



Armenia 2017: An introduction to the party-political landscape

March 2017

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Introduction

Armenia has pledged to carry out the necessary reforms to make its institutions more democratic and the decision making process more transparent. The transition to a parliamentary system and the reform of the electoral code are two steps in this direction. Against this background, it is crucial that interested European stakeholders, analysts, journalists and elections observers acquire a broader understanding about political parties in Armenia in the new parliamentary setup. In order to meet that goal, this paper gives relevant information about the nine parties and blocs registered to participate in the 2 April 2017 elections. The parties are presented in their English alphabetical order. This paper also includes feedback from several Armenia-based insiders, analysts and experts.¹ It summarises the most relevant details about the party history, their leaders, their ideologies, foreign-policy orientation, economic and social policies, and their relations with relevant European political bodies.

Moreover, we are providing an overview about the general background of these elections and the new Electoral Code, which is a bold change. The "Background" chapter elaborates the key aspects from proportional regional lists to the new 25% gender quota, in a rare and understandable summary.

Table 1. Party alliances 1991-2001*

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
ANM	Government									Extra-parliamentary	
ARF Dashnak	Opposition			Banned				non-aligned	Government		
Heritage											
Prosperous											
Republican	Opposition			Government					Opposition	Government	
Rule of Law							Extra-Parliamentry		Opposition		

Table 2. Party alliances 2002-2012*

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
ANC							Extra-parliamentary				
ARF Dashnak	Government								Opposition		
Heritage	Extra-parliamentary					Opposition					
Prosperous			Extra-parliamentary				Government				
Republican	Government										
Rule of Law	Opposition	Government			Opposition		Government				

Table 3. Party alliances 2013-2017*

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
ANC	Opposition				
ARF Dashnak	Opposition			Government	
Heritage / ORO	Opposition				
Prosperous	Opposition				
Republican	Government				
Rule of Law / Renaissance	Government	Opposition			

* Note: ANM = Armenian National Movement (see ANC), ARF Dashnak = Armenian Revolutionary Federation, Prosperous = Prosperous Armenia Party, Republican = Republican Party of Armenia, ANC = Armenian National Congress, ORO = Ohanyan-Raffi-Oskanyan alliance

Government
 Opposition
 Extra-parliamentary or inactive

¹ The Regional Study Center, ICHD, Yerevan Press Club and each political force were given the chance to comment and we are grateful for the corrections and general comments which we received and incorporated.

Armenian Communist Party (Armenian: Հայաստանի կոմունիստական կուսակցություն, ՀԿԿ; Hayastani Komunistakan Kusaktsutyun, HKK)

Founder and year of foundation: Sergey Badalyan, 1991

Chairman: Tachat Sargsyan

About the party: Armenian Communist Party considers itself the successor of the Communist Party of Armenia of the Soviet Union. However, following the dissolution of the USSR, the leadership of the then Communist Party of Armenia formed the Democratic Party of Armenia.

It is the main communist party in Armenia and claimed 18,000 (mostly elderly) members in 2006.² The party was described as "staunchly pro-Russian" by the US-funded RFE/RL in 2002. The Communist Party of Armenia has always been in favour of consolidation among fraternal peoples."³

At the 2012 Parliamentary elections, the HKK won 1.45% of the votes and no seats in the Parliament.

About the party leader: 76-year-old Tachat Sargsyan took the post of the chairman in 2013. He holds a PhD in Economics.

Ideology: Socialism/Communism/Marxism-Leninism

European agenda: The Armenian Communist Party is against the European integration of Armenia.

Foreign policy agenda: The party claims that Armenia's participation in the EEU is a significant factor⁴, which can greatly contribute to Armenia's economy, but cannot hinder Armenia's relations with EU.

Economic and social agenda: They aim at creating a social economy.



² Red Remembrance: Bolshevik revolution anniversary kindles nostalgia for diehards, 03.11.06, https://www.armenianow.com/news/6792/red_remembrance_bolshevik_revoluti, 13.03.2017.

³ Reviving Red?: Armenian Communists mark Sovietization anniversary amid USSR reintegration calls, 30.11.11, https://www.armenianow.com/news/politics/33709/armenia_communist_party_sovetization_anniversary, 13.03.2017.

⁴ Armenia's decision to join Customs Union is revolutionary – Communist Party, 11.09.2013, <https://news.am/eng/news/170758.html>, 13.03.2017.

exclude the possibility to form a coalition with the RPA, since, according to him, it is unlikely for one party to obtain a stable majority and form a government on its own.⁷

Affiliation with European political families (if applicable): The ARF's membership to the Socialist International dates back to 1907. The party has been an observer member of the Party of European Socialists (PES) since 2015.

European agenda: Pro-European, also by virtue of the ARF branches in the Armenian communities in almost all European countries. The party was in favour of Armenia's political association and economic integration with the EU. In September 2013, when Armenia surprisingly decided to join the Eurasian Economic Union instead of signing an Association Agreement and a DCFTA with the EU, ARF publicly stated that this decision was taken due to security concerns in the region, but in the same statement it was noted that Armenia should continue pursuing its social and economic integration with the European Union.⁸

Foreign policy agenda: Balanced foreign policy towards Russia, the USA and the EU. Regarding relations with Turkey, the ARF sustains that as long as Turkey does not recognise the Armenian genocide there cannot be normal relations with this neighbour. Moreover, the party emphasises that the blockade imposed by Turkey on Armenia represents another obstacle for the normalisation of Armenian-Turkish relations.⁹ Regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, ARF's position is clearly supporting NK's quest for international *de jure* recognition of its independence and, eventually, a union with Armenia.

Economic and social agenda: The ARF advocates for an efficient anti-trust policy, for a strong social component in the government's economic policies and for strong and credible anti-corruption measures.

⁷ <http://armenianweekly.com/2017/02/13/arf-own-list-2017/>

⁸ <http://www.arfd.info/2013/09/04/arf-d-press-release/>

⁹ http://www.arfd.info/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/ARF_Brief-A5-updated_October-2011.pdf

Armenian Renaissance Party (former Rule of Law Party, Orinats Yerkir), “Հայկական վերածնունդ կուսակցություն», Haykakan veradznund kusakcutyun



Founder and year of foundation: Artur Baghdasaryan, 1997 as Rule of Law, 2015 as Armenian Renaissance (Composition: Orinats Yerkir and Unified Armenian Party)

Chairman: Artur Baghdasaryan

Website: <http://hvk.am/>

About the party: In 1999, the Orinats Yerkir participated for the first time in the parliamentary elections where it narrowly managed to pass the 5% threshold. During the 2003 parliamentary elections, the party performed well and almost tripled its presence in the parliament with 13%. Its leader, Artur Baghdasaryan, was elected Speaker of the National Assembly. From 2003 to 2006, the party was in coalition with the Republican Party and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) and it held several ministerial posts. The resignation of its leader from the post of the Speaker of the National Assembly in 2006 moved the party into opposition. In 2007, Orinats Yerkir participated in the parliamentary elections as an opposition party and garnered 7% of the vote. After the 2008 presidential elections, the party re-joined the governing coalition. Opposition parties criticised Orinats Yerkir for its moves in and out the governing coalition as tactical opportunism. The party received 5.51% of the votes in the May 2012 parliamentary elections and 5 seats in the National Assembly. It remained a part of the ruling coalition until 2014 and it held 3 ministerial posts. Bagdasaryan was holding the post of the Secretary of the Armenian National Council. The Rule of Law moved back into opposition in 2014 and in 2015 it merged with the Unified Armenian Party, led by Ruben Avagyan to form the Armenian Renaissance Party.¹⁰

About the party leader: Artur Baghdasaryan, is a lawyer and was for the first time elected to the National Assembly in 1995 at a very young age. In 1997, he founded the party Orinats Yerkir. In 1998, Baghdasaryan was elected as the chairman of the Standing Committee on State and Legal Affairs, and both in 1999 and in 2003, was re-elected to the National Assembly. In 2003, he became Speaker of the National Assembly, but resigned from the post in 2006. In 2007, he was re-elected to the National Assembly and joined the opposition. In 2008, he ran as a presidential candidate and finished third with 17.7% of the vote. Shortly after, he joined the governing coalition and was appointed Secretary of the Armenian National Security Council.



Ideology: mostly conservative and pro-European.

Affiliation with European political families (if applicable): Orinats Yerkir is an observer member of the EPP since 2012.

European agenda: Armenian Renaissance pursues a rather consistent pro-European policy stance, at least on a declaratory level. In fact, in 2006, its leader resigned from the post of the Speaker of the National Assembly allegedly because of criticism coming from the government following his statements on the need for Armenia to join NATO and the EU. Still, opposition politicians argued that disagreements were much broader and this move allegedly was merely an attempt to secure political backing from the West. Currently the party is not publicly promoting Armenia's full membership to the EU and NATO. Irrespectively, the party is one of the Armenian parties to be aligned with European political families.

¹⁰ <http://panarmenian.net/eng/news/178056>

Foreign policy agenda: Mainly pro-Western but not anti-Russian. When it comes to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and its policy towards Turkey, the party's positions are moderate and generally in line with the Republican Party.

Economic and social agenda: The party states that its major priority in this field is the consolidation of the rule of law, good governance and transparency in Armenia. It supports reforms in the framework of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) that could encourage Armenia's further democratisation and its transition to a market economy. Orinats Yerkir, the party's major component, was supporting the EU-Armenia Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). In September 2013, when the Armenian government decided to join the Eurasian Economic Union, Orinats Yerkir as part of the ruling coalition backed this decision.¹¹

¹¹ Orinats Yerkir: No one in Armenia is against Customs Union, 13.09.2013, <https://news.am/eng/news/171134.html>

1998. During the February 2008 presidential elections, he officially scored second with 21.5% of the vote. On the Election day, before the closing of the polling stations, his spokesperson stated that the elections were rigged, claimed victory and announced protests for the following days. After days of mainly peaceful protests of his supporters, the situation escalated on 1 March 2008 into severe clashes and 10 casualties, and President Kocharyan announced a state of emergency. In the wake of the 2017 parliamentary elections, Ter-Petrosyan announced his comeback.

European agenda: Mostly pro-European, but the ANC has criticised the Council of Europe (CoE), the EU and the OSCE because of an alleged lack of pressure on the government over human rights violations.

Foreign policy agenda: Balanced foreign policy towards Russia, the USA and the EU. Regarding relations with Turkey, the ANC has supported the steps undertaken by the government to normalise bilateral relations. In fact, during the tensest period of talks, the ANC had suspended its protests against the government. As for the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, the ANC is inclined to a compromise settlement and refutes the use of force.

Economic and social agenda: The ANC states to target a free and competitive market, a corruption-free administration and good governance. Its positions are strongly inspired by liberal market theories.

Affiliation with European political families (if applicable): Since 2010, the Armenian National Movement (ANM) is a member of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party (ALDE).

Free Democrats (Armenian: Ազատ դեմոկրատներ կուսակցություն, ԱԶԿ; Azat Demokratner Kusaktsutyun, AZK)



Founder and year of foundation: Khachatur Kokobelian, 2011

Chairman: Khachatur Kokobelian¹³

Website: <https://www.fdp.am/>

About the party: In 2012, the Free Democrats formed a coalition with the Heritage party to participate in the parliamentary elections. Two members of the party, Khachatur Kokobelian and Alexander Arzumanyan became MPs in National Assembly. This time, the party runs for the parliamentary elections independently.

About the party leader: Khachatur Kokobelian's political career started in 2002 when he became Deputy Chairman of Pan-Armenian National Movement. In 2010, he stepped down in unclear circumstances.¹⁴ In 2011 he founded the Free Democrats.

Ideology: Liberalism

European agenda: Free Democrats clearly oppose Armenia's EEU membership and strongly support the new EU-Armenia agreement.¹⁵



Foreign policy agenda: The party proposes to deepen relations with Iran and Georgia as an alternative to the blockade imposed on Armenia by Turkey and Azerbaijan. The party believes that Turkish-Armenian relations should be regulated without any preconditions, and that reconciliation should be achieved without denying the fact of the Armenian Genocide or hindering its international recognition.¹⁶

Economic and social agenda: the Free Democrats aims to eliminate monopolies and oligarchy from Armenia's economy.

¹³ Name as transcribed by the Armenian Parliament. The alternative English transcription of his name is Qoqobelian

¹⁴ Opposition Party Picks New Leadership, July 20, 2010, <http://www.azatutyun.am/a/2104145.html>, 13.03.2017.

¹⁵ Free Democrats: Armenia should use Europe as an opportunity, 03.03.2017, <https://news.am/eng/news/376599.html>, 13.03.2017.

¹⁶ Vahram Ter-Matevosyan, Foreign Policy Discourse Comparing Election Platforms, Mar 16 2017, <http://evnreport.com/elections-2017/foreign-policy-discourse>, 13.03.2017.

Ohanyan-Raffi-Oskanyan alliance (Օհանյան-Րաֆֆի-Օսկանյան դաշինք) / alliance ORO

The alliance is created by:

- the former Minister of Defence, **Seyran Ohanyan**,
- the former Foreign Minister and leader of the **Heritage Party**, **Raffi Hovhannisyan**
- the former Foreign Minister and leader of the **Unity Party**, **Vardan Oskanyan**



Website: There is no ORO website to date. For the heritage Party: <http://www.heritage.am/en/home-en>

The leader of the alliance list: Seyran Ohanyan

About the alliance: The Ohanyan-Raffi-Oskanyan (ORO) alliance was created in January 2017.



The members of the alliance stated they were aware of the necessity of forming a qualitatively different government to tackle the internal and external challenges. They claimed "to be guided only by state interest", taking into consideration the current situation in Armenia. Seyran Ohanyan said that the members of the alliance were going to use their experience to implement changes in the governance system, trying to eliminate the gap between the government and citizens and move forward all directions of the economy.¹⁷ Few prominent members of the Heritage Party (MPs Zaruhi Postanjyan, Anahit Bakhshayan) left the party because of Raffi Hovhannisyan's decision to create the alliance with Seyran Ohanyan and Vardan

Oskanyan. Surprisingly, Raffi Hovhannisyan is the number 11 on the national list, and he has not been actively involved in the electoral campaign.

About the leaders of the alliance list: From 2008 to 2016 Seyran Ohanyan was Minister of Defense of Armenia. Being originally from Nagorno Karabakh, Seyran Ohanyan is a veteran of the Nagorno Karabakh war and was actively involved in politics in Nagorno Karabakh. Ohanyan was brought to Armenia in 2008 by Serzh Sargsyan.

Ohanyan had to resign shortly after the "Four day April war" of 2016, which was the largest escalation initiated by Azerbaijan after the ceasefire agreement in 1994. However, soon after his resignation Ohanyan came up with a statement saying that he would actively participate in the political and, in particular, the electoral process.



The leader of the Unity Party Vardan Oskanyan is originally from Syria, so he is a Diaspora Armenian. Oskanian moved to Armenia in 1992, shortly after Armenia's independence, and began work at the foreign ministry, first in the Middle East Department, then as head of the North America Department. In 1994, he became Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and in 1996, the First Deputy FM. During those years, Oskanian was a Visiting Assistant Professor at the American University of Armenia. In 1998, he was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs by President Robert Kocharyan and left the post in 2008. In 2008, Oskanian founded the Civilitas Foundation, named after the Latin term for "the citizen's



¹⁷ <http://www.mediamax.am/en/news/politics/22178/>

responsibility to society." ¹⁸ In the run-up to the 2012 elections, he joined the Prosperous Armenia party¹⁹, leaving it in 2015.²⁰

The head of the Heritage Party, Raffi Hovhannisyan, is a US-born descendant of genocide survivors. He is a Fletcher and Georgetown-educated political scientist and lawyer. In 1987, he co-founded the Armenian Bar Association. Hovhannisyan moved to Armenia in 1988 after the devastating earthquake, where he launched a structure coordinating the post-earthquake reconstruction, funded by the Armenian Assembly of America. In October 1991, he became the first Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, without any party affiliation. Hovhannisyan served in that position for one year until resigning over disagreements with the then president Levon Ter-Petrosyan over the inclusion of the Armenian genocide recognition in the country's foreign policy agenda. In 1993, he founded and chaired the first political think-tank in Armenia – the Centre for National and International Studies. In 2007, Hovhannisyan was elected a member of the National Assembly. In 2013, Hovhannisyan was one of the seven candidates at the presidential election and scored second with 37%. He claimed victory and alleged electoral fraud.²¹ He called for the recognition of NK and opposed the normalisation of relations with Turkey, as long as they do not recognise the Genocide of 1915.



European agenda: The alliance so far did not publish a European Agenda.

Foreign policy agenda: Balanced foreign policy towards the EU, the USA and Russia. As for the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, ORO alliance is against one-side consensus but supports peace and reconciliation between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Economic and social agenda: According to the program, ORO aims to promote small and medium business enterprises, and creating better conditions for their development. It also aims to promote immigration of Diaspora Armenians and increase the Armenian population.

¹⁸ <http://www.civilitasfoundation.org/>

¹⁹ Vardan Oskanyan becomes a member of "Prosperous Armenia", February 16, 2012, <http://www.mediamax.am/en/news/politics/4120/>, 12.03.2017.

²⁰ Vardan Oskanian Quits Prosperous Armenia: 'Party couldn't achieve fundamental change', March 5, 2015, <http://hetq.am/eng/news/58851/vardan-oskanian-quits-prosperous-armenia-party-couldnt-achieve-fundamental-change.html>, 12.03.2017.

²¹ Candidate claims fraud in Armenia presidential poll, <http://m.lurer.com/?p=78218&l=en>

Republican Party of Armenia (RPA) Հայաստանի Հանրապետական Կուսակցություն (ՀՀԿ), *Hayastani Hanrapetakan Kusaktsutyun*,



Founder and year of foundation: Ashot Navasardyan, 1990

Chairman: Serzh Sargsyan

Website: <http://www.hhk.am/en/>

About the party: The formation of the party was largely driven by the movement for the independence of Armenia (and self-determination for Nagorno-Karabakh), starting in 1988 under Soviet rule. The core of the Republican Party during its formation in 1990 (legally registered after the independence in 1991) consisted of some members of the anti-Soviet underground National United Party (1967-1987) and the commanders of some self-defence units. During the legislative elections of 1995, the party won 5 seats. In 1997, after the death of the party founder Ashot Navasardyan, Andranik Margaryan succeeded him. In 1998, after the resignation of the then President Levon Ter-Petrosyan, the Republican Party included the Yerkrapah parliamentary group, which mainly consisted of veterans of the Karabakh war, but it also attracted politicians and businessmen. Defence Minister Vazgen Sargsyan subsequently became the leader of the party. Before the legislative elections of 1999, the Republican Party secured an alliance with the People's Party and formed the *Unity Bloc*. The bloc won 41% of the vote, securing 62 seats in the National Assembly. Party leader Vazgen Sargsyan became Prime Minister, but was killed during a terrorist attack on the National Assembly in October 1999. His brother succeeded him as Prime Minister until May 2000. Then Andranik Margaryan, former head of the Republican Party and then chair of the Unity Bloc, was appointed Prime Minister and stayed in that post for seven years. During the 2003 legislative elections, the party scored first securing 40 seats. In March 2007, the party Chairman and Prime Minister Margaryan passed away, and Serzh Sargsyan (not related to V. or T. Sargsyan) then-Minister of Defence, assumed both of these duties. During the legislative elections of 2007, the Republican Party again scored first, securing 64 seats in the National Assembly. In February 2008, Serzh Sargsyan won the presidential elections, amid claims that irregularities helped him escape a second round. The party later won the 2012 elections with 69 seats in total, allowing them to form a government without needing a coalition. Serzh Sargsyan was re-elected President in 2013. The Republican Party of Armenia and the "Rule of Law" Party formed the government led by Tigran Sargsyan. In 2014, after the decision to join the Eurasian Economic Union, Hovik Abrahamyan became Prime Minister. He resigned following the crisis of July 2016, when a group of armed men calling themselves the Daredevils of Sasun ("Sasna Tsrer") stormed a police station in Yerevan and the ensuing protests.

In September, 2016 Karen Karapetyan was appointed the Prime Minister and soon afterwards joined the Republican Party²². The RPA's national list for the 2017 elections is led by Defence Minister Vigen Sargsyan. Karen Karapetyan is not included in the RPA list, as Armenia's election law requires a four-year permanent residence in the country as a precondition to run for a parliamentary election²³. However, Serzh Sargsyan announced that Karapetyan would remain the Prime Minister, should RPA win the elections.²⁴ The 53-year-old, originally from Nagorno Karabakh, is the former head of the national gas distributing company ArmRosGazprom and served as Yerevan's mayor from December 2010 to November 2011,²⁵ when he resigned for "personal reasons".²⁶ He holds a PhD in Economics.

22 PM Karen Karapetyan to join the Republican Party of Armenia, <http://www.armradio.am/en/2016/11/24/pm-karen-karapetyan-to-join-the-republican-party-of-armenia/>

23 PM Karen Karapetyan not included in RPA proportional list due to law restriction, <http://www.panorama.am/en/news/2017/02/14/PM-Karen-Karapetyan/1727481>

24 Armenia President: Karapetyan will remain PM after 2017 election, <https://news.am/eng/news/359447.html>

25 Karen Karapetyan Appointed Prime Minister, <http://armenianweekly.com/2016/09/14/karen-karapetyan-appointed-prime-minister/>

26 Key: Karen Karapetyan, <http://www.mediamax.am/en/news/parzabanum/19765/>

About the party leader: A philologist by education, Serzh Sargsyan was the assistant to the head of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region under Soviet rule in 1988. He joined the self-determination movement in Nagorno-Karabakh at its start and chaired the Self-Defence Committee between 1989 and 1993. In 1993, he moved to Armenia and until 2007, served in several ministerial capacities (as Ministers of Defence, Interior, and National Security) and as head of the National Security Council. Sargsyan became Prime Minister in 2007 and President in 2008 (see above). He is also the chairman of the Yerevan State University's Board of Trustees and chairs the Armenian Chess Federation. In May 2014 and November 2016, Serzh Sargsyan was re-elected as RPA chairman.



Ideology: national-conservative.

Affiliation with European political families (if applicable): The Republican Party is an observer member of the European People's Party (EPP) since 2012.

European agenda:

The government led by the Republican Party concluded the negotiations for an Association Agreement with a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area with the EU in July 2013, but in September 2013, decided that Armenia would join the Eurasian Economic Union, while still searching the closest possible alignment with the EU. In December 2015, negotiations for a new EU-Armenia framework agreement were relaunched. Concluded in February 2017 during President Sargsyan's visit to Brussels,²⁷ the new *Comprehensive and Enlarged Partnership Agreement* was initialled on 21 March.²⁸ During a recent meeting with the head of the EU Delegation in Armenia, Piotr Switalski, Karen Karapetyan called for the spread of a "European" political and business culture in Armenia.²⁹

Foreign policy agenda:

Complementarity is a cornerstone, intended to secure Armenia's interests in relations with Russia, the EU and the US. The party seeks to build good relations with all neighbouring countries, while its program stipulates that Azerbaijan and Turkey "stop denying the right of the Armenians for existence, sovereignty, sustainable and secure development." The party in its program and its government also supports the consolidation of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). At the same time, there is a deepening of the partnership with NATO in order to improve the combat skills of the armed forces and civil-military relations.³⁰ The party backs the right of self-determination of the people of NK and a peacefully negotiated resolution on the basis of the Madrid Principles proposed by the OSCE Minsk-Group. With Turkey, Serzh Sargsyan initiated the so-called *football diplomacy* by inviting Turkish President Abdullah Gul to an Armenia-Turkey football match in Yerevan in 2008. The talks without preconditions, which resulted in the signature of Armenian-Turkish protocols in 2009, triggered the loss of then coalition partner ARF. The protocols were later withdrawn by the Turkish government.

Economic and social agenda: Party policies are marked by its longstanding governmental role, balancing the trade relations with Russia and the Eurasian Economic Union and with the EU. With the latter, the government embarked on a path of ambitious reforms. The goal is to increase the efficiency of the market, improve the investment climate and boost exports. The implementation of these reforms is in some cases noticeable while lagging behind in others. PM Karapetyan, like his predecessor, has publicly slammed corruption and dominant market players, change in this area remains slow.³¹

²⁷ EU-Armenia edge towards cooperation deal, 02/03/2017, <http://www.euronews.com/2017/03/02/eu-armenia-edge-towards-cooperation-deal>, 12.03.2017.

²⁸ A starting gun for new growth: Armenia and EU initial Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement, <http://www.eufoa.org/newsroom/391/51/A-starting-gun-for-new-growth-Armenia-and-EU-initial-Comprehensive-and-Enhanced-Partnership-Agreement/>

²⁹ Karapetyan Vows 'European' Reforms In Armenia, <http://asbarez.com/157027/karapetyan-vows-european-reforms-in-armenia/>

³⁰ <http://evnreport.com/elections-2017/foreign-policy-discourse>

³¹ Karen Karapetyan, Peter Switalski Discuss Joint Efforts to Combat Corruption, <http://www.gov.am/en/news/item/8744/>

“Tsarukyan” Coalition, Ծառուկյան դաշինք, “Tsarukyan” dashinq

The Coalition consists of the following parties:

- **Prosperous Armenia**
- **“Alliance” Progressive Centrist Party “Araqelutyun”**



The leader of the coalition: Gagik Tsarukyan

About the coalition: The by far strongest party in this coalition is the Prosperous Armenia led by Gagik Tsarukyan.

The Prosperous Armenia Party first participated in the parliamentary elections in 2007, when it scored second, after the Republican Party, gaining 15% of the vote and securing 29 seats in the National Assembly and 4 ministerial posts. It then doubled its proportionate strength in the May 2012 elections, achieving 30.12% of the votes, but securing only 28 seats due to losses of directly elected constituency mandates. The party then decided not to continue its formal coalition agreement with the ruling RPA, and instead joined the opposition, or, as the party leader formulated it, presenting an “alternative”. The formation of the party had been linked to the then-outgoing President Robert Kocharyan. The head of the party, Gagik Tsarukyan, one of the wealthiest businessmen in Armenia, provided the party funding, attracted party members from the domestic intelligentsia and regularly coupled the party’s political work with the philanthropic activities of his family foundation.

In February 2015 Gagik Tsarukyan made a speech criticising the ruling RPA. He particularly stated that the change of the current government is required by the nation’s security. PAP underwent a brief change of leadership when Tsarukyan was replaced as the party leader by Naria Zohrabyan, only to return in the wake of the new general election. In the 2017 election, the bloc led by Tsarukyan will be joined by six smaller parties, as well as some prominent individuals (including the son of the ex-Prime Minister Hovik Abrahamyan), but will no longer have the support of ex-foreign minister Vardan Oskanyan (see ORO). The coalition’s moto is “Time to change and build”.



About the coalition leader: Gagik Tsarukyan is a former European arm wrestling champion, wealthy businessman and founder of the “Multi Group” holding corporation, which incorporates over a dozen large enterprises in Armenia. He is also the president of the National Olympic Committee of Armenia. He ran as an independent candidate during the 2003 legislative elections and won a seat in the National Assembly. In 2004, he founded the Prosperous Armenia Party. In the same year, Tsarukyan founded a charitable foundation carrying his name which focuses on sports, culture, education, social welfare and the construction of churches. He briefly withdrew from the Armenian political life in early 2015. On 17 January 2017 Tsarukyan declared that the current socioeconomic conditions in Armenia made him decide to return to politics.

Ideology: eclectic, with elements of social-democracy and liberal conservatism

Affiliation with European political families (if applicable): Prosperous Armenia’s applied for observer membership status in the EPP in 2012, but was rejected. In 2014, the Party became a member of the Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists in Europe (ACER).

European agenda: Prosperous Armenia has a pro-European posture especially when it comes to issues of economic cooperation. In 2009, Gagik Tsarukyan publicly assumed the honorary chairmanship of the European Movement in Armenia, which he dropped in 2011. Moreover, the Chair of the National

Assembly's committee for European Integration, Naira Zohrabyan, is a member of Prosperous Armenia. Tsarukyan's personal ties are strong within the former CIS area. He even organised conferences showcasing Russian President Vladimir Putin's vision of a Eurasian Union, in open opposition to the then government's policy to establish an EU-Armenia DCFTA.

Foreign policy agenda: Complementarity, in other words the party promotes good and balanced relations with all global players. When it comes to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and policy towards Turkey, the party has strongly supported the positions of the government, except between 2012 and 2015 when former Foreign Minister Oskanyan, a known critic of the foreign policy of President Sargsyan, joined its ranks.

Economic and social agenda: The party advocates economic liberalism, a limited regulatory role of the government in the market and social protection for the most vulnerable strata of the population. It considers emigration to be one of the most important challenges to Armenian statehood and believes that job creation and strong support for small- and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) is the right remedy to the problem.



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YELQ alliance (ԵԼ ք դաշ ի նք) / alliance EXIT

The alliance consists of three parties:

- Bright Armenia (Lusavor Hayastan),
- Civil Contract (Kaghatsiakan Paymanagir) and
- Republic Party (Hanrapetutyun)

The leaders of the alliance list: Edmon Marukyan, Nikol Pashinyan, Aram Sargsyan

Website: <http://www.brightarmenia.am/en/1/home.htm> , <https://civilcontract.am/>

About the alliance: In December 2016, Bright Armenia, Civic Contract and Republic Party formed a coalition to participate in the parliamentary elections. The first two are led by active MPs- Edmon Marukyan and Nikol Pashinyan respectively, and the last one by Aram Sargsyan.

About leaders of the alliance: Edmon Marukyan, the first on the YELQ list, is a lawyer, and since 2012 the MP from the 30th electoral district in the Lori Province. Armenian media responded to his election, calling him the "[Bright Spot](#)" or "[Kinder Surprise](#)" of the election in 2012.

Since 2001, Marukyan has been actively involved in human rights activism in Armenia as the head of several human rights NGOs. From 2007 to 2008 he lectured Philosophy and Political Science at the Vanadzor State Pedagogical Institute. From 12 December, 2015 Marukyan leads the Bright Armenia party.³²



Nikol Pashinyan, the second on the YELQ list, is an Armenian politician, journalist, and publicist. He was a leading member of the Armenian National Congress (see ANC). He was the editor of Armenia's liberal daily newspaper Haykakan Zhamanak (The Armenian Times), which has been highly critical of the administrations of Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan.



Pashinyan supported Levon Ter-Petrosyan in the 2008 presidential elections, when he was described by WikiLeaks as Ter-Petrosyan's "customary crowd-warmer"³³ He went into hiding shortly after the deadly unrest following the election; he was wanted by the Armenian police on allegations of murder and initiating mass disorder. In June 2009, he turned himself in to the police.³⁴ He was released following a general amnesty in May 2011, nearly two years after he was jailed. In 2012, he was elected to the National Assembly of Armenia. Pashinyan with other six politicians and activists started a new political group called Civil Contract aimed at overthrowing Serzh Sargsyan.

Aram Sargsyan, the third leading figure of the alliance, is Vazgen Sargsyan's brother. Vazgen was a central figure in Armenian politics, served as Defense Minister of Armenia from 1995-1999, and in 1999 he became Prime Minister after his coalition "Miasnutyun" acquired the majority of the seats in the parliament. On 27 October 1999, he



³² Edmon Marukyan to head "Bright Armenia" opposition political party, 12 December, 2015, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/829442/edmon-marukyan-to-head-%E2%80%9Cbright-armenia%E2%80%9D-opposition-political-party.html>, 13.03.2017.

³³ Pennington (13 February 2008). "Armenia: Pre-Election tour of Ararat marz", https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08YEREVAN118_a.html, 13.03.2017.

³⁴ "Hello. I am Nikol Pashinyan, and I came to be arrested": Armenia oppositionist wanted by police surrenders and anticipates punishment, 02.07.09, https://www.armenianow.com/news/10130/hello_i_am_nikol_pashinyan_and, 13.03.2017.

was assassinated in the National Assembly of Armenia, which led to six-month long crisis in the government.³⁵ To overcome the crisis Aram Sargsyan served as the Prime Minister from 3 November 1999 to 2 May 2000. In 2001 he founded the oppositional party "Republic". He supported Levon Ter-Petrosyan in the 2008 Armenian presidential election. Sargsyan was elected to the Armenian National Assembly in May 2012 with the Armenian National Congress, but he didn't accept the seat.³⁶

Ideology: Liberal

European agenda: The YELQ holds a rather pro-European stance; according to the program YELQ proposes to renegotiate the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) with the EU.³⁷ The longstanding head of the European Movement in Armenia, Viktor Yengibaryan, is running on the YELQ list and advises them on EU affairs.

Foreign policy agenda: Balanced foreign policy towards EU, the USA and Russia. Regarding relations with Turkey, YELQ is for the opening of the Armenian-Turkish border without pre-conditions. As for the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, YELQ is not inclined to accept any kind of compromises until Azerbaijani government stops its war rhetoric.

Economic and social agenda: The "YELQ" alliance states to target a free and competitive market, a corruption-free administration and good governance. Its positions are strongly inspired by liberal market theories. They also aim to create more industrial opportunities for Armenia.

35 Opinion: Armenia braces itself for more "competitive", even if ever so slightly, elections, 01 February 2017, http://commonspace.eu/index.php?m=23&news_id=4089, 14.03.2017.

36 No Thanks: Party leader Sargsyan joins Ter-Petrosyan in giving up mandate, 11.05.12, https://www.armenianow.com/vote_2012/38012/may_vote_aram_sargsyan_refuse_deputy_mandate

37 Vahram Ter-Matevosyan, Foreign Policy Discourse: Comparing Election Platforms, <http://evnreport.com/elections-2017/foreign-policy-discourse>, 13.03.2017.

Background information

Legislative elections will take place on 2 April 2017. It is the first time after the referendum of 2015 that Armenia will hold elections. The constitutional referendum reinforces, on the one hand, the powers of the parliament and turns Armenia's political system into a parliamentary one, and, on the other hand, reduces considerably the President's powers. Following the referendum, a new electoral code was adopted in May 2016 which was largely welcomed by the OSCE/ODIHR as it included many of the recommendations made by the Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR Committee.

These developments caused substantial changes on the political landscape, primarily in the form of the emergence of new parties and blocs which will participate in the upcoming election alongside the traditional political forces.

The last legislative elections were held on 6 May 2012. The current parliament consists of 131 deputies. The ruling party, the Republican Party of Armenia (RPA) holds 69 seats and forms a coalition with the Armenia Revolutionary Federation (ARF) which holds 5 seats. The Prosperous Armenia Party (PAP) holds 33 seats, the Armenian National Congress (ANC) 7, Orinats Yerkir (now Armenian Renaissance) 5, Heritage Party 3 and there are 8 independent MPs. Under the old electoral system, out of a total of 131 seats in the National Assembly, 90 were distributed between parties using a proportional system, while the other 41 were elected from the constituencies by a majoritarian voting system.

The new electoral code sets out that **101 deputies** will be elected to the National Assembly and they will be elected by a **two-tier proportional system**. More precisely, there will be two different lists on the same ballot: on the one side, there will be the **party's national list**, on the other side, there will be the **party's district list** which will have up to 15 candidates. The voter can, in addition to choosing from a national list, also give a preference vote to one district candidate.³⁸ Out of the 101 seats, four are reserved for national minorities (Russians, Yezidis, Kurds and Assyrians).

The new electoral code secures a **25% gender quota** for the closed national lists and ensures that per every 4 candidates, one has to be of a lesser represented gender. However, for the district lists, which are open, there is no strict rule for the placement, only that the better represented gender should not have more than 75% of places on the list. In addition to that, if a female candidate doesn't assume her post, the seat is awarded to the next female candidate.³⁹

In order to form a government, a so-called **stable majority** of 54% of the seats is required. If no party or bloc, reaches this threshold, but achieves a minimum of 50%+1 of the votes, it will be granted more seats to reach the **stable majority**. The other parties and blocs are not affected by this addition will maintain the number of seats they won. In this case the total number of seats in the parliament would exceed 101.

If no party or bloc achieves either of these criteria, the law provides a deadline until which up to three parties or blocs can form a governing coalition. If no government can be formed after the first round of negotiations and votes of confidence in the Parliament, a second round will be held between the two candidates (parties or alliances) who garnered the highest support. A short deadline for formation of new alliances is provided before the second round of voting in the Parliament. This portion of the electoral code was deemed unclear by the Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR.⁴⁰

The nine parties and blocs described in this paper will run for the upcoming elections. Independent candidates are no longer allowed under the new Electoral Code.

In order to be represented in the parliament, **parties must pass a threshold of 5%** and **blocs / alliances a threshold of 7%**. The leader of the party or bloc represented with most seats in the parliament will be appointed as Prime Minister whose powers as the head of the government will significantly increase after the Presidential elections of 2018.

³⁸ The new electoral code divides Armenia in 13 district lists.

³⁹ <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/armenia/246566?download=true>

⁴⁰ *ibid*.