



Armenia

Last update:	8 June 2009
Author:	
Population:	2,967,004 (July 2008 est.)
Prime minister:	Tigran Sargsyan
President:	Serzh Sargsyan
Governemental type:	Presidential representative republic
Ruling coalition:	RP, PA
Last election:	Presidential February 19, 2008
Next election:	Parliamentary 2012
Sister parties:	



“Another major step towards democracy”, that’s what president Robert Kocharian of Armenia said about the general elections in Armenia on 12 May 2007. The elections, which brought a victory to the pro-government parties, were assessed by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe / Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) election observation mission as being largely in accordance with international standards, although some issues remained. It was hopefully proclaimed that the elections could be seen as a further step to democratisation of the country.

INTRODUCTION

The 19 February 2008 presidential elections shed a dark light on the democratisation process in Armenia. After a campaign period marked with incidents, the then Prime Minister and presidential candidate Serzh Sargsyan was proclaimed the winner within a single round. The opposition, led by former president Levon Ter-Petrossian, protested these results, claiming widespread election fraud had taken place. After the opposition staged protest rallies in the Armenian capital Yerevan that lasted for over a week, the police violently dispersed the demonstrations, and a state of emergency was proclaimed which was used by the government to curb down political liberties in Armenia. The international community also protested the authorities’ conduct .

One year after the presidential elections, and following the latest municipal elections held on 31 May 2009, political tensions continue to linger on.

ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL SITUATION

Armenia is a presidential representative republic. The president is head of state and the head of a pluriform government. The executive power is exercised by the government, the legislative power by both the government and the parliament.

The Parliament –the Armenian National Assembly– consists of 131 deputies that are directly elected every four years. The Electoral Code, amended in 2005, provides for the deputies to be elected according to a mixed electoral system. 90 deputies represent the parties or blocs that have overcome 7% voting threshold in a single national constituency. They are elected on a proportional basis. The other 41 deputies are elected from single-mandate



constituencies by means of a one-round majoritarian system.

Political party system

Since the constitutional amendments of 2005, political parties have gained power with respect to the years before 2005. The influence of the President has therefore diminished compared to the power of the political parties. Groups in parliament have changed, new ones have been formed and oligarchs gained influence over politics. New political parties were created based on economic power, rather than on political ideology. Still, most parties present themselves with a certain ideological background.

Parliamentary elections 2007

Since the parliamentary elections on 30 May 1999, the political landscape of Armenia has experienced significant realignments. The most important reason of these changes was the attack on the Parliament on 27 October 1999. Prime Minister Vazgen Sarkisian, speaker of parliament Karen Demirchian and six other parliamentarians were assassinated.

On 12 May 2007 parliamentary elections were held. According to International Election Observation Mission (OSCE, PACE and the European Parliament) the poll largely met the international standards, regardless some irregularities. The opposition nevertheless contested the election outcome by holding street demonstrations. Despite several appeals by some opposition parties for a re-run of the election, the Constitutional Court denied the request.

The election brought an enormous victory to the ruling party, the Republican Party of Armenia (HHK). The party doubled its number of seats by winning 64 out of the 131 seats in parliament. The other party of the ruling coalition, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) increased its representation in Parliament by five seats. Much of the power in Parliament is now concentrated in the faction of the RP. Another remarkable outcome is the fact that two new parties – "Prosperous Armenia" and "Heritage" ("Zharangutiun") – entered Parliament. The former instantly became the second party in Parliament with 24 seats, while the latter came in with 6 seats.

Following the results, the RP formed a coalition government with Prosperous Armenia (BHK), which together hold 89 of the 131 seats in Parliament. Later the ARF joined the coalition, although the party was not needed to form a majority in Parliament.

Presidential elections 2008

The last Presidential elections were held on 19 February 2008. Although nine candidates competed in the elections, there were two main contenders. Then PM Serzh Sargsyan, a trustee of then incumbent President Robert Kocharian, was supported by the ruling coalition, and gained 52.8% of the votes. The other important candidate was ex-President Ter-Petrosyan, who won 21.5%. Ter-Petrosyan was supported by a number of opposition parties during the elections, led by the Heritage Party. Kocharian was not allowed to compete in the elections as he had served two terms. Turnout was 70.5%.

According to the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission the poll was "mostly in line with international commitments" but consisted of several shortcomings. Oppositionists supporting Ter-Petrosyan complained nevertheless about fraud. From 21 February to 1 March demonstrators started a string of peaceful rallies with the aim to force new elections. President Kocharian, however, spoke of an "illegitimate attempt to take over power". On 1 March, the police violently dispersed the rally which led to many injuries and 10 fatalities. Hereafter, a 20-day state of emergency was declared by the authorities, which imposed a ban on rallies and gatherings in Yerevan and Ter-Petrosyan was placed under house arrest by the police.

On 9 April, Sargsyan was inaugurated as the new President. A new coalition memorandum was signed by four of the five parties represented in the Parliament, including two parties that had outspokenly criticized the government during the recent election campaign: the Country of Law (Orinats Yerkir) Party and the ARF. The same day, the authorities accepted the Council of Europe's demands to stop the crackdown on the opposition after the PACE had adopted a resolution threatening to suspend the voting rights of Armenian delegates unless the authorities would



allow an independent investigation into the post-election violence. PACE furthermore demanded the urgent release of individuals arrested for their political activities and the scrapping of restrictions on freedom of assembly imposed after the protests.

Municipal elections 2009

On May 28th Yerevan for the first time ever held municipal elections since the Armenia's first constitution in 1995. The vote was established as a result of EU-backed constitutional amendments in 2007. Residents of Yerevan for the first time could elect a municipal assembly empowered to choose the city's next mayor. Previously, city leaders were appointed by Armenia's President. To gain representation in the Assembly, parties were supposed to win at least 7 per cent of the vote, while the alliance was supposed to win 9 per cent to gain seats. A party or bloc getting more than 40 per cent of the vote could single-handedly appoint the next mayor. The vote was important as over one-third of the total electorate and over half of Armenia's economic potential are concentrated in Yerevan. Gaining the powers of Yerevan's mayor, this person could become an important political figure in the country, being even in the position of challenging the authorities.

The great winner in the vote –which had a turnout of 53%– was the ruling HHK with 47.4% of the votes, which was largely enough to re-install its top candidate, Gagik Beglaryan, as Yerevan mayor. BHK followed with 22.7%. HAK –led by Armenia's first President Levon Ter Petrosyan– gained 17.4%. The Orinats Yerkir (Rule of Law) party got 5.2% while the ARF received 4.7%. The People's Party and the Labour Socialist Party of Armenia (LSPA) gained 2.1% and 0.5% respectively. As the legal vote threshold for single parties seeking to gain seats in the Yerevan's Council of Elders is set at 7%, neither of the four latter will be represented in the new municipal assembly.

Fraud allegations

Both HAK and the opposition Zharangutyun (Heritage) party complained about widespread fraud, mainly vote buying. Observers, however, among which the CEC and the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, described the elections as "largely democratic" despite some "serious deficiencies", which eventually had some "influence on the final results". HAK said that with these elections Sargsyan has closed the path of dialogue, and that it will boycott the City Council.

LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

After the municipal elections political tensions continue to linger on despite some installed stability. The opposition remains relatively fragmented. Besides that the regime is failing to consolidate its power amid lack of progress in the dispute with Turkey, negotiations over Nagorno Karabakh and the deepening economic recession. At the same time, it is far from clear whether the opposition offers a constructive alternative.

A positive development, that could offer some opportunity in restarting the dialogue between the regime and the opposition, is the general amnesty –approved by the President on 19 June 2009– to release opposition members that were imprisoned following the 2008 post-election violence. According to the adopted bill only those oppositionists who were sentenced to up to five years in prison and had already served one third of their sentences will be released. Thus, on 22 June the first four opposition figures were set free. Parliament deputies Hakob Hakobian and Miasnik Malkhasian as well as former Foreign Minister Aleksandr Arzumanyan –found guilty of organizing the post-election violence– were released after the end of their high-profile trials. Later, more than a dozen of other opposition members were also released. On a rally on 2 July to welcome the released oppositionists Ter-Petrosyan described their release as a "great victory" for his HAK and a "defeat" for the authorities. Several other Ter-Petrosyan loyalists said they will now be "even more resolute" in challenging the regime and urge for the release of another two dozen imprisoned opposition members. The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) praised the amnesty bill saying the release of the political prisoners is a "clear indication of the willingness of the authorities to overcome the political crisis and its consequences".



IMPORTANT POLITICAL ISSUES

Nationalities

Armenia is ethnically the most homogenous state of all former Soviet States; ethnic minorities in Armenia constitute only about 2 percent of the population. Kurds, Greeks, Jews, Russians and Assyrians are the main minorities, but these are mostly well integrated into society.

The Armenian population is divided among other groups. These groups all have a different notion of being Armenian. Hayastantsis – literally 'Armenians'–, Karabakhtsis, refugees from Azerbaijan and Diaspora Armenians are all different groups. Since the presidency of Robert Kocharian, the Karabakhtsis have been the major player in the political arena.

In February 2007, the Armenian parliament passed a new law on dual nationalities passed. The law states that it is now possible for Armenians abroad (the Armenian Diaspora) and for Armenians living in Armenia to have a double nationality with two passports. From now on, the Armenian Diaspora has the opportunity to vote in their (historic) motherland for the elections. Before the 2007 elections, it was for Armenians abroad only possible to vote in the Armenian diplomatic missions in their country.

Clans

The Armenian society is predominantly divided into clans. These clans are groups of people related by kinship, friendship or acquaintance and play an important role in the functioning of society. This means that in all aspects of society, be it family life, business, politics or in crime, personal connections can strongly influence the distribution of money, means and positions.

Similar clans are present in the political life of the country, and some key groups can be identified. Since 1997, when Kocharian became the Armenian prime minister, the Karabakh clan has been the driving political force in the country. Kocharian created his own support group by bringing 'his people' from Karabakh and appointing them to key socio-economic positions. He appointed his closest ally, Serzh Sarkisian, former commander of the armed Karabakh forces, as minister of defence. Other Karabakhis were made heads of universities, hospitals and schools.

The opposition consists of several other clans. The most important figures of the Demirchian clan are father Karen and son Stepan. The family has been very influential since the 1970s, when Karen Demirchian was First Secretary of the Communist Party. When he was killed in the attack on the parliament of 1999, his son took over his position and became an opposition leader.

The Sarkisian clan is another powerful clan. Vazgen Demirchian, former defence minister, became prime minister in 1999, but like Karen Demirchian, he was assassinated later that year. His brother Aram Sarkisian succeeded him and became prime minister for a few months. Later he formed the opposition Republic Party. The youngest brother Armen Sarkisian is currently in prison on charges of ordering the killing of the head of State Television, Tigran Nagdalian, in December 2003.

Economic Situation

Armenia has experienced a significant economic growth. At a yearly 13,9 percent (2005 est.), its GDP growth is higher than in some other former Soviet republics. Neighbouring countries like Georgia (7% GDP Growth, 2005 est.) and Azerbaijan (32,5%, 2006 est.) score a high GDP growth rates as well. The positive economic indicators and the macroeconomic reforms that were implemented in order to be incorporated into international organisations give the Armenian economy an aura of stability and progression. President Kocharian's commitment to the distribution of some basic needs, like electricity and the payment of pensions for instance, has also contributed to the sense of increasing economic stability, and compared to the situation during the economic crisis in the '90s, this idea is true. Still, the majority of the economic growth is concentrated in Yerevan, especially in the circles around the government.



Poverty among the Armenian population is a relatively important issue in the country. The official figures show that 15 percent (2004 est.) of Armenians live at or below the poverty level, some estimate these figures even higher. Although the issue has been a subject in the power struggle between Robert Kocharian and the oppositional political parties, the government shows little initiative to provide a more equal spread of wealth and does not do much to reduce the high levels of poverty. However, the neighbouring countries like Georgia (54%, 2001 est.) and Azerbaijan (49%, 2002 est.) score much worse than Armenia on percentage below the poverty line. It must be noticed that the estimations for both countries are the most recent estimations available and that the results therefore could be somewhat outdated.

The little initiative to provide a more equal spread of wealth can be attributed to the high influence of the business elite in Armenia. Since independence, the rise of a new elite, the oligarchs, has troubled the Armenian economical reform. These influential businessmen were able to obtain seats in parliament by means of bribery and manipulation to win the elections in single-mandate constituencies. Especially on certain issues, like poverty, anti-corruption, criminal justice reform and the privatization program, the political influence of the business elite is a possible liability to progressive reforms in Armenia.

The levels of real unemployment is high as 30 percent and an estimated 20 percent of the Armenian workforce has left the country to seek employment in Russia, the EU or the US. Since independence, over one million Armenians have left the country and the bad economic situation has been one of the major causes of the exodus. Despite the economic growth and foreign investments, the social-economic position of many Armenians still hasn't changed. Analysts state that this is caused by the situation of "neither war nor peace" in Armenia.

Corruption

Another problem in Armenia is the high level of corruption. Just like its neighbouring countries Georgia and Azerbaijan, Armenia is part of the problem of corruption in the former Soviet Union. All the countries (Transparency International Corruption Perception Index 2006) can be found among the 75 most corrupt countries in the world. Armenia even scores relatively well with a score of 2.9 (1 is highly corrupt, 10 is not corrupt at all) and is ranked 93 out of 163 countries. Azerbaijan, for instance, scores much worse with 2,2 and a 130th place. Armenia's corruption level has been relatively stable since 2001.

Political party funding – business involvement

Something that is not contributing to the stability of political parties in Armenia is the involvement of businessmen in Armenian politics. In Armenia it's common for big businessmen to support political parties financially in the run-up to the elections. When a party, for some reason, does not pass the electoral threshold, the supporting businessman will most likely leave the party. This kind of political-economic involvement makes it difficult for parties (with less electoral fortune in their first elections) to survive in Armenian politics. It is therefore hard for opposition parties to take a stand against the pro-government parties and to build a vivid oppositional block. New parties have to have instant success in order to survive and to gain media-exposure.

The Armenian Diaspora, worldwide around 8.000.000 Armenians, is also very important for the funding of political parties in Armenia. Especially the ARF depends heavily on the funds of foreign benefactors, as, in fact, it was originally established in the Diaspora in the late 19th century.

Human rights

According to Human Rights Watch, the Armenian government has done little to address serious human rights violations. They state that threats to media freedom in Armenia continued in 2006, as more journalists faced harassment and attacks, and broadcast media lacked pluralism and remain largely pro-government. Furthermore, torture and ill-treatment remain serious problems in places of detention and the military. The ombudsperson was dismissed in January 2006, apparently for criticizing the government.



The November 2005 national referendum approved constitutional amendments that aimed to introduce stronger checks and balances among government branches. However, according to Human Rights Watch, Council of Europe legal experts approved the draft amendments, but Armenia's political opposition contested the legitimacy of the Armenian authorities and called for boycotting the referendum. Council of Europe observers expressed concern about the integrity of the vote.

Gender representation

Women continue to be underrepresented as candidates and political party activists. During the last parliamentary elections in 2007, only four percent of the candidates in the majoritarian-system, and fifteen percent of the candidates on proportional lists were women. All parties and blocs met their obligation to include a minimum of 15% of women on their candidate lists, but most women were placed on positions that were highly unlikely to be supported with enough votes. Just four parties were an exception to that rule.

Due to Armenia's traditional, Christian society, highly educated women lost a great amount of their economic independence after the country's political independence due to a major economic crisis. Their confinement to mainly the private sphere (family) was restored, as a result of massive unemployment. Nowadays, the percentage of women in politics is low, around 10%. The only party that seems to be a deviation from this is the Heritage party.

Out of the 131 elected deputies to the National Assembly (2007 composition), 12 are women, which is 9,2% of the total number of seats. Armenia is ranked 100th out of 188 countries in this.

Media

The general position of the media in Armenia is weak. Journalists often practice self-censorship because they are subject to a system of patronage. They risk being harassed or threatened and oftentimes choose to refrain from bringing up certain subjects.

There are many television stations, but most of them are leisure-oriented. Independent television stations covering news are practically nonexistent. The licences of the last two independent stations doing critical reporting, A1+ and Noyan Tapan, were not renewed in 2003.

The Armenian newspapers are mainly in the hands of private owners and are not subjected to control from a professional supervising body. This has led to the lowering of journalistic standards and has transformed newspapers into carriers of personal political agendas. Printed media however, has a limited impact, as the circulation is very low. The distribution networks are bad and the costs of paper and ink are high leading to high newspaper prices. The Armenian citizens cannot afford this.

Freedom House, an independent non-governmental organisation that supports the expansion of freedom in the world, marks Armenia as a country that is not free (Freedom House report 2006) regarding the press. They confirm the above remarks that the intimidation and self-censorship of journalist, together with the great influence of the private owners of newspapers, make Armenia into a country without a free press.

Constitutional reform

On 1 September 2005, the Armenian National Assembly passed a number amendments to the Armenian constitution and the electoral code. The bulk of the amendments was aimed at imposing a more strict separation of powers between the judicial, executive and legislative branches. The constitutional changes were endorsed by the international community in order to sustain the parliamentary democracy in the country.

The President lost its power to alone dissolve the parliament. In addition to this, the parliament's voice is decisive when a new government is about to be formed. In the past, this authority was solely in the hands of the President.



Another reform was the installation of an Ombudsperson. This reform could be seen as an important step towards ensuring and protecting human rights in Armenia. The appointment of the National Commission on Radio and TV was the third constitutional reform. In the past, the Commission was appointed by the President. After the constitutional reform, half of the members is appointed by National Assembly (with exclusion of members of political parties) and half is appointed by the President. Other reforms concerned the execution of the foreign policy of Armenia. In the past, the control of the foreign policy was in the hands of the President of the Republic. After the amendments, it is stated that the President “determines and implements the foreign policy jointly with the government”.

Probably most important was the electoral reform. The number of seats elected from party lists increased (from 75 to 90) and the number of seats elected in single member constituencies decreased from 56 to 41. A second important reform was the new quota for women in parliament. Parties are now obliged to include a minimum of 15% of women on their party-lists. This was only 5% previously.

In November 2007, a referendum was held on the amendments, as they had passed the National Assembly. The amendments were supported by 93 percent of the 1.5 million people who cast ballots, according to official results. However, the referendum was criticised by the international community.

The Nagorno Karabakh conflict

One of the most important and long-lasting issues that influence the political situation in Armenia has been the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. The situation has not been resolved, and continues to influence the country in several ways. The relation with neighbouring states, the relation with the U.S, the domestic economic situation and the social divide within the Armenian citizens are all influenced by this conflict.

The region of Nagorno Karabakh, an Armenian-populated enclave in Azerbaijan, was transferred to Azeri control in 1923 as part of a Stalinist campaign to ‘divide and rule’ its satellite republics. The death toll in the conflict over this region that broke out after the collapse of the Soviet Union has been put as high as 20,000, with refugee numbers estimated at over one million.

A cease-fire agreement was signed between Azerbaijan, Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh in July 1994, the status quo being that the region of Nagorno Karabakh and some surrounding territories have been under Armenian control. The Azerbaijan government accuses the Armenian Government of pursuing an active settlement strategy, trying to increase the Armenian share of the population in this region. The Armenian Government denies this.

In the meantime political negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan continue over the disputed territory. In 1999, a number of land swaps were proposed which almost led to a solution of the conflict. The killing in the Armenian parliament however, ended these negotiations. In 2001, another proposal was dismissed.

The international negotiations conducted in the framework of the OSCE/Minsk Group continue with ups and downs, as well as intensified face-to-face meetings between the two Presidents, but have so far failed to bring about a peace agreement.

The issue of Nagorno-Karabakh is highly sensitive among the Armenian population, and potentially dangerous for Armenian politicians. When, for instance, former-president Ter-Petrosyan called for compromises with Azerbaijan on the subject of Nagorno-Karabakh, the statements can be said to have eventually lead to him stepping down.

The Nagorno-Karabakh issue puts an immense pressure on Armenian domestic politics. Apart from the trade embargos from Turkey and Azerbaijan that lead to food and energy shortages in the 90s, the conflict has led to a social divide. Hayastantsis, and especially Yerevan residents, see the Karabakhtsis as outsiders in their city and hold them responsible for the corruption of the ruling clan.

The chances of a new war with Azerbaijan weigh heavy on the Armenian people. According to a poll conducted by the Armenian Centre for National and International Studies in August 2004, almost 50 percent of all Armenians believe that war with Azerbaijan is the country’s most serious threat in the next five years.



International relations

In the history of the country, many foreign powers have ruled and influenced Armenia. In recent history, the Soviet–Union and the Russians were of great influence in Armenia. However, the geographical position of Armenia has brought also influences from the West (Europe) and from the middle–east (Iran). This history of diverse influences is reflected in the way Armenia is handling its foreign–relations in the present time. Armenia is not focused on one foreign partner, but has good relationships with Russia, the EU and the US.

Over the years, Armenia joined several international organisations including the OSCE, the U.N. and the Council of Europe.

Russia

Historically the relationship with Russia is very close. As a former Soviet–Union republic, Armenia was under Russia's influence for decades. Since 1991, the relationship remained very close. It also had a strategic purpose because of Armenia's hostile relationship with its eastern (Azerbaijan) and western (Turkey) neighbours. The last few years, the relationship between Russia and Armenia has become more difficult because of the closer Russia–Azerbaijan ties and the closer ties between Armenia and United States and Iran.

Despite the frayed relationship, on 29 August 2006 Armenia and Russia signed a treaty on friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance. By signing the treaty, Russia is obliged to defend Armenia when the country is attacked by a third country.

Iran

Armenia has a good relationship with Iran. The relationship between both countries goes back thousands of years. Both countries have a good economic relationship, especially in the field of energy supply. On 19 March 2007, President Kocharian and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad officially inaugurated a gas pipeline between Iran and Armenia. In return for each cubic meter gas from Iran, Armenia is obliged to send 3Kwh of electric energy back to Iran. Currently, Armenia and Iran are also working on a new highway to boost the trade between the two countries.

Politically, it is Armenia's merit that it has a good relationship with Iran while also having a good relationship with the US. The recent dispute between Iran and the US about Iran's nuclear program, has had, surprisingly, little effect on the Armenia–US relationship.

Turkey

Since February 2009, it seemed that the relations between Armenia and Turkey were at a turning point after a historic football match –coining the phrase 'football diplomacy'– to which Armenian President Sarkisian invited his Turkish counterpart Gul. In April 2009, Armenia and Turkey agreed on a 'road map' to normalise bilateral ties and re–open the Turkish–Armenian border. The agreement would promote peace, security and stability in the region. It is, however, undisclosed to the public and remains controversial, especially for the Armenian opposition.

One of the disagreements involves Turkey's pre–condition of the Nagorno–Karabakh conflict being resolved before Turkey is willing to open the border; a connection that is unacceptable to the Armenian opposition. The latter also accused President Sarkisian of damaging the country's national interests by, among others, allowing a commission to investigate the nature of massacres of Armenians in the Ottoman empire, that Armenians refer to as genocide.

In October 2009 a return football match between Armenia and Turkey is planned in Turkey. Recently, President Sarkisyan threatened to refuse Gül's reciprocative invitation unless Turkey takes concrete steps to re–open the Turkish–Armenian border.

The Armenia –Turkey relationship has been troublesome for ages. Between 1895 and 1920, allegedly 1.5 million Armenians living in Turkey lost their lives through violence and starvation. In 1915 thousands of Armenians were massacred in Turkey. The latter has never admitted to the Armenian accusation of it constituting a genocide. This debate still rules the relations between the two countries. Turkey closed its borders with Armenia in 1993 during the Nagorno–Karabakh conflict to show its solidarity with Azerbaijan. The country refuses to lift the



blockade, demanding that Armenia stops its international effort to get the genocide recognised.

European Union

Relations between the EU and Armenia are based on a Partnership and Co-operation Agreement, which provides a framework for the EU to support democratisation and market liberalisation in Armenia. The EU has an interest in developing a politically and economically prosperous Armenia, as part of the South Caucasus region. In this respect, the negotiations for the settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict are important, as well as the important geo-strategic position of the region that gives access to the Caspian Sea countries.

In June 2004, Armenia was included in the 'European Neighbourhood Policy' (ENP) program. This policy was designed to prevent the emergence of new dividing lines between the EU and its neighbours and to offer them a chance to participate in various EU activities, through greater political, security, economic and cultural co-operation. On 14 November 2006, the EU signed the ENP action plan for Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

NATO and the US

Armenia joined the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program in 1994. This program is aimed at defence cooperation of NATO and its partner countries and is designed to reinforce stability and reduce the risk of conflict. Partner countries work on developing the interoperability of their military forces and have to reform the defence system. Since 2006, Armenia has an Individual Partnership Action Plan with NATO.

In attempts to intensify NATO contacts, the Armenian government decided to delegate a peacekeeping battalion to Kosovo, and to join the coalition of countries in the 'war against terror'. Some Armenian troops have been stationed in Iraq to assist in peacekeeping and the reconstruction of the country.

The US and Armenia have signed several treaties on economic cooperation since Armenia's independence. Besides the economic relations, the US tries to sustain the process of democratization by means of trainings for political parties. The large size of the Armenian Diaspora in the United States has arguably also contributed to the good relations between the tw

However, the relationship has become more difficult due to the good relations between Armenia and Iran. As part of the "Axes of Evil", Iran has experienced an increasing level of American interest in the country.

SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTIES

Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) – "Dashnaktsutyun"

Leaders: Hrant Markarian (chairman of The Bureau, the international body of the ARF), Armen Rustamyan (Chairman of the ARF Armenia Supreme Council) and Vahan Hovhannesyanyan (number one on the ARF Party list).

Seats: 16

The ARF was established in 1890 in Tbilisi. During the First Armenian Republic the party was in power, but it was banned following the Sovietisation of 1920. The party, however, continued to function in the Diaspora. The party was reintroduced in Armenia after 1988, but was banned in 1994 by Ter-Petrosyan on allegations of terrorism. The President took this and other allegations (following the Constitution) to the Supreme Court. The Court concurred only with one of the President's accusations, that the ARF broke the Law on Parties by having non-Armenian citizens in its leadership. In 1998 Kocharian re-allowed the party and asked it to support him in his campaign for the presidential elections. Since then, the party has been backing him. The support is however more pragmatic than ideological.

The nationalistic ARF has set its mind on "the creation of a free, Independent and United Armenia" and is prominent in Nagorno-Karabakh. The "Dashnakts" hope to once reunite the entire Armenian diaspora on the united Armenian lands. The party therefore is popular among the Diaspora Armenians and receives much financial support from them. The main objectives of the party are the establishment of a minimum wage of 50,000 Drams, the establishment of an anti-corruption entity and a minimum retirement benefit.

On its website, the party describes itself as essentially nationalist, socialist, democratic and revolutionary. The ARF



is internationally recognised as a social democratic party, and became a full member of the SI in 2003. Already in 1907, the ARF became a member of the SI. Following the changes in the SI statutes, which required that only parties functioning in their homeland can be members, the ARF membership of the SI was terminated. Currently, the party is seeking to intensify the relationship with the Party of European Socialists, the PES.

The ARF voiced considerable critique on the conduct of the 2008 presidential elections, expressing its concern about incidents during the campaign period and stating that “the atmosphere of intolerance sowed in society, the violation of elementary norms of political struggle, the personal offences addressed to each other by the rival candidates and their team fellows, the threat of reprisals, as well as the sowing of enmity and mutual hatred in society, have reached a very dangerous level.” After the elections, parliamentary speaker and ARF party leader Vehan Hovhannesian resigned from office out of frustration with the alleged election violations. Although the ARF later stated it would not dispute the results of the elections, this caused some tensions in the governing coalition, two parties out of which had supported winning candidate Sargsyan and were thus indirectly criticized for the election fraud.

The ARF has a very extensive network of local organisations, also beyond the Armenian borders, and is structurally well-functioning.

In April 2009, ARF left the ruling coalition because it did not agree with conditions of the 'road map' agreement between Turkey and Armenia. ARF found that concessions made to Turkey undermined Armenia's sovereign existence.

Social Democratic “Hnchakyan” Party (SDHP)

Leader: Lyudmila Sargsyan

The Social Democrat Hunchakian Party (SDHP), also known as Hentchak, is one of the oldest political parties in Armenia and the first Socialist party in the Ottoman Empire. It was founded in 1887 by a group of college students in Geneva, Switzerland, with the goal to gain Armenia's independence from the Ottoman Empire.

The party formally registered in 1991. Its President is Lyudmila Sargsyan. The party aims for democratisation and the establishment of a social-democratic order in the country. It also aims to strengthen Armenia's national security, Armenian statehood and to improve the people's social condition. Hentchak is one of the parties within HAK.

The party has no seats in Parliament.

OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES

Republican Party (RP) – Hayastani Hanrapetakan Kusaktsutyun (HHK)

Leader: Serge Sargsyan

Seats: 64

The conservative Republican Party was founded in 1990 and sees itself as the follower of the ideas of the Armenian national hero Garaghin Nzhdeh. According to his teachings, the trust in the nation's power, will, capacities and future depends on the recognition of the nation. The party therefore stresses the importance of the nation over other religious, social or partisan entities.

The party has its roots in the National Independence Party founded in the 1970's in Soviet Armenia, pursuing Armenia's independence as its goal. The main founder, Ashot Navasartian, as well as former and now deceased



leader Antranik Margaryan were political prisoners in Soviet Times. The current leader, Serge Sargsyan has been a Comsomol leader in Karabagh.

Currently, there are two main fractions of the within the RP: those who have been a member of the Republican Party since the foundation, and those who joined the party during the waves of 1998 and 2006 with Vazgen and Serge Sargsyan respectively. The new wave is then “nouveau riche”, which not had any economic power prior to the break-up of the Soviet Union.

Political stability is the biggest interest for the RP. Other important issues are growth of GDP, increase of number of jobs and a growth of the retirement payments. The RP is conservative in its values, but rather neo-liberal in its economic policies.

In 1998, the small RP was joined by the political branch of the Yerkrepah Union, an organisation of Karabakh war veterans, and became one of the more influential parties of Armenia.

The RP has been in governance since 1998, when it was part of the Unity bloc, a coalition of the RP and the People’s Party. This bloc was dissolved in 2001 as a result of different opinions about new president Kocharian. After the 2003 elections, the RP became the biggest party in parliament when many non-partisan deputies aligned with the RP. These deputies generally are wealthy local elites and have the same interests as the RP: stability in their powerful position.

In 2003, The party formed a coalition with the ARF and in 2007, the party increased its number of seats in parliament up to 64. The party formed a coalition with “Prosperous Armenia”.

Prosperous Armenia Party (BHK)
Seats: 24

This pro-Kocharian party was formed in January 2006 by millionaire businessman Gagik Tsarukian, who is a close associate of the President. In August 2006, Victor Dallakian, a prominent member of the opposition Artarutiun (Justice) bloc, defected to join the BH (however, in the end, Dallakian didn’t became a member of BH). The party is as rather a pro-president party than a pro-coalition party. The faith of the Prosperous Armenia Party is therefore closely aligned to the future of president Kocharian.

After the 2007 elections, Prosperous Armenia formed a coalition with the Republican Party.

Country of Laws – Orinats Yerkir
Leader: Artur Baghdasarian

Seats: 9

This centre-right party was founded in 1998 and aims to reform the state’s legal system. The young party leader, Baghdasarian is in his mid-thirties, has put human rights, reform of the court system, improved availability of legal representation for citizens, and a economic liberal policy high on the agenda.

In 2006, the party ceased to be the third party of the ruling coalition.

“Heritage” – Zharangutiun
Leader: Raffi K. Hovannisian

Seats: 6



The Heritage party was founded in 2002 and nationally registered in 2005. It first competed in the national elections of 2007, in which they entered parliament and won six seats.

Their foreign policy can be characterised as balanced, but also as pro-Western. The Heritage party underlines the good relationship with Russia, China and India, but sees European integration and cooperation as the key to progress. European integration is not a goal on its own, but rather a tool for improved well-being, prosperity and security. With Turkey, Heritage advocates an open and honest dialogue.

Domestic policy goals are legal reforms, the development of civil society and the economic policy of Armenia. Heritage states that sustaining the competitiveness of the market helps the Armenian economy grow.

Furthermore, the party believes that reducing poverty and building good social services are very important for the future of Armenia. By taking these measures, Heritage has the objective to reduce emigration from Armenia and stop the “brain drain” from the country.

It is generally assumed that the “Heritage” party has the only party leader with clean hands and a clear track record in Armenian politics.

People’s Party of Armenia (PPA) – Hayastani Zhoghovrdakan Kusaktsutyun (HZhK)
Chairman: Stepan Demirchian

Karen Demirchian, who was the leader of Communist Armenia from the 70’s to the 90’s, founded the People’s Party in 1998. When he was killed in the 1999 attack on the National Assembly, his son Stepan took his role. This leftist party aims to establish government of the people and the strengthening of the Armenian independent statehood. The PPA was the most important party in the Justice Bloc, which ceased to exist just before the 2007 elections.

The party’s main issues are: a 100% proportional electoral system, the implementation of a new administrative-territorial division in Armenia and the support of closer cooperation with the CIS.

National Democratic Union (NDU) – Azgayin Zhoghovrdavarakan Miutyun (AzhM)
Chairman: Vazgen Manukian

The NDU was founded in 1991. Its party leader, Vazgen Manukian, was a candidate in the presidential elections of 1996, 1998 and 2003, but was not successful. In 1996, Manukian was the candidate of the opposition, which included the ARF, and was considered to have won the elections, which the authorities disregarded. The NDU supported Demirchian in the run-off presidential elections and later that year joined the Justice Bloc to participate in the parliamentary elections.

Republic Party of Armenia – Hanrapetutiun Party
Chairman: Albert M. Bazeyan; Leader: Aram Sarkisian

The conservative Republic Party of Armenia was formed in 2000 out of former RP members. Its leader, Aram Sarkisian, also used to be part of the RP. He was appointed prime minister after his brother and predecessor Vazgen Sarkisian had been killed in the attack on the National Assembly in 1999. In May 2000 however, president Kocharian already discharged him as Sarkisian appeared to be an opponent of his policies. The RP continued to support the president but Sarkisian left the party to found his oppositional Republic Party. In 2003 the Republic Party joined the PPA to which it was already close, and became part of the Justice Alliance.



Democratic Party of Armenia – Hayastani Demokratakan Kusaksutyun (HDK)
Chairman: Aram Sarkisian

The Democratic Party of Armenia, founded in 1991, is a party based on the principles of democratic socialism. After independence the goals were set to create a sovereign, democratic, economically developed state. The party strives for social justice and the rule of law. One of the most important aspects of the party is to ensure the social protection of workers. The motto of the party is: “Freedom, Equality and Solidarity”

National Unity Party (NUP) – Azgayin Miabanutyun Kusaksutyun (AMK)
Chairman: Artashes Gergamyán

No seats

The National Unity Party was the second largest opposition party in Armenia. Artashes Gegamyán, former Yerevan mayor and third runner-up in the 2003 presidential elections, is however a controversial figure among the other opposition parties. The party has some populist characteristics and support for the party shifts from different groups. Most of the supporters are former urban elites.

The NUP promotes tax reductions, state control on exports and natural resources and the increase of production. In his presidential elections campaign, Gegamyán called for Armenia’s economic inclusion in the Russia– Belarus Union.

The NUP is in opposition and has boycotted the National Assembly since January 2004. In May 2007, it lost all its seats (9) in parliament.

United Labour Party (ULP) – Miavorvats Ashkhatankayin Kusaksutyun (MAK)
Chairman: Gurgen Arsenian

No seats

The United Labour Party is a pro-governmental party and holds six seats in parliament. It was established in 2002 was one of the newcomers in the 2003 parliamentary elections. Its leader, Gurgen Arsenian, owner of the Arsoil Petrol Company, was an unaffiliated member of the outgoing parliament. Arsenian used to own Kenton TV, a pro-establishment television station, but this was sold before the 2003 elections.

The subjects of the party’s campaign were mostly centred on the issues of a legal state, human rights and basic freedoms. In May 2007, it lost all its seats (6) in parliament.

Armenian Communist Party (ACP) – Hayastani Kominstantakan Kusaksutyun (HKK)
Chairman: Ruben Tovmasyán

No seats

The ACP, founded in 1920, was the leading political force in the Soviet Republic of Armenia, but lost its power to the Armenian National Movement in 1989. The ACP stopped functioning in 1991, but was re-established in 1994. The 2003 parliamentary elections were the first in which the ACP took part without obtaining any seats.

The current program of the ACP is more or less comparable to that of Soviet times, stipulating for instance the superiority of state ownership and calling for protection of home markets. On the issue of Nagorno Karabakh, the ACP is in favour of self-determination for the region.



Party leader Vladimir Darbinyan participated in the presidential elections, but did not make it to the runoffs. The party supported Stepan Demirchian in the second round. Officially the party supported Artashes Geghamian/National Unity

Armenian Pan-National Movement (APNM) – Haiots Hamazgain Sharzhum (HHS)h
Chairman: Ararat Zurabian

No seats

The APNM was founded in 1988 as the political successor of the Karabakh movement and won the 1989 parliamentary elections in the Soviet Republic of Armenia. One of the party's leaders, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, became president in 1990. The period following that was marked by major reforms, including the introduction of the multiparty system and the market economy. When Ter-Petrosyan was forced to resign in 1998, the party entered a period of political isolation.

The party has a rather nationalistic platform–ANM was always condemned by the political opponents for being antinationalistic, as was implementing/promoting rather balanced foreign policy based on establishing peace and good relations with all its neighbours. and stands for political reforms, guarantying basic rights and creating a social state. The party is an opponent of the current Kocharian regime, calling it “illegal” and favours more independence from Russia.