISITING DELEGATION AND THE SCHEDULE

#### THERE IS WORK

At the beginning of the conversation with the protocol guru, I was amazed at his low voice. I had to concentrate to catch his words. At the end of the talk, I understood: it is a working custom, to speak in a low voice as a token of politeness. In response to the question “What professional other features are formed?” he said quite sincerely: “While watching the news I unwillingly fix on what side they put the folder or whether the flag pole is a good one or it was ignored or who reaches out their hand for a handshake or there was water during the meeting or have they had forgotten to put it on the table to or if there was tea, coffee and chocolate available at the meeting.” Speaking of the chocolate, there was time, when the meetings at the National Assembly were “sugar-coated” with chocolate produced in Armenian.

The question “where is the chocolate?” had a very unexpected answer. It turned out that drinks (with the exception of water) or snacks require waiters to serve them, and it has already been one year and a half that the National Assembly needs a waiter: “We look for a waiter all the time, but we cannot find one. The salary is low, and there is no tip for understandable reasons. Meanwhile tea, coffee or chocolate can’t be served without asking the guest’s wish.” At the end of the talk the Head of the National Assembly Protocol Department approached the window and had a look at the flag on top of the National Assembly house flying in the wind. There I change my previous intention to ask him about his attitude to the proposal of changing the current national symbols like the flag, coat of arms and the hymn. ♦

# NA DURING PANDEMIC

Covid-19 was confirmed to have reached Armenia on 1 March 2020 when its first case was reported. It has spread to all of the regions of Armenia and has caused 4,400 deaths since. Lockdown was announced in mid-March. National Assembly kept working with special measures – wearing masks, social distancing, disinfection. This is how it looked.

PHOTO : ARAKS KOCHARYAN



> Disinfection process in the NA offices



^ MPs wearing masks during parliament sessions

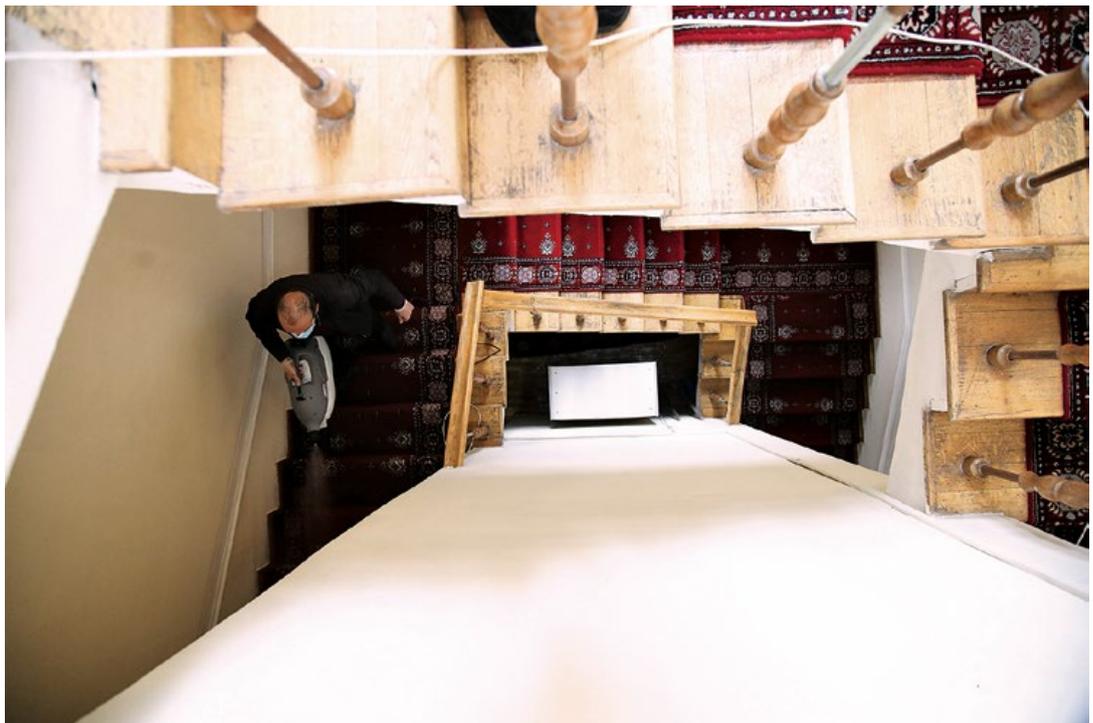


^ Wearing masks in public spaces was mandatory in Armenia until June 2021





> Mass vaccination started in Armenia on April 13



< In May 2021 over 100 MP's were vaccinated with AstraZeneca or Sputnik V

# SUPREME COUNCIL

The staff of a top important state institution, the National Assembly – formerly known as the Supreme Council (or Soviet) of People’s Deputies of the Armenian SSR – has always been a coveted job. It is utterly difficult to get a job at the National Assembly staff, and it is even more difficult to make a decision to leave it. The staff members’ individual employment records are a vivid illustration to the point. There are at least 80 people in the legislative body who have devoted 20 or more years of their professional life to this institution. Hence, we decided to select those who have a record of at least 30 years and introduce them to you.

TEXT : OVSANNA MNATSAKANYAN / PHOTO : ARAKS KOCHARYAN



This year is remarkable for **Gayane Grigoryan**. On May 6 was the 30th anniversary of her career at the National Assembly. Gayane was a Karabakh movement activist from the Mergelyan Institute and she worked initially as bibliographer in the Supreme Council. Afterwards she worked as an editor in the publishing division. She was involved in publishing a number of books, booklets and info brochures on the National Assembly.

She feels at home in the parliament. “The National Assembly is so homey, that leaving here would be like abandoning your own home,” Gayane says. She is currently a senior expert in the information department; her professional duties include an important matter which is monitoring.

Although the Secretariat's Russian translator **Georgi Hlghatyan** has started his career at the National Assembly since 1991, he has been familiar with this building since much earlier. He had been working in the Central Committee of the Armenian Communist Party, which was housed in the building now the National Assembly occupies. Currently he is engaged in translating laws.



**The Ordoyan Couple** are liked by everyone in the National Assembly. Every morning the family of 51 years walk to work hand in hand and have a fixed point of meeting after the work – “Arch of the National Assembly chairperson”. The first to receive a job offer from the parliament staff back in 1987 was the wife, Karine Ordoyan. Several years later her husband Sahak joined her. A year after that the Karabakh war started and Sahak Ordoyan was mobilized to the army. He returned to the National Assembly 11 years after that. Tikin Karine from the website maintenance division and facilities manager Paron Sahak never quarrel. Asked if it is not hard for spouses to work at the same place, Sahak Ordoyan says they almost never see each other during the work time and adds jokingly: “the building is so huge that some MPs or staff members keep losing their way in it.”

**Marusya Asatryan**, or Tikin Maro, as they call her, was 33 when she started working at the Supreme Council's staff and it is almost that many years – 31 in fact – that she has been working there now. Starting from a humble stenographer, she kept climbing up to all the successive positions and now she is a head of department. Currently she is the person in charge of recounting the history of the National Assembly to the visitors. She knows every single detail about the institution she has been working at. “Previously I had been working at the department on state secrets in the press where I censored the Supreme Council newsletter. I was frequently having phone conversations with the chairman of the Supreme Council's division on publicizing laws. Once he invited me to his office at the Supreme Council and assigned a number of tasks to test my professional qualities. After some time I got a job offer to work at the Supreme Council as a stenographer. Several years later I moved to the newly created library there, later becoming its head and stayed at that position for 7 years. After that, when new departments were created, I became the head of the Information Department.” To the question “what has kept you working here in the National Assembly” she answered without a slightest hesitation – the workplace is a second family to her. Whenever she hears a negative opinion on the National Assembly, she gets offended, she says, as if the offence has been meant to her.





**Tatul Soghmonyan** started his career at the National Assembly (back then called the Supreme Council) staff in 1990. Since 1996 he has been the chief of the largest department, Secretariat. During his service he was awarded a number of certificates of merit, gratitude letters and medals. It is noteworthy that his department of the National Assembly enjoys the privilege of having a staff with the longest career records. People there have an intimate knowledge of the secret of it: he keeps his team out of any kind of stuff cuts. Tatul Soghmonyan has a reputation of being the single person who can cite from memory literally any clause from the constitutional law on National Assembly procedure rules. Human relationship is the cornerstone of any job for Soghmonyan.

The most experienced employee in the Secretariat and the National Assembly staff in general is **Eleonora Grigoryan**, the head of the Shorthand Division. The fame of the 18-year-old super-swift stenographer once had reached from her Hayastan publishing house up to the Presidency of the Armenian SSR Supreme Soviet. The job she got from there initially did not make her particularly happy. “The Supreme Soviet was like a retirement home to me, where I – a young pretty girl back then – had little to do.” Yet the family council discussed the offer and made a clear decision – she would work there. After a short time she became the only stenographer of the Supreme Council chairpersons’ speeches.

No constitution or important law was adopted in Armenia without Tikin (Ms.) Eleonora having done her bit. She recalls occasional conflicts with some of her superiors during the long 51 years of her work experience: “I would say on such occasions: ‘I’ll stay to see you leave your job’.”



**Astghik Antonyan** started working at the National Assembly as a stenographer of sessions and she has been working in that position for 31 years now. She is renowned as a big fan of indoor plants. Plants growing in pots occupy a big part of her office. She knows every secret of growing them and she helps her colleagues with tips and advices. Apart from that she is known as a fan of recital. She does not miss any opportunity to perform on stage reciting some of the poems written by herself. She made it a habit to congratulate her friends’ and family members’ birthdays with short poems by herself.





**Seda Kupelyan** has worked in the National Assembly staff since 1986, starting with the Armenian SSR Supreme Soviet presidency, later in the Supreme Council and ultimately in the National Assembly. She had been a senior editor at the publishing division. Initially she was editing the newsletter published twice a month as well as minutes of sessions for internal use.

She recalls how difficult it was typing minutes of a whole session. “Even if you made a single mistake on the page, you needed to retype the whole page. It was even hard to get the whole thing published. We were distributing it to all publishing houses in Yerevan in order to be in time, then collected them one by one and grouped them together.”

Currently Seda Kupelyan is the head of the Records Department. She likes her job which implies being in the center of political events.



In 1992 a team of young enthusiastic specialists in radio physics – **Sasun Petrosyan, Garnik Khachikyan** and others – decided to change the old-fashioned vote counting system in the National Assembly. They came up with a proposal and ultimately succeeded in getting it approved. Ever since the Armenian parliament has shifted to the electronic system of voting, which was a great novelty back then. The system has been working smoothly, however as any other one, it needs maintenance. Therefore it was suggested to the team to stay and continue working. Sasun was appointed as head of the working group, later the head of the relevant department and it has been continuing for the third decade. After setting up the electronic voting system in the parliament of Armenia a similar one was set up for the parliament of Artsakh.

Sasun’s joining the National Assembly staff was fortunate to him. After several years in the National Assembly he met then a young university graduate Lusine, fell in love with her and married, having two children. Till now he is still with both Lusine and the National Assembly. The latter is like the mother of your children, whom you cannot offend and leave, he says.

# PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY CENTER

## At the National Assembly

Within the framework of the reforms envisaged by the UNDP's "Modern Parliament for a Modern Armenia" project, a Parliamentary Democracy Center will be established at the National Assembly of RA with the funding of the governments of Sweden and the United Kingdom, and the development of its concept is entrusted to the UNDP "Modern Parliament for a Modern Armenia" project.

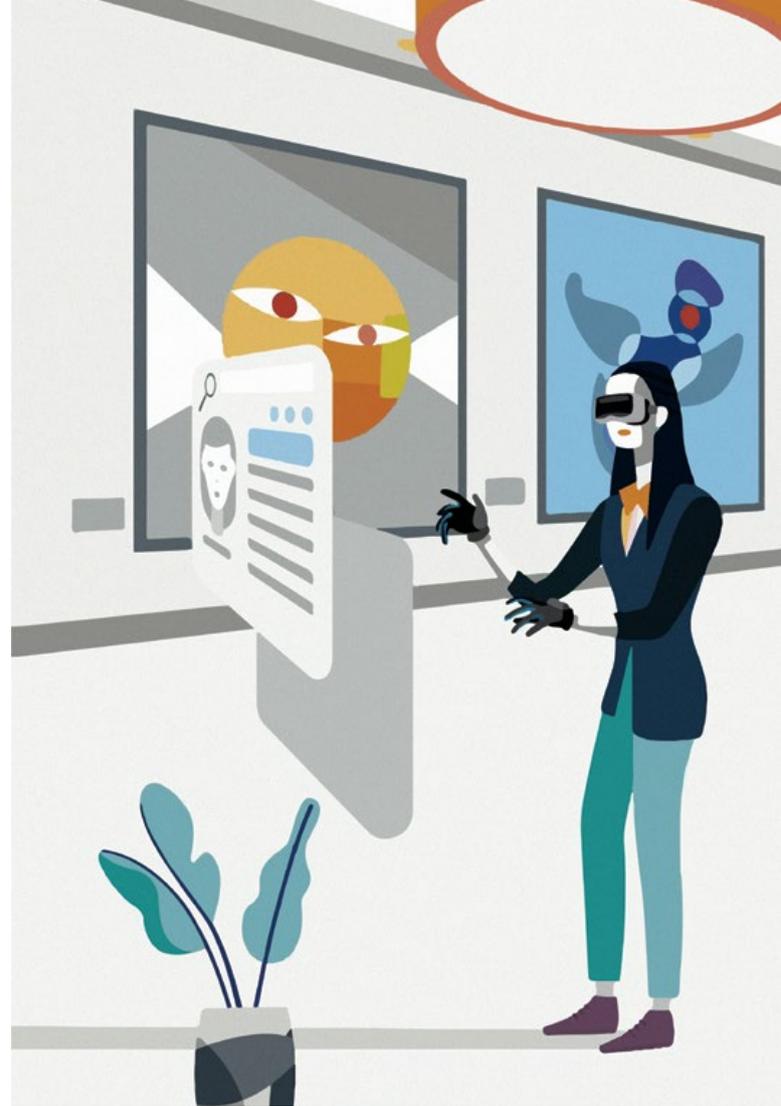
TEXT : HASMIK BARKHUDARYAN

### FUTURE OUTREACH DEPARTMENT

To have a better idea about the future center, we visited the National Assembly and went to see the place which is planned for the construction of the center. David Karapetyan, the adviser to the NA speaker, accompanied us to the basement of the NA building, which actually looks like a museum, or, at least, a storehouse of exhibits. It turns out, starting still from the Soviet times, none of the old things in the NA building has been thrown away; old radio sets, computers, and even framed photographs of the former governors are still there. With its П-shaped architectural design, this area is especially convenient for the exhibition model.

For decades, this basement has partially served for technical purposes, and partially has been used for collecting such an archive. For decades, the archive hasn't been given much importance, and it's only in recent years that the idea of reforming the area and giving it a new function has been conceived. The main goal of the center is not only to present the history of the Armenian parliamentary democracy, but also to eliminate the notable disconnect between the parliament and the citizens.

"Although the project is still in its initial stage, the operational plan which will guide us in establishing the center is already on the table. As an end-result of consultations with histori-



ans, specialists in culture, political scientists, and relevant specialists from different state institutes, archives, museums and libraries, we will make the list of the selected exhibits, including the photo and video content, which will be presented in the center and reflect the mission and vision of this new body," says Armen Yesayants.

In the exhibition area of the center, artifacts, documents, video and photo materials will be displayed through which the visitor will get introduced to the cornerstone stages of the history of Armenia, especially the modern period. The main goal is to present the whole history of the establishment of the parliament to the visitors of different age groups. They will be guided along the historical way of Armenian political mind, with the focus being on the development and establishment of democracy in Armenia. Temporary exhibitions and cooperation with local and international organizations, as well as individuals, will make the center's activities more dynamic.

"That being said, we don't want this center to become just a place for displaying the exhibits and documents, as people today prefer more active participation; we envisage to apply both combined and virtual reality and interactive technologies. By the way, the new center will also emphasize inclusion; this center will be a unique place for education and



information. It will also be an important scientific platform for students, pupils and teachers specializing in relevant areas, as well as for historians, politicians and culturology specialists,” says Armen Yesayants.

This center will be a special place for the visitors as this historical building designed by Mark Grigoryan, which is itself a unique architectural monument, will become a more spectacular place with its added historical content.

According to Armen Yesayants, the history of the mind of Armenian parliamentary democracy is worth being presented separately, as, unfortunately, the knowledge of even the RA citizens about modern history is often superficial. Despite the short period of Independence, the Armenian political mind developed much earlier. Moreover, the Armenian Legislative body stood out with its progressive and democratic views even during the years of the First Republic, about which few people know, and this is just one piece of the information that will be available at the future center.

#### **PARLIAMENTARY EDUCATION DEPARTMENT IN THE NA**

Within the framework of the UNDP “Modern Parliament for a Modern Armenia” project, the parliamentary education program is envisaged which is logically connected with the

idea of the center. Adviser to the RA NA Speaker, coordinator of works with international donors Vahan Kostanyan in his conversation with Regional Post said that within the framework of the parliamentary democracy center, while studying the new standards of general education, they’ve come up with an idea of developing a new program according to which citizens of different age groups will have the opportunity to be taught on the role of the parliament and the constitution in the society.

Vahan Kostanyan studied international experience and is confident that it’s quite possible to harmonize the general and parliamentary educational programs. The initial version of this program is ready. The curriculum is designed for several age groups, with the focus being on the 10-11 graders, who study these very topics during their social science subject.

For now, the pilot version of the program is considered for the high-school students. If successful, the program will be expanded. Both the trained employees of the NA and the deputies themselves will speak about the parliament, the RA Constitution and other related topics. Other non-formal methods of education, interactive components such as quests, questions and answers, etc., will be used. ♦

# RESEARCH AND TRAINING CENTER

The National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia has a new Center called Research and Training. It was initiated within the scope of a UNDP project called “Modern Parliament for a Modern Armenia” and is funded by the UK and Swedish governments. Regional Post talked to Head of the Republic of Armenia National Assembly’s Expertise and Analytical Department Garnik Atanesyan and Adviser to the National Assembly Speaker David Karapetyan.

TEXT : HASMIK BARKHUDARYAN / PHOTO : ARAKS KOCHARYAN





### WHATS AND WHYS OF THE CENTER

The Republic of Armenia National Assembly's Expertise and Analytical Department – as suggested by the name – is a subdivision of the National Assembly staff, employees of which are considered as public servants and their remuneration is made in accordance with the general guidelines stipulated by the Law on Remuneration of Persons Holding Public Offices. However the vibe here is a bit different.

The Expertise and Analytical Department is like in a parallel reality amid the neoclassical and somewhat old-fashioned interior design of the National Assembly premises. The luminous space marked by glass walls and modern furniture stands out from everything else inside the building. The Department consists of four divisions, namely the Division of State and Legal Expertise, Financial

and Economic Expertise Division, Social, Educational, Healthcare Expertise Division and Legislative Monitoring and Information Division. While the first three ones are engaged in expertise the fourth deals with monitoring the laws adopted during the last three years and providing information on the social impact of those laws. Any legislative initiative coming into the National Assembly, regardless of its provenance is checked meticulously by legal experts who ultimately give an exhaustive answer on its constitutionality and conformity with the existing legislation. This job is not an easy one and apart from a well-structured general knowledge and solid awareness of the laws requires a good deal of concentration. One needs to be extremely attentive to avoid giving the green light to such laws which could potentially contain mutually contradicting provisions. ➤

**T**HE EXPERTISE AND ANALYTICAL DEPARTMENT IS **LIKE IN A PARALLEL REALITY** AMID THE NEOCLASSICAL AND SOMEWHAT OLD-FASHIONED INTERIOR DESIGN OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PREMISES

Garnik Atanesyan notes that the Research and Training Center came into a structural reorganization and a status readjustment of his department. The main goal of the newly created body is to offer better research and expertise services to the National Assembly and have a greater involvement in the training of the MPs and the staff members. The center according to Atanesyan should be a good partner to each and every MP who can find their answers to their questions within the shortest possible time. As a result of the creation of the center other divisions are being reorganized, merged or expanded.

Adviser to the National Assembly Speaker David Karapetyan notes that the activities of the center will be coordinated with the research units of the government ministries which will be helpful for making even deeper research and analysis and making more informed decisions.

The center's training division will enable both the staff and MPs to attend different courses on different topics.

#### STAFF AND EFFICIENCY

Involvement of quality experts is of key importance for the center to produce serious research. "It is no secret that serious research can be produced by serious researchers. However, involving serious specialists under the present rates of remuneration is not realistic. Thanks to the successful cooperation with the UNDP the center is embarked on a successful implementation of its projects," says Garnik Atanesyan.

In terms of recruitment, the department has started involving promising specialists from high school or brilliant master's students to join the team as junior experts. The center is also striking cooperation deals with leading regional universities. Atanesyan says they will try not to leave





**A**CCORDING TO GARNIK ATANESYAN **THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS THAT THEY HAVE A VISION AND BELIEF IN IT AS WELL AS GOOD MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING WITH INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

a good student looking for a job; they will recruit them as soon as they appear in the job market. In case of new jobs opening in the center – especially of senior positions – priority will be given to its own junior staff. For the moment the department has 34 employees, 12 more positions are still vacant while the center, if functioning in its full capacity, will employ 70 people, some of whom will be busy with research and expertise while others will be engaged in training. The center needs professionals in multiple disciplines, including lawyers, finance experts, sociologists etc. Albeit the number of the staff is still limited, while there is a vast amount of work for them to do, the department finds time on top

of everything else to do research on such topics as criminalizing spreading false news, pros and cons of majority and proportional voting systems and be honored with a well-deserved praise for the job done. Atanesyan is happy with the staff and mentions with pride that the youngest team member is 21 years old while the senior one is 66 years old. According to him they got a perfect blend of youth and experience, which contributes to the efficiency of the work done. According to Garnik Atanesyan the most important thing is that they have a vision and belief in it as well as good mutual understanding with international organizations. ♦

# “MODERN PARLIAMENT FOR A MODERN ARMENIA”

What is the National Assembly as a structure? Is the full potential of the structure being used? And aren't we, as a parliamentary country, obligated to strengthen this structure? These questions made the RA National Assembly staff search for new ways of development. About the new projects of NA development Regional Post talked to UN Development Program (UNDP) Resident Representative a. i. in Armenia, Mihaela Stojkoska, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to Armenia, John Gallagher, and the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Sweden to Armenia, Patrik Svensson, as well as to David Karapet'yan, adviser to RA NA Speaker.

TEXT : HASMIK BARKHUDARYAN

UNDP “Modern Parliament for a Modern Armenia” project is called to strengthen the National Assembly so the latter can carry out its key functions of law-making, oversight and representation in its new and thoroughly expanded role in the public administration. UNDP is one of the world's leading organizations of parliamentary development which supports over 60 assemblies in strengthening the recognized principles of parliamentary development and making parliaments more participatory, transparent and accountable to public.

The program with a four-year time frame, has launched in 2019, and it has already implemented a number of stages. It is funded by the governments of Sweden and the United Kingdom. Some of the project activities are carried out in cooperation with the OXYGen Foundation, International Center for Human Development, and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

This program is part of the Swedish government's support for the democratic reform process in Armenia, which is in line with Sweden's reform strategy with Eastern Europe. “Our aim is to support the RA National Assembly in its efforts to enhance capacities of the Armenian legislature, oversight and representation. We believe that well-functioning democratic parliaments are prerequisites for democratic governance, as well as for sustainable development and poverty eradication. I would also like to emphasize the excellent relationship between our two parliaments on several levels,” says Ambassador Patrik Svensson.

The next partner of the project – the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, supports such initiatives as it is committed to promoting strong,

modernized and inclusive democracy. “In Armenia, as in the United Kingdom, the parliament is the institutional backbone of democracy. With support of the UK's Good Governance Fund, we are providing responsive and flexible technical reforms in legislative work essential for effective parliamentary democracy in Armenia. This project aims to strengthen the National Assembly in its enhanced role, which includes oversight of the government. This responds to the NA desire to be more technology-driven, more efficient, transparent, accountable, and enables the MPs and staff to take the advantage of modern governance tools and mechanisms,” notes Ambassador John Gallagher.

UNDP Resident Representative a.i. Mihaela Stojkoska notes that the long-term project aims to improve the overall effectiveness of the parliament as a policy making body and was designed to support the National Assembly in using modern governance tools and mechanisms which will contribute to the improvement of the quality and transparency, as well as inclusiveness of parliamentary operations, and enhance the capacity of the parliament to develop gender-responsive policies. The pandemic confirmed the need for resilient decisions, cost-effectiveness and transparency of expenditure to ensure the constructive role of the parliament for the Republic of Armenia.

## ABOUT THE OBJECTIVES AND COMPLETED WORK

As mentioned, the aim of the program is to strengthen the legislative, oversight and representative functions of the National Assembly as the primary and central governing body of the country. Mihaela Stojkoska notes, that the “Modern Parliament for a Modern Armenia” project is called to create new opportunities for citizens within the framework of digiti-



UNDP Resident Representative a.i. in Armenia Mihaela Stojkoska



Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to Armenia John Gallagher



Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Sweden to Armenia Patrik Svensson



Adviser to RA NA Speaker David Karapetyan

zation of the National Assembly. The initiative involves development of the e-Parliament and the Research and Training Center, as well as the Center for Parliamentary Democracy which comprises three units: Public Engagement, Parliamentary Education and Outreach and Information.

To date, the “Modern Parliament for a Modern Armenia” project has achieved a number of positive results, such as the technical assistance to numerous legislative changes. An example of such accomplishment is the amendment to the Labor Law, according to which the concept of “paternity leave” was introduced for the first time in the history of Armenia.

Through the joint efforts of the Office of the Human Rights Defender of Armenia, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, and the Standing Committee on Health and Social Affairs of the National Assembly, amendments have been made on insurance premiums in the Law on “Compensation for Damages Caused to Life or Health of the Servicemen During the Defense of the Republic of Armenia”, also the disability assessment process in the Law on “the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” has been changed.

#### ABOUT THE CHALLENGES

Speaking about the challenges facing the project, UK Ambassador to Armenia John Gallagher noted that the path to parliamentary democracy and democratic reforms is not always easy and smooth, and the period following the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, as well as the Covid-19 pandemic, has been especially hard for Armenia. Improving the capacity of the National Assembly to be able to function in crisis situations like this is a test for the strength and stability of the democratic system. Ambassador of Sweden to Armenia Patrik Svensson, in his turn, believes that despite all the recent difficulties, the National Assembly of Armenia was one of the unique parliaments in the region which continued to operate fully during the pandemic restrictions. These challenges affect everyone, but the project indicated that it is

flexible, responds quickly to situations, and is in line with the needs of the National Assembly.

#### E-PARLIAMENT

The “Modern Parliament for a Modern Armenia” project aims to digitize the most important functions of the National Assembly. “As part of the digital transformation of the National Assembly, the e-Parliament system will comprise a document management system and e-voting in the National Assembly, as well as integration and interoperability with internal and external digital management tools and systems. A fully realized e-Parliament is important for securing more efficiency, transparency and accountability. This, in its turn, facilitates greater involvement of citizens in the decision-making processes of the government. Digitizing the plenary and committee sessions is a challenge, but one that results in deputies’ work being in line with the operational design and implementation of the 21st century parliaments,” notes Mihaela Stojkoska and adds that UNDP recognizes that the design and development of any comprehensive parliamentary assistance project is a long-term process with results realized over time. The “Modern Parliament for a Modern Armenia” project today involves all the structures of the National Assembly, especially the IT Unit and NA Secretariat. David Karapetyan, adviser to the NA Speaker, emphasizes the importance of creating a new NA website within the framework of the program. “On the website, we will emphasize the main functions of the National Assembly: the oversight function, within the framework of which we will show how the NA oversees the work of the government; the parliamentary diplomacy, which is a really serious work; and the legislative function, within which it can show how the laws are drafted and how the whole legislative mechanism works.” The program will ensure that the lessons learned from other parliaments are reflected in the activities of the program and the final results of the program are introduced in the functions of the National Assembly as a structure entrusted by the people. ♦

# TRAGEDY OF OCTOBER 27

On 27 October 1999, at around 5:15 p.m., five men led by journalist and former Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) member Nairi Hunançan, armed with Kalashnikov AK-47 rifles, broke into the National Assembly building, while the government was holding a question-and-answer session. They shot dead eight people, including Prime Minister Vazgen Sargsyan and Parliament Speaker Karen Demirçyan, whose coalition had won a majority in a parliamentary election held in May of that year.

PHOTO : ARMENPRESS



The terrorists claimed they were carrying out a coup d'état, describing their act as "patriotic" and "needed for the nation to regain its senses," said they wanted to "punish the authorities for what they do to the nation" and described the government as profiteers "drinking the blood of the people"



← Emergency cars arriving to the National Assembly



Hundreds of policemen and military personnel were brought into Yerevan, surrounding the National Assembly building





Terrorists murdered eight people:  
Vazgen Sargsyan, Prime Minister  
Karen Demirchyan, National  
Assembly Speaker  
Yuri Bakhshyan, Deputy National  
Assembly Speaker  
Ruben Miroyan, Deputy National  
Assembly Speaker  
Leonard Petrosyan, Minister of  
Urgent Affairs  
Henrik Abrahamyan, Member of  
Parliament  
Armenak Armenakyan, Member of  
Parliament  
Mikayel Kotanyan, Member of  
Parliament





The five main perpetrators of the shooting (Nairi Hunanyan, his younger brother Karen Hunanyan, their uncle Vram Galstyan, Derenik Ejanyan and Eduard Grigoryan) were sentenced to life in prison on 2 December 2003



The state funeral ceremony for the victims of the parliament shooting took place from 30 October to 31 October 1999, starting in the Liberty Square, near the Opera House



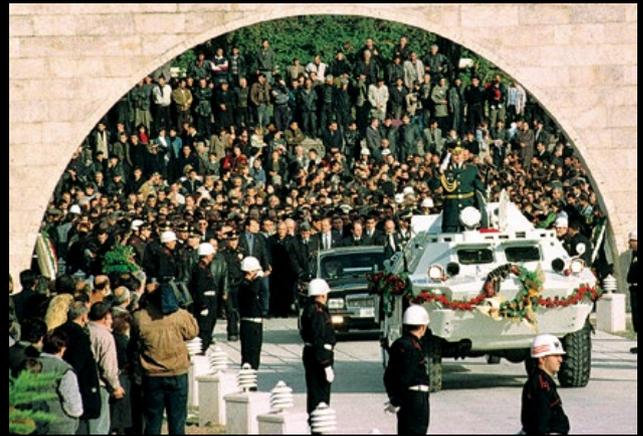


➤ President of Armenia Robert Kocharyan and Prime Minister of Russia Vladimir Putin at the funeral of the victims of the attack





Funeral procession passing through the Mashtots Avenue in the center of Yerevan

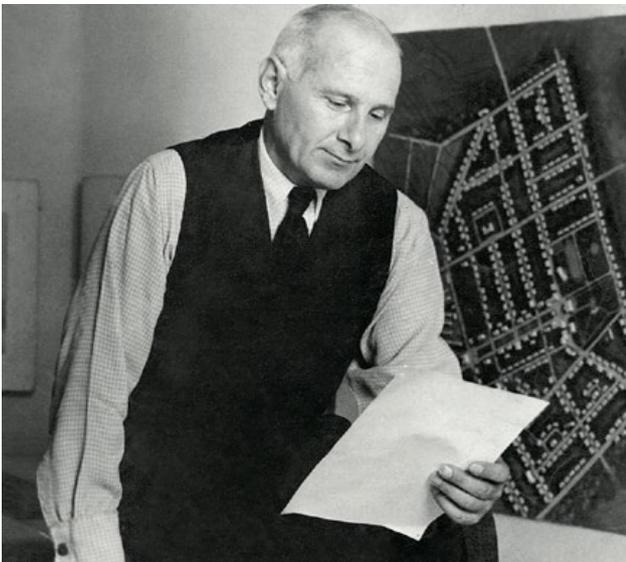




# THE VINEYARD ON THE HILL

During the last century, both Soviet Armenia and later the newly established Republic of Armenia went through many hardships whose witness and direct participant became the building built in the place of a vineyard on a hill far from the city center, which we all know today as the National Assembly building of Armenia. Journalist Mark Grigoryan, the grandson of the author of the building and the former chief architect of Yerevan, Mark Grigoryan, sat down with YEREVAN to speak about the past and current history of the building.

TEXT : MARGARIT MIRZOYAN / PHOTO : ARMENPRESS, MARK GRIGORYAN'S FAMILY ARCHIVE



< Mark Grigoryan

## FAR FROM THE REPUBLIC SQUARE

One summer day in 1947, Yerevan's chief architect at the time Mark Grigoryan received a phone call. CPCC Secretary Grigory Arutinov's assistant was on the other end of the line. He told Mark Grigoryan that the governor was inviting him to a walk.

As they were walking, they bypassed the summer houses and approached a bare hill with a vineyard on one side. Arutinov had envisioned the future building of the Central Committee of the Communist Party erected on the place of the vineyard and told Grigoryan about his idea. The architect was surprised. First, in the place of today's Baghramyan avenue there was just a narrow street then with summer houses on both sides; second, it was far from the city center; and

finally, the Republic square was not even seen from that point. How was it possible to govern the whole republic from that part? But Arutinov wanted to prove that the Communist Party could govern the country from any point.

Mark Grigoryan started designing the building. In just three years, the building was erected and the staff of the Central Committee moved in. >

**F**IRST, IN THE PLACE OF TODAY'S BAGHRAMYAN AVENUE THERE WAS **JUST A NARROW STREET** THEN WITH SUMMER HOUSES ON BOTH SIDES; SECOND, IT WAS FAR FROM THE CITY CENTER

▼  
Mark Grigoryan's sketches  
of the future building



### THE CHARM OF LIGHT COLOR

The National Assembly building is the embodiment of the best solutions of classical architecture of those years reminding of the architecture and style of the Italian Renaissance period.

"This building has the charm of the light color stone, and though Yerevan is called rose city, it can be successfully called also a terracotta city," says Mark Grigoryan Jr., "Just imagine the extent of skillfulness of the architect to have created a monumental building in traditional Greek style which is entirely Armenian. It's beyond doubt for everyone that the building is national. This is the mastery."

Years later, the National Assembly building got renovated. Decades after its construction, they found that the building no longer met the growing bureaucratic requirements, and in the early 80s reconstruction was initiated by Karen Demirchyan; the session hall and the canteen were added, the number of offices was increased, and a separate entrance was created

to lead to the first secretary's office. The reconstruction was completed in 1985.

Three years later, in 1988, Sumgait massacres, and the first Artsakh war started. "This building has gone through several critical events, periods and social cataclysms," Mark Grigoryan recalls, "Every black cloud passing over the country has definitely poured down on the roof of this building."

The already weakened Central Committee continued to operate in the building, while the seat of the Supreme Council became Baghramyan 26.

### FROM CC TO NA

When a decision was made to reduce the influence of the Central Committee, a question had risen as to what to do with the building which had all the facilities for the activities of the Supreme Council. However, the Communist Party was not willing to give up its seat, and the Supreme Council was offered to occupy another



◀  
NA's building was built on the place of the old vineyard on the hill



#### MARK GRIGORYAN (1900-1978)

Mark Grigoryan was born in New Nakhichevan, Russian Empire. In 1928 he graduated from the Department of Architecture of Yerevan State University. In 1937-1951 he was the chief architect of Yerevan, in 1951-1978 he was the director of the Hayardnakhagits Institute. In 1951 he supervised the design of the general plan of Yerevan, made the general plan of Hrazdan city for 1961-1963. Besides the building of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, among other significant works are the building of the Hotel Armenia on Republic Square (co-author: E. Sarapyan), the Union Building, the Matenadaran building, the Presidential residence (26 Baghramyan), the Margaryan maternity hospital, and the Actors' residential building on Mashtots Avenue.

building – the current building of the American University (which, by the way, is also designed by Mark Grigoryan). The Supreme Council moved to the building of the Central Committee (CC), where, a few years later, it was renamed National Assembly.

During the following years, the building witnessed tragic events again: in 1996, a group of citizens dissatisfied with the presidential elections broke into the building; on October 27, 1999 – one of the most painful days in the modern history of Armenia – a group of gunmen assassinated several high-ranking members of the governing body. Years later, the assembly hall, where these events had taken place, changed its looks completely as if trying to forget the past. It became more convenient, the rectangular edges turned round, and the journalists moved to the other end of the glass windows. The hall was reopened in 2010. The designer of the new Assembly Hall is Anahit Tarkhanyan. ➤

**T**HIS BUILDING HAS GONE THROUGH SEVERAL CRITICAL EVENTS, PERIODS AND SOCIAL CATAclysms, EVERY BLACK CLOUD PASSING OVER THE COUNTRY HAS DEFINITELY Poured DOWN **ON THE ROOF OF THIS BUILDING**





^  
The pond in front of  
the NA building, 1960's

“From an architectural point of view, as long as the overall appearance of the building is not distorted, and all the additions are made from behind the main doors, I don’t see any problem,” says Mark Grigoryan Jr.

### TRANSFIGURATIONS

During those years, however, some changes were made which Mark Grigoryan never accepted; e.g. the exterior of the pond in front of the National Assembly building went through some changes, which he considers simply an expression of bad taste. According to Mr. Grigoryan, the change that was made in just half a day, isn’t the least congruous with the image of the National Assembly building. Initially, the pond was constructed to provide fire-fighting system. Until the 1940s, a fire water pond used to be installed next to every house or even on its roof to be used in case of fire.

The pond in front of the National Assembly building, a clear ground-level water mirror, was de-

signed for the same purpose. But in 2020, it was tiled, the borders were decorated with carved ornaments, and a crown-like metal decoration was installed in the center. The complaints of the architect’s grandson were of no use, and the exterior remained as such.

Today, it’s obvious that the building needs renovation; the wooden windows need to be changed, and a number of other works needs to be carried out. In addition, over the years, the interior of personal offices has changed and become different, expressing the taste of each person staying there, and is, in some cases, anti-aesthetic.

By the way, still during his grandfather’s lifetime, Grigoryan Jr., too, had had his contribution in completing the exterior of the building, or rather, not the building itself, but the police station next to the gate, which is still operating and is used as an entrance. “I was at school then, one day my grandfather came home and put some drawings of police station lobbies on the table

> Mark Grigoryan (on the right) on the construction site



▼ Mark Grigoryan junior



“ I AM A GREAT SUPPORTER OF OPENING THE PARK SO THE PEOPLE CAN ENJOY IT, BECAUSE, EVENTUALLY, IT’S NOT CREATED ONLY FOR A GROUP OF DEPUTIES. THE PARK BELONGS TO EVERYONE”

in front of me and asked which one I’d choose. I said I didn’t like any of them and that I’d prefer the combination of both options. Then, I drew on a piece of paper what I meant and gave it to him. Guess what? He turned it into a professional drawing, and the police station got constructed according to that option,” recalls Mr. Grigoryan.

#### A SYMBOL OF TRUST IN THE AUTHORITIES

A large part of the charm of the National Assembly building belongs to its surrounding park. There used to be a greenhouse in the area, where the most beautiful carnations used to grow. This solution had an economical purpose: there was no need to spend state money on buying flowers for the guests.

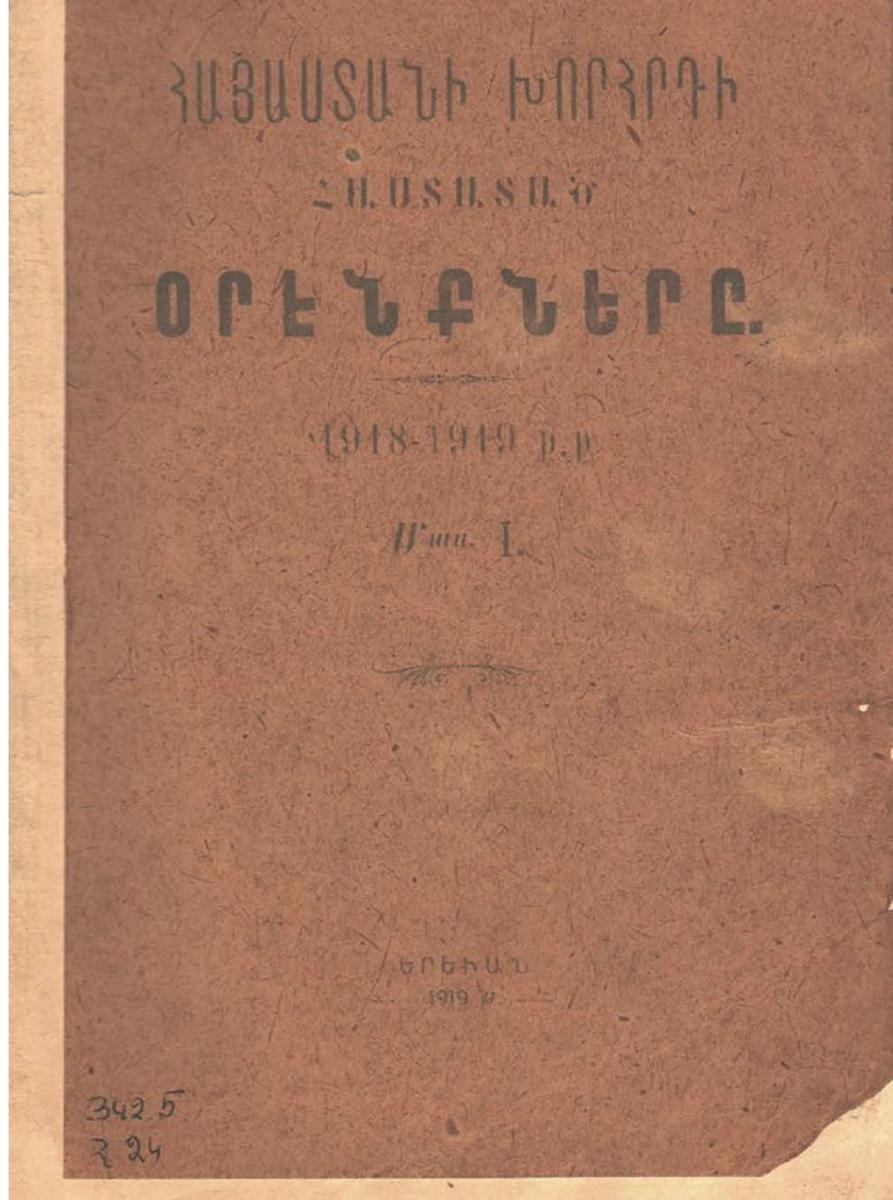
After the Independence, when the Supreme Council moved to that building, the chairman of the Council, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, decided to open the park to the citizens. However, weeks later, the situation got a little out of control.

One day, the employees came and saw a coffin placed in front of the main entrance. It turned out that a murder had taken place in the city, and the relatives of the victim had brought the coffin and placed it in front of the building as a demand for justice. On another occasion, sheets appeared there; people were protesting again. As a result, the park was closed. The park reopened in 2018, but today it’s closed again. “I am a great supporter of opening the park so the people can enjoy it, because, eventually, it’s not created only for a group of deputies. The park belongs to everyone,” says Mark Grigoryan, “But something else must be considered here. Whether the park is open or closed has become an indicator for the level of people’s trust in the government. As long as the attitude is fine, the garden is open, when the attitude deteriorates, the garden closes its doors again.” One can only hope that in the near future the park will become a public place again, and the NA building won’t be that far. ♦

# ARMENIAN PARLIAMENT AT ITS BEGINNINGS: The Council of Armenia

Some of the most significant bills by the parliament of the First Armenian Republic (1918-1920), put in a historical context.

TEXT : TIGRAN ZAKARYAN



Those who are interested in Armenian history are aware that up until 1918 there was no representative legislative body in the country. A handful of them might also know that the first Armenian parliament which existed from August 1918 till March 1919 was called the Council of Armenia. The Council was formed amid the chaos of the war when even thinking of holding election would sound ludicrous. Instead the newly and haphazardly formed legislative body came into being having at its core the Tbilisi-based Armenian National Council (hence its name Council) and its membership extended by new delegates added from each faction proportionally as well as representatives from the ethno-religious communities residing in Armenian. Thus it had 46 delegates, of whom 38 were Armenians, six were Muslims, with one Russian and another one Yezidi. The seats of the Armenian delegates were distributed in the following way: the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) held 18 seats, Armenian National Party (one of the forerunners of the Democratic Liberal (Ramgavar) Party), Social Democratic and Socialist Revolutionary parties (“EsErs”) had

six seats each, added by two independent delegates. It is worthwhile to mention that the legislative lacking a clear majority very soon displayed certain differences – particularly in the foreign policy issues – with the government representing the ARF, as a result of which on 4 November 1918 the first Armenian Prime Minister Hovhannes Kajaznuni was tasked to form yet another cabinet. We have at our disposal a collection of legal acts adopted by the Council of Armenia, which was published in 1919 in Yerevan. A good number of them cannot be considered as law in the strictest sense of the term, since in our days such decrees or directives are issued by the government, by a specific ministry or any other government body, but not by the parliament. Such instances include decisions on issuing specific amounts of money for certain purposes (which was an indication of a lack of a general state budget in that period), adding wages to civil servants, pardoning or commuting prison terms of certain individuals. Below are represented comments to certain groups of legal acts adopted by the Council of Armenia between August 1918 and February 1919.

3. Խօյեայն զէմ կռակի մասին.  
 1) Յայտարարել ամբողջ Հայաստանի տեղիաօրին խօյեայն կողմից վտանգւած.

18. Փետրվարի կառավարչական զեմպն մասին:  
 Յօդ. ա. Արդեւում է գեանախնձորի արտահանումը Հայաստանի հանրապետութեան սահմաններից:  
 Յօդ. բ. Ներքին Գործերի Մինիստրութեան Պարենաւորման Բաժանմունքին յանձնարարուած է հանրապետութեան կարիքների համար զենեկէս միլիոն փութ գեանախնձոր:  
 Յօդ. գ. Գեանախնձորի արժէքը որոշուած է՝ Գիլիշանի և Նոր-Բայազէղի շրջաններում 20 ր. փութը, միւս շրջաններում 25 ր.:  
 Յօդ. դ. Յօդւած բ-ում յիշուած քանակով գեանախնձորի զեման բաշխուան ըստ շրջանների և ըստ այնմ նրա ամբարումը վերադարձուած է ներքին Գործերի Մինիստրութեան Պարեն. Բաժանմունքին:

1919 թ.  
 64. Բժաւօր սիֆի զէմ կռակի ճամար մի միլիոն ռուբլու աւանդի մասին  
 Բաց թողնել ինամատարութեան մինիստրութեանը մի միլիոն ռուբլու աւանդ թժաւօր տիֆի համաճարակի զէմ կռակի. համար: Հաստ. է յունւարի 3-ին 1919 թ.

**FIGHT AGAINST HUNGER AND EPIDEMICS**

The epidemics of contagious diseases – namely typhus and cholera – on one hand and the widespread famine – on the other were just a few of the calamities facing the young republic. The period between the autumn of 1918 and the spring of 1919 was a most disastrous one claiming the lives of some 150,000 people, which – depending on our definition of the borders of Armenia, very much fluid back then – constituted up to a shocking 20 percent of its total population. It did not spare either the political elite of the state, driving the statesman and a main hero of 1918 May battles Aram Manukyan, State Controller Minas Berberyan and others into early graves. The main victims of this misfortune were mostly the homeless and destitute refugees, who numbered somewhere close to 400,000 throughout the Caucasus, mostly elderly people, women and children. The government of Armenia spared no effort to channel its meager resources towards fighting the epidemics and famine, in the meantime establishing state supervision over the sale and the prices of such strategically a literally vital goods as potatoes.

**COLLECTING WEAPONS FROM THE POPULATION AND INTERNAL PACIFICATION**

Strengthening the foundations of any newborn state requires ensuring rule of law through means also including coercion, if necessary, in the meantime ruling out violent actions on the part of private individuals or organized groups. All this was a big problem facing the government of the newly independent Armenia. Interior Minister Aram Manukyan in a speech on 23 August 1918 stated that private individuals were in possession of “huge stocks” of firearms – some 60 to 150 thousand units namely – which the Armenian nascent army badly needed. Manukyan underlined that although previously arming the civilians was important for local self-defense, by that time of relative peace and shaping of the statehood the armed populace was “worthless and unhelpful, moreover, a hindrance to the army”. The law was adopted but a few days later stipulated that under special conditions and with the special approval by the interior minister a very limited number of civilians would be authorized to carry firearms, for exclusively self-defense purpose.

6. Մասնաւոր սեփականութիւն կազմող զէմերի և զինամթերքների պետականացման մասին.  
 1) Հայաստանի Հանրապետութեան սահմաններում մասնաւոր սեփականութիւն կազմող ամեն տեսակի զէմերն և զինամթերքը,

բացի որտորդական, անմազապինաւօր և սոյո տեսակից, գրաւուած և յանձնուած են զինուորական վարչութեանը, մինչև որ Հայաստանի Խորհուրդը կասնմանի զէմը ունենալու և կրելու կարգը.

4) Ներքին Գործերի Մինիստրը որոշու և յայտարարուած է իւրաքանչիւր շրջանի համար այն ժամանակամիջոցը որև ընթացքում նոյն շրջանի բոլոր զինատէրերը պարտաւոր են ըսել յանձնելու իրենց զէմերն ու զինամթերքը.  
 5) Որոշուած ժամանակամիջոցում կամովին չ'յանձնուած զէմերն ու զինամթերքը յանձնաժողովի կարգադրութեամբ գրաւուած են հարկադրական միջոցներով, իսկ պարտազանց զինատէրը ենթարկուած է պատժի մինչև երեք ամիս բանտարկութեան և կամ մինչև երեք հազար (3000) ռուբլի տուգանքի՝ Ներքին Գործերի Մինիստրի որոշումով.

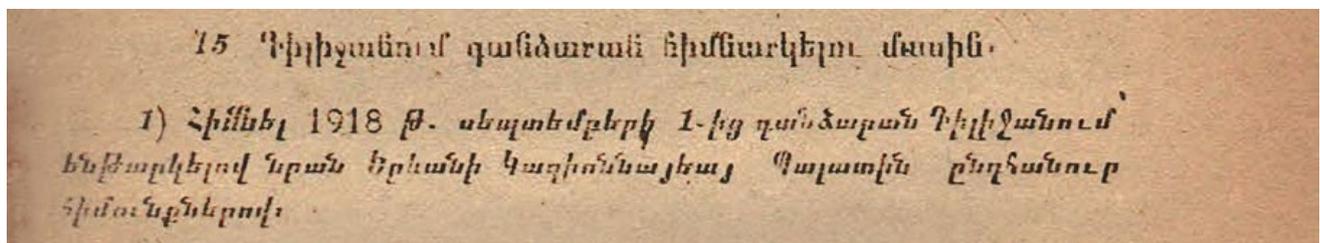
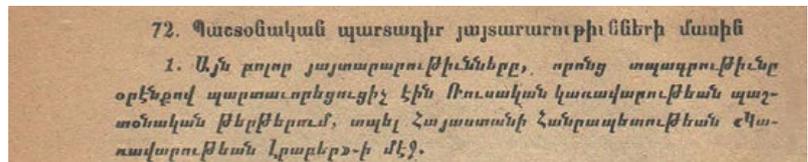
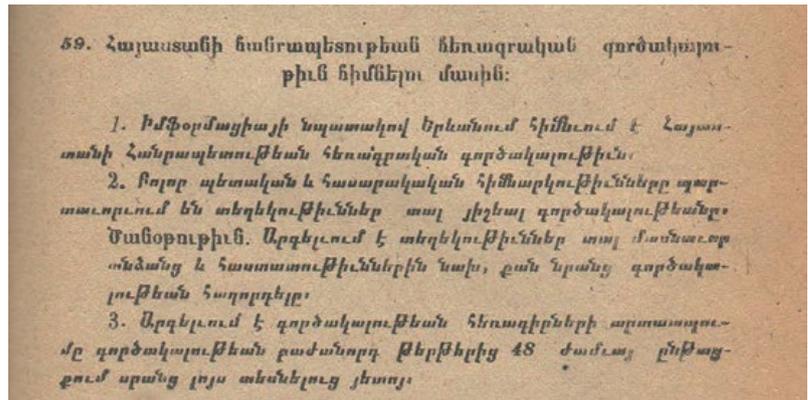
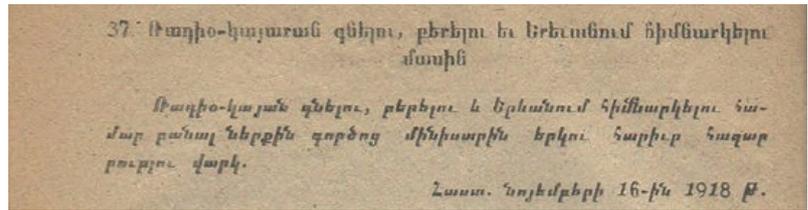
7) Ներքին Գործերի Մինիստրի որոշմամբ վտանգւած գիւղում գրաւուած զէմերի և զինամթերքի մի մասը, նրա մեծութեան համեմատ, մնում է նոյն տեղում հանրային պաշտօնեային հսկողութեան տակ՝ զիւղի պաշտպանութեան համար համայնքի կողմից կազմակերպուած պահպանների ձեռքով.  
 ԾԱՆՈԹ.— Գիւղերում թողնուող այս զէմն ու զինամթերքը պահելու տեղն ու եղանակը, գործածելու կարգը և պահպանների կազմակերպման ու պաշտօնավարութեան հրահանգը կ-բ պարտուած է ներքին Գործերի Մինիստրը.

**INFORMATION AND INFORMATION SECURITY**

State governance and molding civil society require a serious and meticulous engagement with flows of information, especially when it comes to a newly independent state in the making, which is essentially in a semi-war state.

Based on this kind of considerations the authorities of the newborn Armenia quickly made a decision to establish a “radio station” in Yerevan. It is worth mentioning that in this case by a “radio station” a radiotelegraphic facility is meant, capable of sending and receiving wireless messages, which was of vital importance to the country which was essentially in a blockade.

In the meantime the Council of Armenia, guided by the concern of preventing news leaks – which by the way, have reached epic proportions in Armenia in modern days – made first attempts at regulating media’s rights and responsibilities in accessing to information.



**ARMENIA'S FINANCES PREFER DILIJAN**

It turns out that the town of Dilijan became a spot of choice for the finances of Armenia back in 1918 when in September of that year the parliament of the newborn republic passed a resolution on establishing the first ever national treasury of independent Armenia.

Apart from aesthetical preferences, the choice of Dilijan was made, most likely, due to its central location of the de-jure Armenia (which by September 1918 included only a faction of today’s Armenia, confined within borders including the city of Yerevan and surroundings, Kotayk region, the Sevan lake basin, parts of Tavush and Aragatsotn) further solidified by the mountainous terrain surrounding it.

**PUBLIC WORKS FOR THE DISPLACED**

As mentioned above, the newly independent Armenia was flooded with starving and destitute refugees. Almost all of the political parties represented in the Council of Armenian socialist in their political ideology and it was only normal that under those conditions the government took rigorous measures to fight against famine and provide jobs – and therefore a living – to those people. By the autumn of 1918 decisive measures were taken to ensure the state control over the reserves of such a strategic raw material as cotton and setting up public manufactures for processing the stocks available which would employ the jobless refugees. In the meantime allowances were established for those who were incapacitated or those who were seeking job, but not finding it, in the meantime excluding those who refused jobs offered.

As per a budget estimate annexed to the law on Establishing Weaving Mills for the Needy Refugees approved on 8 October by the Council of Armenia the authorities were to open as many as 37,000 new jobs, chiefly for women.

17. Կարիք ունեցող գաղթականների խնամաստուգման մասին:  
 Յող. ա. Կարիք ունեցող գաղթականներին օգնութիւն է արբւում աշխատանքի միջոցով:  
 ԾԱՆՕԹ.—ա. Գաղթականին աշխատանք տալու անհրաժեշտութեան համար աշխատանքը անընդհատ պէտք է զբոսաշրջութեամբ և անհատաբար:  
 ԾԱՆՕԹ.—բ. Մշակուած ներքին համարող գաղթականը զբոսաշրջութեամբ և անհատաբար իրականորէր:

21. Կարիքաւոր գաղթականների համար զուգահեռացներ բանալու մասին  
 Յող. 1. Կարիքաւոր գաղթականներին, առուելապէս կանանց համար, բանալ պետական շուկաներում:  
 Յող. 2. Այդ նպատակով և համաձայն սրանց նետ հաստատուած նախատարէ լաւակցենէ՛ 6,691,200 բ. և մտնողովդացիայի ենթարկուած բամբակից 35,700 դուբ:

II. Աւելասպարս (10 արարայի մասին)

1. 1500 շուկանի 60-ական բ. շարժական	900,000 բ.
2. 20,000 մանող 15-ական բ. շարժմ.	3,000,000 բ.
3. 800 դրոս	334,000 բ.
4. 15000 մասրաշինոյ	720,000 բ.
5. 150 թիկակապոյ	72,000 բ.
6. 30 հիւսն	14,400 բ.
7. 30 սոպ շինոյ	14,400 բ.
8. 30 չափոյ և 60 մարդոյ	43,200 բ.
9. 30 վարդեա և 30 օգնական	28,800 բ.
10. 30 շուկանոյ	14,400 բ.
<b>Ընդամենը 5,191,200 բ.</b>	
<b>Գումար 6,691,200 բ.</b>	

80. Հայաստանի Հանրապետութեան մէջ տանձնուած տօներէ մասին  
 ա) Մանմանուած են հետեւեալ տօները:  
 Ընդհանուր պետական տօներ՝ նոր արարայ, ծննդեան և մկրտութեան, մեռելոցի, Տեառնպատալի, Կարդումանց և Բարեկենդանի շաբաթ, Հասարակ ժողովի մուտնի ի պիւրայ, Զատիկի երկուշաբթի և երեքշաբթի, Համբարձման, Քարգմանչաց և բոլոր կիրակի օրերը:  
 Ռուսներէ համար, բացի միջոցառող ընդհանուր տօներէց՝ Աւետուան Նատաւածմանի, Կերտիտիանի, Քաղցերացի, ծննդեան և նրա յաջորդ օրը, Նիկողայոս հրաշագործի (9 մայիսի), Գողթի և Գեարդոսի և Յովնանու Մկրտչի գլխատման օրերը:  
 Մանմանականներէ համար իմած Հուսէինի մահուան, նրա բաւաստները օրը, Մանմէղի մահուան, նրա ծննդեան, Ալիի ծննդեան, Գարբիէլ հրեշտակաղեւոսց Մանմանի մարգարէական կուսակցութեան, յայտնելու, 12 իմամի ծննդեան, Ալիի միլաթուրելու և

— 50 —  
 մահուան, Աստուծոց Մանմանի Դրոսը զրկելու, Գորսից առաջին տօնի, Արարայի Իսրայէլին զոհաբերելու, Մանմանի Ալիի, Իսաիէ նշանակելու և Նովրուզ-Բայրամի երեք օրերը:  
 բ) Բոլոր հիմարելութիւնները պիտի փակեն, բանտերները և ծառայողները ազատ պիտի լինեն աշխատանքից, ամբողջ օրը ծննդեան, Ռուսական մեծ յեղափոխութեան (12 Մարտի ն. տոմարով), Զատիկի, մայիսի 1-ի, Օգոստոսի 1-ի (Հայաստանի Հանրապետութեան պարլամենտի բացման օրը), Նրկու ճրագալոյցներէ, պետական հասարակական հիմարելութիւնները պիտի փակեն կէս օրուայ ժամը 12-ին իսկ ուտեստի խնամութիւնը ժամը 1-ին:  
 Գնթօք. Մանմանականները փակուած են առեւտրա-արդիւնաբերական հիմարելութիւնները կիրակի օրերը ժամը 12-ին, իսկ օրը ժամը օրը իրենց ցանկութեամբ ամբողջ օրը:  
 Հաստ. յունուարի 17-ին 1919 թ.

**HOLIDAYS IN ARMENIA FOR EVERYBODY**

As soon as the upheavals of the initial several months of the Armenian Republic's existence was somewhat settled down the parliament engaged into shaping of the newly established state attributes, including the list of official holidays. It is worth to note that the official statehood was a mandatory non-working day only for a minority of all workers, as the vest majority of them were farmers, others were self-employed artisans who decided their working schedule on their own. In the long list of holidays one can find not only Armenian Church holidays, but also such days for Orthodox Christians and Shia Muslims, with a staggering number of 15 days marked by the latter group. The official calendar of holidays also included secular holidays, such as the 1st of May – marked as the Labor Day – which shows that that holiday was marked before the communists came to power in Armenia.

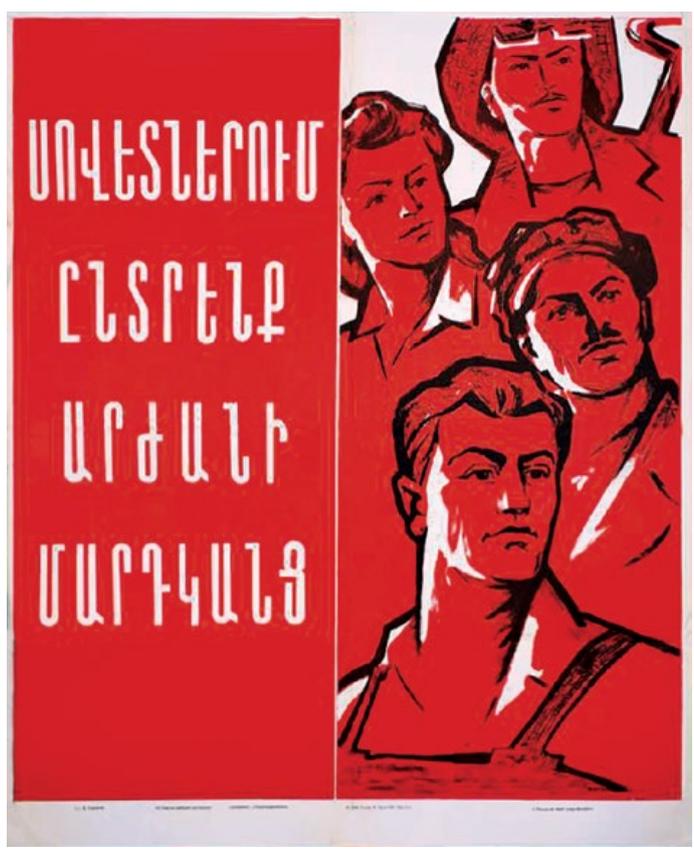
The 1st of August was also an official holiday, marking the beginning of the Armenian parliament, just like the 5th of July marked as the Constitution Day in present Armenia. Interestingly enough there was a “Great Russian Revolution Day”. Now, those who lived in the Soviet Union remember a holiday of “Great October Revolution of 1917” marked – oddly enough – on November 7, while the soviet historiography mentioned the anti-czarist, democratic revolution of 12 March as the “February Revolution” – the sole responsible of this whole confusion in naming being the Russian Orthodox Church which stubbornly refused to shift to Gregorian Calendar, due to which there by the beginning of the 20th century there was a 13-day difference between the calendars in the Russian empire and the rest of the world. There was some logic in marking the “February” revolution in Armenia as it had created an opportunity to start the process of independence and a democratic Russia was potentially a good ally. ♦

# ADVERTISING OF THE ELECTIONS OF THE SUPREME COUNCIL OF THE ARMENIAN SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLIC

The Supreme Council of the Armenian SSR was the supreme soviet (main legislative institution) of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic, and the independent Republic of Armenia, from 23 August 1990 until 1995 when it was superseded by the National Assembly, with the adoption of the Armenian Constitution.

PHOTO : NATIONAL LIBRARY OF ARMENIA

∨  
D. Sarkisyan



> E. Khachatryan



> Suren Safaryan

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