



Armenia's Economic and Social Problems in the Press Conferences of Political Forces Running for Parliament (According to monitoring results)

From February 6th to April 29th, 2017, the Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression conducted monitoring of press conferences, held by 9 political parties and alliances running for Parliament on April 2, 2017. According to the list published on February 17th, 2017, by the Central Electoral Commission, those political forces are: the EXIT Alliance, the Free Democrats Party, the Armenian Revival Party, the Tsarukyan Alliance, the Congress – People's Party of Armenia Alliance, the Republican Party of Armenia, the Ohanyan – Raffi – Oskanian Alliance, and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation “Dashnaktsutyun”.

The study aimed to reveal the share of references to Armenia's economic and social issues and the solutions proposed to address those issues in the campaign press conferences held by the representatives of political parties. The monitoring activity consisted of 3 stages, each lasting 27 days: the period prior to the official campaign, the official campaign period and the post-campaign stage. Respectively, the first stage lasted from February 6th to March 4th, the second was from March 5th to the 31st, and the third one extended from April 3rd to 29th. A comparative analysis has been conducted on the basis of the data collected in all the 3 stages of monitoring.

MONITORING OVERVIEW

The press conferences held by political parties and alliances, to be more exact, the fragments of press conferences devoted to economic and social topics, extracted from the speeches of the speakers, served as the object of monitoring. The excerpts have been subject to quantitative and qualitative analysis. In addition, all other topics covered in the press conferences have also been quoted, though without any analysis.

According to the monitoring methodology, the economic issues have been divided into the following 3 components:

- Economy: industry/agriculture/tourism/IT sector and so on (current policies and the current situation),
- The RA economic strategy (vision),
- External economic relations (EEU/Russia, EU, Georgia, Iran).

The social topics have been divided into the following 4 components:

- employment/unemployment,
- labor rights,
- healthcare,
- pension system/social benefits/return of deposits/ assistance to vulnerable groups.

When conducting a **quantitative analysis**, the monitoring team highlighted the time allocated to economic and social issues in every press conference under study. Those fragments in the speaker's speech have been measured by minutes/seconds. In some cases absolute figures

have been translated into percentage points in order to reveal proportions and make correlations more obvious. The **qualitative analysis** of economic and social issues mentioned in the press conferences has been conducted by the monitoring team according to the following criteria:

- the overall assessment of the present situation,
- the issues revealed,
- recommendations proposed and their content.

The following sequence of steps has been followed in the analysis of speeches during the press conferences under study:

1. Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression contacted the political forces running for election, as well as the press centers and clubs in the capital, and checked the schedule of planned press conferences,
2. The members of the monitoring team attended the press conferences and recorded the speeches,
3. Afterwards, fragments on the economic and social issues were extracted and subjected to quantitative and qualitative analyses according to the above criteria,
4. In the course of studying the press conferences references made by speakers during conferences have also been recorded and listed.

PRESS CONFERENCE MONITORING RESULTS

1. Participation of Political Forces in Press Conferences

In the first stage of monitoring 63 press conferences, held by the representative of parties and alliances running for Parliament, were studied. 2 and more political figures participated in 31, and that is why the tables and narrative below reveal that the total number of participants exceeded the number of press conferences. 16 of those 31 press conferences were debates, that is to say, they were held with the participation of representatives of different parties and alliances, in the cases of the remaining 15, the participants represented the same pre-electoral camp. The total number of political figures speaking at 63 press conferences was 114.

In the second stage of the study, i.e. during the 27 days of the official campaign, the monitoring team recorded 110 press conferences held by the same parties and alliances, 58 of which marked the participation of 2 and more political figures. 37 out of those 58 press conferences were debates, and the participants in 21 were from the same party or alliance. The total number of political figures speaking at 110 press conferences was 201.

In the third stage of monitoring 9 press conferences were held devoted to the Parliamentary elections with the participation of 15 representatives of the RPA, Exit, Free Democrats, ORO and CPA, that is to say 5 parties and alliances out of the above-mentioned 9. 2 and more figures participated in 5 of these post-election press conferences, however, only one of those was a debate, in the remaining 4 the speakers represented the same political camp.

Thus, during the three stages of the monitoring activity 182 press conferences were held. 2 and more political figures participated in 94, by the way, 54 press conferences were debates, and the participants of 40 were from the same political camp. The total number of speakers at the press conferences was 330.

It is of more interest to note the share of representation of every party and alliance in the quoted totals. The monitoring activity enabled to identify the level of activity by political forces, particularly the degree to which they made use of press conferences as a tool to interact with the electorate and to bring their ideas and approaches home to citizens. In this regard, the

quantitative indicators of participation by the representatives of political parties and alliances in the pre-election press conferences monitored during all the three stages are presented in the table below (**here and in the tables further the order of political forces is presented according to their order in the list published by the CEC**):

Table 1

N	Political forces participating in press conferences	Press conference participation rates			Number of participants		
		Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
1	EXIT Alliance	13	28	1	21	31	2
2	Free Democrats Party	12	24	2	13	26	2
3	Armenian Revival Party	12	20	0	15	20	0
4	Tsarukyan Alliance	5	18	0	5	18	0
5	Congress – PPA Alliance	7	13	0	12	15	0
6	Republican Party of Armenia	17	23	4	17	23	5
7	Communist Party of Armenia	2	22	1	4	32	1
8	Ohanyan – Raffi – Oskanian Alliance of Parties	15	13	2	23	19	5
9	Armenian Revolutionary Federation “Dashnaktsutyun”	3	17	0	4	17	0

The comparison of the data in the table shows that during the first stage of the monitoring process press conferences were used most intensively by the RPA as a pre-election campaign tool. They were followed by Ohanyan – Raffi – Oskanian and Exit Alliances. The Armenian Revival and Free Democrats parties were almost equally active. The Congress – PPA and Tsarukyan Alliances were less active in their participation in press conferences. The ARF and the Communist Party were the least active.

In the second stage of monitoring, i.e. during the 27 days of the official campaign, the situation changed completely. The EXIT Alliance and the Free Democrats Party fell ahead of the ruling RPA in the rate of their participation in press conferences, and one of the leaders of the first stage, i.e. the Ohanyan – Raffi – Oskanian Alliance, reducing its activity and took bottom positions.

Except ORO, all the other participants of the campaign significantly increased their participation in the press conferences in the second stage. Thus, the indicators of the Exit and Free Democrats were multiplied by more than 2 times. The participation of the Armenian Revival party and Congress – PPA Alliance intensified almost equally. And the rates of the most passive participants in the first stage, namely those of the Tsarukyan Alliance, the ARF and the Communist Party, increased respectively by more than 3, 5, and 10 times.

In the post-election period the “wave” of press conferences abruptly decreased. If on certain dates in the last part of the campaign their number amounted to 15, in the post-election period, i.e. in the third stage of the monitoring, as it has already been mentioned, only 9 press conferences were held on the topic of Parliamentary elections. Moreover, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation “Dashnaktsutyun”, the Tsarukyan and Congress – PPA Alliances and the Armenian Revival Party did not participate in press conferences at all. The most active one from among the participating forces was the RPA, followed by the ORO and Free Democrats.

2. Quantitative Data on References to Economic and Social Topics

How did the parties and alliances running for Parliament assess the situation in industry, agriculture, trade and other sectors of economy in the country? What vision did they have regarding the development of those sectors? Which foreign relations were seen as a priority? Which ones were seen as in need for stimulation and growth? What state was the social sector assessed to be in and what was proposed for its improvement? How would unemployment be decreased and how were labor rights protected? What was proposed for the development of the health sector, the improvement of the pensions and benefits system? These were the topics that became major topics of analysis when considering pre-electoral press conferences.

Generalizing the collected data, the monitoring team recorded that the representatives of political forces running for Parliament made few references to social and economic issues during the press conferences held in the 27 days prior to the official campaign (the first stage of monitoring). Moreover, until February 16, 2017, the deadline for the compilation of the slates for the parties and alliances and their submission to the CEC, those issues were not mentioned at all, since the major intrigue of the moment was the slates and the political rearrangements reflected in them. Only after those processes did economic and social issues start to be covered in the speakers' speeches.

During the 27 days of the official campaign (the second stage of monitoring) almost all political forces running for Parliament, except for the ORO Alliance, referred to socio-economic issues much more frequently and in more detail. Those were among the major topics touched upon by the majority of parties and alliances, and in essence, the most important ones for the Communist Party, the Armenian Revival Party and Tsarukyan Alliance, for they paid little attention to other issues.

During the press conferences in the post-election period (the third stage of monitoring) the speakers representing only the Communist Party of Armenia and the Free Democrats did thoroughly cover economic and social issues, while the speakers of the RPA, ORO and Exit either merely mentioned the issues related to those sectors, or completely bypassed them. However, the few press conferences held in the post-election period, mainly focused on the evaluations of the course and results of the April 2nd elections.

The following table presents the overall share of social and economic topics throughout total duration of press conferences by individual political forces (the data on all the 3 stages of monitoring are presented for purposes of comparison):

Table 2

N	Parties and Alliances	Total duration of press conferences			Time devoted to economic and social issues			Percentage		
		Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
1	EXIT Alliance	298m 45s	378m 2s	9m 20s	29m 17s	34 m 7s	0	9,87 %	9,02 %	0%
2	Free Democrats Party	151m 50s	433m 31s	45m 13s	15m 34s	82m 5s	11m 4s	10,25%	18,93%	24,47%
3	Armenian Revival Party	181m 16s	271 m 29s	0	23m 48s	75m 11s	0	13,13 %	27,69%	0
4	Tsarukyan Alliance	87 min.	316m 40s	0	14m 57s	68m 42s	0	17,18%	21,69%	0
5	Congress – PPA Alliance	223 m 53s	380 m 4s	0	4m 14s	53m 28s	0	1,89 %	14,07%	0
6	Republican party of Armenia	309m 5s	531m 41s	72m 42s	7m 45s	33m 21s	27s	2,51%	6,27%	0,62%

7	Communist Party of Armenia	42m 19s	421m 37s	17m 28s	7m 8s	124m 16s	17m 28s	16,86%	29,47%	100%
8	Ohanyan – Raffi – Oskanian Alliance	399m 40s	236m 55s	53m 2s	12m 39s	9m 24s	5s	3,17 %	3,97%	0,16%
9	Armenian Revolutionary Federation “Dashnaktsutyun”	66m 53s	241m 31s	0	5sec	14m 14s	0	0,12%	5,89%	0

As it can be seen from the Table, the Republican Party of Armenia was also among the leaders in terms of the total duration of press conferences (309m 5s) in the first stage of monitoring, yet not the leader: the Ohanyan – Raffi – Oskanian Alliance exceeded them on that indicator (399 m 40 s). However, if considering the time allocated to economic and social issues from the total duration identified neither RPA nor ORO occupied the best positions. It is obvious that the EXIT Alliance (29m17s) and the Armenian Revival Party (23m 48s) paid more attention to these topics. Noticeably far behind them were the Free Democrats Party (15 m 34 s) and the Tsarukyan Alliance (14 m 57s)*.

During the second stage of monitoring, i.e. during the official campaign, the situation regarding the total duration of press conferences changed completely: the Ohanyan – Raffi – Oskanian Alliance became obviously more passive and occupied the one of lowest positions, whereas the RPA took the leader’s position. Though having less than about 100 minutes, the Free Democrats Party followed the Republicans, with the Communist Party, who had the lowest indicator on this matter in the first stage coming next. The Congress – PPA (380m4s), Exit (378m2s) and Tsarukyan (316m40s) Alliances were active, too.

In general, during the 27 days of the campaign almost all political forces increased their efforts considerably to present their platforms and approaches to the electorate through press conferences, and this was certainly natural. The same can be said also about the time allocated to the coverage of economic and social issues. The comparison of the absolute figures of this indicator shows that the vast majority of parties and alliances paid many times more attention to the socio-economic issues in the second stage.

During the 27 days of the third stage of monitoring after the April 2 elections, only one of the RPA (the party that participated in press conferences most) representatives referred to socio-economic issues and for only 27 seconds. Whereas the Communist Party, even though participating in only one post-election press conference, devoted it fully to economic issues (17 m 28s), and in fact, in the 3rd stage the CPA was ahead of all the other forces regarding the duration of time for covering those topics.

Communists follow the Free Democrats who in two of their press conferences spoke about socio-economic issues for 11 m 4s. In the post-election period the representatives of the ORO alliance had the same number of meetings with journalists, but they referred to the above-mentioned topics by mentioning them just once, devoting only 5 seconds to it. Whereas during the only press conference held by the Exit Alliance the speakers did not raise these issues at all.

If the table above presented the total, aggregated duration of time allocated to economic and social issues by the representatives of each political force, the table below presents the duration of time allocated to every aspect separately.

* The monitoring team cites absolute numbers, since the percentages are calculated only to show the correlation among indicators on the same lines, not to determine ratings due to the comparison of data on different lines.

Table 3

N	Parties and Alliances	Time devoted to economic issues			Time devoted to social issues			Percentage		
		Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
1	EXIT Alliance	28m 19s	14m 27s	0	58 sec	19m 40s	0	96,70% / 3,30%	42,35% / 57,65%	0%
2	Free Democrats Party	8m 50s	71m 24s	10m 49s	6m 44s	13m 41s	15s	56,75% / 43,25%	83,92% / 16,08%	97,74% / 2,26
3	Armenian Revival Party	13m 17s	50m 20s	0	10m 31s	20m 51s	0	55,81% / 44,19%	70,71% / 29,29%	0
4	Tsarukyan Alliance	10m 22s	54m 25s	0	4m 35s	14m 17s	0	69,34% / 30,66%	79,21% / 0,79%	0
5	Congress – PPA Alliance	4m 9s	41m 12s	0	5 sec	12m 16s	0	98,03% / 1,97%	77,06% / 22,94%	0
6	Republican party of Armenia	7m 45s	26m 48s	0	0	6m 19s	27s	100% / 0	80,93% / 19,07%	0/100%
7	Communist Party of Armenia	5m 8s	100m 47s	17m 28s	2 min	19m 19s	0	71,96% / 28,04%	83,92% / 6,08%	100%/0
8	Ohanyan – Raffi – Oskanian Alliance of Parties	11 m	6m 25s	5s	1m 39s	4m 59s	0	86,96% / 13,04%	56,29% / 43,71%	100%/0
9	Armenian revolutionary Federation “Dashnaktsutyun”	5 sec	10m 24s	0	0	3m 50s	0	100% / 0%	73,07% / 26,93%	0

The data presented in the table testify that almost all political forces running for Parliament spoke more on economic than social issues at their press conferences. The only exception is the Exit Alliance the representatives of which gave preference to social issues in the second stage of monitoring, during the official campaign. Whereas in the first stage they preferred to speak about economic issues, moreover, Exit was the leader with regard to the time devoted to this component in their speeches. Yet, in the third stage 6 political forces stepped ahead of the Alliance by this indicator in the second stage. The obvious leader here is the Communist Party, followed by the Free Democrats, the Tsarukyan Alliance and the Armenian Revival. As it has already been mentioned, in the third stage of monitoring, in the post-election period, too, the Communist Party devoted the longest time to the analysis of economic problems. And again they were followed by the Free Democrats, even though, in general, the indicators of this stage are many times smaller than those of the previous stage.

As for the time allocated to social issues, the absolute numbers for this indicator denote that the Armenian Revival Party was the leader in both the first and second stages. According to the data of the official campaign period the Exit Alliance and the Communist Party came very close to its indicators. The latter were followed by the Tsarukyan Alliance, the Free Democrats and Congress – PPA. It is noteworthy that in the first stage of monitoring the representatives of the ruling parties – the RPA and ARF – did not refer to social issues at all, confining themselves only to mentioning the need for solving the problems of the sector. With this indicator on press conferences the ARF representatives were at the bottom in the second stage, too, and the Republicans were left behind by 6 political forces in the same period of time.

As we have already mentioned 5 out of the 9 political forces running for the Parliament held press conferences in the third stage of monitoring, but in this post-election period none of the forces addressed social issues thoroughly. Thus, the RPA and the Free Democrats only touched upon the matter, respectively devoting 27 seconds and 15 seconds to briefly mentioning them. The others, i.e. the ORO, CPA and Exit did not refer to the topics of this sector at all.

3. Economic and Social Issues and Recommendations by Each Political Force

During press conferences the representatives of all oppositional political forces running for Parliament mentioned that the economy of the country was in crisis. As for the ruling parties, they either bypassed the topic or avoided negative assessments. The same approach was demonstrated by the political forces in relation to social issues. The economic and social issues raised by each party and alliance and the solutions proposed by them during monitored press conferences are presented below. Frequently, many of those proposals and recommendations were of declarative nature and did not point to the ways and mechanisms of achieving a goal. However, the recorded data allow for a clear understanding of the principles held by every political force running for Parliament.

EXIT Alliance

Economic Sector. On February 16th at Article 3 Club the leader of the alliance slate Edmon Marukyan announced that the economic situation was very complicated, and Nikol Pashinyan who was on the third position on the list stated that we had no economy in Armenia. Number two on the list, Aram Sargsyan, thought that there were many challenges but corruption was the major one. The leaders, as well as other representatives of the alliance underlined the following in their press conferences:

- Property is not protected by the Constitution,
- Citizens do not have faith in opportunities for engaging in economic activity,
- The EEU is a hindrance for the economic development of Armenia, membership to this Union was a wrong political decision,
- Industrial spaces have been transformed into trade zones,
- Tax entities have become tools to intimidate and pressurize small and medium enterprises and keep businesses in dependence from power,
- There are no equal conditions for competition and their lack impedes the involvement of investments,
- Monopolies are dominant in Armenia,
- The economic situation in the marzes is worse than in the capital,
- Not only the large capital, but also the medium-sized business leave the country,
- We are dependent on external factors because of underdeveloped economy,
- The country is in blockade.

In the context of these issues the members of the Alliance put forth a number of recommendations, considering these as areas of their activity in the future Parliament:

- An initiative will be implemented to change the status quo in the economy, criteria will be proposed to ensure economic development,
- The members of the alliance will advocate and be committed to amendments to the tax legislation in order to prevent pressures on the small and medium businesses and ensure the implementation of equal conditions for competition in the sector. The Tax Code and

taxes will exclusively become means for regulating economic development. Armenia should be devoid of monopolies,

- As an alternative to the EEU, it is necessary to continue bilateral relations with its member-states, and also get rid of the Union as such, for it is an unnecessary burden for the RA,
- Joining the EEU and refusing from the EU Association Agreement, the RA agreed to commit to much lower standards for the economy and stepped back from its aspiration for development. Standing against the EEU membership, the alliance will take into consideration the analysis of the current international and regional situation and the RA national interests in its approaches,
- Negotiations with the EU on the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement for Association will resume,
- Industry needs to be made a primary sector which will ensure budget revenues, and many jobs will be created. It is necessary to reopen Nairit, restart shoemaking and warp knitting and ensure investment opportunities. It is necessary to identify a direction for development and exempt it from all taxes,
- It is necessary to study the efficiency of the used loans and the property owned by those who held top positions in entities related to loan programmes in the last 5 years,
- The Alliance will create a new economy, and Armenia must become an industrial state,
- It is envisaged to develop a science-based industry, including military industry,
- The whole cycle of processing the raw material of the mining industry shall be organized in the country, and the taxes need to be revised to increase state budget revenues,
- The marzes must be divided into zones and differentiated taxes need to be levied,
- It is necessary to levy fixed taxes from the small and medium businesses,
- Commercial areas will again be turned into industrial spaces,
- The alliance will restore the citizens' faith in the opportunities to engage in economic activity, the middle class must be widely engaged and participate in economic processes,
- Introduction of advanced technology in agriculture, creation of an investment system, provision of favorable conditions for the sale of produce,
- Introduction of advanced technology in agriculture, creation of an insurance system, provision of favorable conditions for the sales of produce,
- The Diaspora should also be entrusted with control over Diaspora investments,
- The development of cooperation with Iran, the construction of a railroad and its operation, as well as the import of the Iranian gas and its export via Armenia would be an important step towards overcoming the blockade.

Social sector. During the first stage of monitoring the representatives of the Exit Alliance hardly ever referred to social issues at their press conferences. The Alliance member Mane Tandilyan is the only exception as she pointed at the issue of inadequacy between the volume of labor and remuneration at Hayq press club on February 20th (“One works all day, however cannot ensure a decent standard of living”). Whereas dwelling upon the pension system she underlined that she prioritizes a radical reform of the system. As to the mandatory payment of 1000 AMD established by the RA Law on Social Assistance to the Families of Killed or Disabled Military, she mentioned that in the current environment of mistrust towards the leadership the application of such mechanisms was unacceptable.

Unlike the first stage of monitoring, in the second stage the Alliance was among those in leading positions with regard to reference to social issues. Particularly, the further steps were singled out as follows:

- There is a need to revise the pension fund system,
- Mechanisms to protect women's labor rights will be developed,

- System changes need to be introduced to ensure full integration of people with disabilities, including the military who became disabled in the army, in the socio-political life,
- Reforms in the health sector must be aimed at reviewing the implementation of state orders, its certification, the targeted provision of allocated sums, the creation of a state insurance system; to double allocations to the sector from state budget in 5 years,
- It is envisaged to double the installment payment for the birth of the third and fourth child, and to triple it at the birth of the fifth and the sixth,
- To optimize state body structures to ensure the salaries of employers/servants.

In the third stage of monitoring the representatives of the Exit Alliance held only one press conference during which they did not refer to economic or social issues.

The Free Democrats Party

Economic Sector. The party was extremely critical of the economic policy pursued by the incumbent government. Particularly, Hrant Bagratyan that ran second on the Free Democrats' slate mentioned at Hayeli Club (Mirror) on February 20th that this policy was eroding the foundations of the state. Styopa Safaryan running the third stated in the same club on February 22nd that the pursued policy was leading to a disastrous situation, an economic degradation. Khachatur Kokobelyan, who was leading the slate, in his turn, mentioned at a press conference at Hayeli club on March 3rd that it was impossible to develop the economy without financial investments.

In the official campaign stage on March 9th at a press conference in the same club Hrant Bagratyan stated that the economy was in collapse.

Along with this, throughout the three stages of monitoring the members of the party pointed at the following issues in their press conferences:

- The function of regulating investment funds has been resorted to the Central Bank, which is an incorrect approach,
- Small businesses are taxed more than large businesses, as a result, new large corporations are entering the market, whereas thousands of small ones are closing down,
- The small peasant-owned farms and large farms are not differentiated in agriculture,
- The government does not create a stock market for small-scale investors,
- Nairit production association has been robbed, and its reoperation is a huge problem,
- The mining industry and tourism potential are not being fully used,
- The EEU is not an opportunity for Armenia, but rather a serious challenge: we have delegated our sovereignty to the EEU, which is the reason why we cannot have a good economy or good prospects; goods circulation has decreased, trade with Europe has reduced, relations with Iran have weakened, gas is purchased at a higher price than in other EEU countries,
- The economy of Armenia is dependent on Russia, the influence and control of the latter on the Armenian economy is so extensive that it blocks alternative partnerships and possibilities,
- Russia has been an employer for capable Armenian labor migrants, but today this employer is on the verge of insolvency which will negatively impact on the volumes of remittances to Armenia,
- Armenia needs to diversify its markets and economy accessing the Western Economic Space.

Should it be elected into the Parliament, the party envisages the following steps to reform the economic sector:

- Development of the economy by liberalization, decentralization of economic governance,
- As an advocate of liberal policies, the party will encourage free competition and business, the development of small businesses abruptly moderating the growth of the large business,
- The scope of the Central Bank's authority needs to be revised, particularly, it should be dealing mainly with the monetary policy,
- The party envisages to sterilize remittances to ensure additional budget revenues,
- The share of small and medium business will be increased in the economy up to 60 %,
- Insufficient state budget revenues caused by the reduction of tax burden on small and medium businesses will be compensated by bringing all entrepreneurial activities out of the shadow and levying taxes,
- The same means will be used to establish innovation labs, develop the ICT sector,
- Income tax must be flexible and have a floating scale of rates,
- Half of the external debt needs to be gradually transformed into internal debt,
- The approaches in the economic platform of the party will ensure a growth of 6,5 – 7%, the GDP will exceed invested sums by 10 times curbing inflation,
- It is necessary to create a sovereign fund for small-scale investments,
- Due to the fight against shadow economy the budget will be replenished by 800 million to 1 billion USD,
- The gas provision agreement is proposed to be revised,
- It is necessary to create viticultural cooperatives to boost wine-making,
- The party envisages termination of membership to the EEU and has drafted a relevant law. The position of the Free Democrats party is that Armenia must become a member of the larger European family; that is the only correct route for the country, also from the perspective of the economy.

Social sector. At the first stage of monitoring the Free Democrats Party addressed the issues of compensation of deposits in the former USSR Savings Bank, the aggravation of poverty and social polarization, the salaries of contract military servicemen, provision of military disability assistance, and provision of housing for the graduates of orphanages. It was also mentioned that employment rates were very high, leading to a significant increase of emigration. Besides, some MP candidates (Anahit Bakhshyan, Armen Arakelyan) spoke in general terms about the necessity of solving the problems in the healthcare and social sectors.

As for proposed solutions, the speakers mainly referred to the electoral platform of the party, which, according to their words, contained the solutions of the above-mentioned problems. Only some of those solutions were presented to the journalists. Particularly, with regard to the return of deposits, Hrant Bagratyan mentioned at the February 20th press conference at Hayeli Club that the Free Democrats were against the return of a handful of “kopeks” at the 1:30 ratio. These sums had to be formulated as state debt and serviced accordingly. Anahit Bakhshyan proposed to invest the large sums that were spent on the treatment of disabled veterans abroad in Armenia to ensure those medical services in the country.

In the second stage of monitoring the above-mentioned problems and solutions were voiced again; however, other topics in the social sector were raised, too. In particular, on March 7th in Hayeli Club Anahit Bakhshyan stated that the party would be committed to a rise in the teachers' salaries. Assessing the general social situation, the MP candidate said that people were oppressed and had difficulty in earning their daily living. Hrant Bgratyan, the second on the party slate, continued her line by saying that the society was in a total crisis and that the increase in the GDP would result in an increase of pensions and minimal wages. MP candidate Samvel

Harutyunyan mentioned at Media Center on March 15th that the majority of the population had no access to healthcare. In order to solve this problem, he thought, it was necessary to increase funding, especially targeting the socially vulnerable groups.

The Armenian Revival Party

Economic Sector. Even before the official campaign, during a press conference held at the office of the Armenian Revival party on February 16th the leader of the party Artur Baghdasaryan announced that there was economic monopoly in Armenia. Mher Shahgeldyan, the second on the slate of the Armenian Revival Party, mentioned on the following day at Sputnik Armenia press center that during the last two-three years foreign debt increased and this put pressure on the economy of Armenia. And on February 28th at Article 3 Club he underlined that the currently pursued economic policy needed to be changed. Besides, during the first stage of monitoring the representatives of the Armenian Revival raised the following issues:

- Bad legislation is the reason for the economic crisis in the country,
- No proper struggle against corruption,
- Industrial policy is not a priority branch in the programs of the government,
- A fair climate is not created for business in Armenia: large industrial spaces have led to the closure of small and medium enterprises, “the red lines” for parking are also a manifestation of unfair business,
- Exploitation of mineral resources is not under state care,
- Levying an advance payment for building houses on mortgage impedes the development of the sector.

Raising these economic issues the representative of the Armenian Revival Party presented some of their follow-up activities, should they be a success in the elections. Particularly, party leader Artur Baghdasaryan said at the above-mentioned meeting with the journalists: “We are coming to fight against corruption, to ensure serious state care for the exploitation of mineral resources, and to eliminate any advance payment for the construction of mortgage housing.” The other members of the Armenian Revival presented the envisaged further steps at their press conferences:

- The deindustrialization currently happening in the country will be stopped by the new laws and the new ways of governance, all targeting the development of the industry,
- An economic policy to contribute to SME development will be implemented on the basis of the new legislation,
- The “red lines” for parking will serve the prevention of violations, not the pursuit of excess profits,
- The advance payments for housing construction will be eliminated by legislative initiatives, and the interest rates will be reduced,
- Mechanisms will be developed for returning the 25 billion US Dollars that were illegally taken out of the country during the 25 years of independence.

In the second stage of monitoring the representatives of the party expanded the scope of economic topics raised. Particularly, at a press conference held at Media Center on March 9th Vilen Khachatryan spoke about the need for the redistribution of profits through a tax system and reduction of the ‘shadow’ by means of the efficient operation of the customs checkpoints. And at Post Scriptum on March 24th he stated that, in general, the profit made by enterprises in the country was decreasing, the levels of export had fallen, and the state debt had grown. As a means of improving the situation it was proposed to reduce the import of goods and to increase the

volumes of local production achieving its export. In every marz it was envisaged to have at least one large enterprise which would serve as a nucleus: other small enterprises would develop around it and their tax burden would be lightened. At the same time it was envisaged to apply the model of luxury tax which would ensure additional budget revenues. The party also envisaged to demonstrate a diversified approach to levying taxes on salaries.

The representatives of the Armenian Revival mentioned that the route for the development of Armenia is the socialist market economy. In the field of mining industries it envisaged to exclude the activities of companies registered in offshore zones.

Social sector. The major initiative of the Armenian Revival party in this sector remains the continuation of the former USSR Savings Bank deposit compensations (an AMD amount equivalent to over 40 million US dollars had already been compensated). At almost all press conferences the representatives of the party referred to this issue. In this regard, it was particularly voiced that a deposit was considered inalienable property by the Civil Code, which hindered its inheritance. In order to overcome this hindrance, the members of the Armenian Revival party would propose relevant legislative amendments in order to ensure the inheritance of the deposits. In order to ensure the continuity and sustainability of the process, it would be proposed to set a clear sum of money from the state budget annually.

Besides the compensation issue, the representatives of the Armenian Revival Party also mentioned the following social issues in the first stage of monitoring:

- The labor of those engaged in land cultivation is not officially considered to be work experience, and this adversely impacts on their pensions,
- The volumes of poverty increase,
- The creation of jobs is not emphasized as a policy direction in the Government program; the level of unemployment is very high,
- Mechanisms of providing assistance to young families are very weak.

The speakers presented the party's approaches to the solution of some of the voiced problems. Particularly, it is envisaged to consider the labor of farmers cultivating land as official work experience via legislative amendments. As for the creation of jobs, the members of the Armenian Revival Party intend to turn it into a priority in the Government program, thus reducing the level of unemployment, and generally the poverty level. To assist young families, the party proposed a lump-sum financial support, reduction of mortgage interests, and elimination of advance payments for apartments. The Armenian Revival emphasized that in order to solve the above-mentioned issues it was necessary to have full power; should it be a success in the elections, it would enforce the provision fixed in the Constitution that Armenia is a social state.

At the second stage of monitoring, besides the ones mentioned above, the representatives of the party referred to other issues, too. Thus, at Hayeli Club on March 7th the MP candidate Marianna Frunjyan mentioned the need for providing certificates to the young people in socially vulnerable families to pay off their university tuitions. And at Tesaket Club on March 9th the same candidate stated that the Armenian Revival Party would expand the program for children, would raise the maternity capital scale, and would implement the project of free kindergartens in the marzes, too.

Another MP candidate Vilen Khachatryan at a press conference held at Media Center on March 9th stated that at the expense of curbing "shadow" entrepreneurship the party envisaged pension indexing and a rise in salaries and allowances. On March 13th at Post Scriptum Club he added that a system would be introduced in the healthcare sector to issue certificates to the socially vulnerable groups. And on March 15th at Media Center Vilen Khachatryan spoke about the redistribution of wealth through luxury tax, as well as the need and opportunities for the

development of people's capacity to engage in entrepreneurship. The sums charged as fines by speed cameras could serve as a financial source for the implementation of social programs, according to Karen Tumanyan's statement at a March 16th press conference.

The representatives of the party did not hold a press conference during the third stage of monitoring.

Tsarukyan Alliance

Economic Sector. During the first stage of monitoring, this political force attempted at presenting economic problems from the perspective of public interests. Particularly, at the press conference held at Hayeli Club on February 20th Vardan Bostanjyan spoke about the possibilities for decreasing gas and electricity tariffs. During a press conference held at Henaran Club on February 22nd Ararat Zurabyan announced that the Alliance envisaged 3 years of tax holidays for SMEs. Instead, the state budget would be replenished due to the abrupt rise in the environmental fees charged for the copper and molybdenum minerals (currently only 600 AMD is charged for the extracted 1 ton of ore). According to the data presented by another representative of the Alliance, Michael Melqumyan, the raised environmental fees would replenish the budget by 50 – 60 billion within a year.

When addressing these issues, another representative of the Alliance, Tigran Urikhanyan, referred to the EEU membership at a press conference held at Hayeli Club on February 24th. According to him, the right way was not collaboration within a state or interstate-international union at the expense of others. Collaboration should be mutually complimentary.

Taking into consideration that there are 1 million 400 thousand borrowers in Armenia, by the way, at high interests, Tsarukyan Alliance plans to take steps for changing the banking policies and revising interest rates, should they come to power.

At the second stage of monitoring the content of press conferences of the alliance members was mainly structured around a document called “15 priority steps” that served as election platform that is fully devoted to economic and social issues. Vardan Bostanjyan, an MP candidate, said at a press conference at Media Center on March 9th that all the 15 points presented to the electorate were realistic, but in order to realize them it is necessary to bring economy out of the shadow. Referring to foreign relations, the speaker mentioned that it was still necessary to rectify the situation in the country, and only after that deal with integration issues. At a press conference held at Pastark Club on the same day Vardan Bostanjyan stated: economy could develop only in the conditions of free competition. At a press conference at Hayeli Club on March 14 MP candidate Zorik Zohrabyan referred to light industry: he stated that currently it was in a “petty” state, compared with the Soviet times, whereas there are opportunities for development. Referring to investments, the speaker highlighted the need for their targeted use. Another MP candidate nominated on the alliance slate, Vahe Enfiajyan, referred to the 15 points at the March 15th press conference and underlined the few most important ones, namely, tax exemption for SMEs, proposed amnesty of fines and penalties on the tax obligations, revision of policies in the mining industry.

At a press conference at Pastark Club on March 21st MP candidate Michael Melkumyan stated that in case they came to power the party would ensure 6 percent of economic growth in the country due to the elimination of monopolies, the change of the governance model, liberalization of the market, and increase of investments. The speaker accounted for the alliance's position in favor of joining the EEU with the need to ensure the security of the country. Whereas at Hayeli Club on March 24 the MP candidate Ararat Zurabyan expressed his conviction that the 6 percent economic growth envisaged by the Alliance would have a multiplicative effect and would lead to long-term development.

At the press conference at Post Scriptum media club on March 27th Vardan Bostanjyan criticized the economic policies led by the authorities and stated that the alliance intended to increase the share of SME in the GDP of Armenia to reach 65 – 70% which was typical of economies in civilized countries. This is how the extreme polarization of income would be reduced. Since the financial market does not contribute to engaging in business activities, the alliance proposed to create favorable conditions for business entities – to provide low interest loans and soften tax policies.

At Tesaket press club on March 30th Michael Melkumyan referred to the scarcity of investments in the RA, explaining this by the business climate based on privileges and the lack of trust. It is first of all expressed in the tax policies. There can be no fair competition in the conditions of such privileges. Proper order needs to be established in the business system for the development of business. This is exactly what the alliance envisages to undertake if they come to power. According to Melkumyan, Armenia must become an industrial country: small business should be given an opportunity to grow into a medium enterprise, and the medium sized business should be able to grow into a large business. Industrial zones need to be created in every marz, and the policy for mining industry needs to be revised, for example, not the copper ore, but the final product should be sold. According to the speaker, cooperating within the EEU Armenia can become a center for military industry and receive a lot of orders in the context of Russia – Ukraine conflict.

Social Sector. In the first stage of monitoring the members of the alliance devoted about one third of their speeches to the rise of pensions, the possibilities for citizens to have jobs, a decent payment and standards of living. They also touched upon the need for ensuring public access to healthcare.

In terms of the activities to be undertaken in the sector, the members of the alliance specifically mentioned that they would introduce changes that the poor had dreamed about (Tigran Urikhanyan, February 24, Hayeli Club). In terms of healthcare it was said that the activities should target the satisfaction of people’s needs and should not be seen as a merely profitable business. Besides, they envisaged the creation of favorable conditions in order for citizens to have their own ideas to realize and ensure their own employment and income. This political force intended to raise the pensions by 25000 AMD, moreover, they assured that this was a calculated figure, and only one percent of the economic growth would suffice to solve the problem (Michael Melkumyan, February 28, Sputnik Armenia).

With regard to the compensation of deposits in the former USSR Savings Bank, the initiative underway was welcomed. At the same time it is underlined that the expectations of the poor were more than great, whereas the full implementation of the program was impossible since the state is not capable of fully returning the deposits that exceeded 10 billion US dollars (Vardan Bostanjyan, February 20th, Haylei Club).

In the second stage of monitoring, when the alliance had already published its “15 priority steps”, the speakers made more frequent references to the document dwelling upon social issues. Along with this, some candidates also presented additional approaches and activities related to this sector. Particularly, MP candidate Zorik Zohrabyan mentioned at Hayeli Club on March 14 that in order to mitigate unemployment, preliminary arrangements had been made with the owners of the industrial zones (that were privatized in the 1990s and were not operating presently) on the reopening of factories and creating jobs. On March 1st Vahe Enfiayyan once again referred to the 15 steps and underlined their intention to raise salaries and pensions and assured that the financial sources had been calculated, and the figures were substantiated. Ararat Zurabyan (Hayatsq, March 20), Michael Melkumyan (Pastark, March 21; Tesaket, March 30) and Vardan Bostanjyan (Post Scriptum, March 27) demonstrated the same approach in their press conferences.

The representatives of the alliance did not hold a press conference during the third stage of monitoring.

Congress – PPA Alliance of Parties

Economic Sector. During the press conferences in the first stage of monitoring this opposition alliance underlined that the country was collapsing economically and promised that in case it succeeded in the elections it would be ready to implement modernization programmes in Armenia to ensure 6 – 7 percent economic growth. This would enable to double economic volumes in 12 years. Levon Zurabyan presented all this at a press conference at Media Center on February 24. He also added that the alliance would dismantle the monopolies and would simplify the tax system by reducing the current 16 types of tax to only 6.

Zoya Tadevosyan, the fourth on the alliance slate, mentioned at a press conference at Hayq Center on March 4th that the economy cannot develop in the conditions of war, and a non-developing economy leads to the outflow of the capital. According to her estimates, there was an outflow of 10 billion dollars in the last 10 years. Zoya Tadevosyan was convinced that the difficult state of the economy was caused by the scarcity of labor force, volumes of finances, as well as foreign investments. According to the alliance, these problems would be impossible to solve in the conditions of warfare, consequently establishing peace as a priority.

In the second stage of monitoring, even though the key issue was the peaceful settlement of the Karabakh conflict, economic issues were raised, too. At the press conference in Hayatsq Club on March 10 MP candidate Zoya Tadevosyan interrelated the war conditions and the state of the economy, underlining that in the current conditions it was difficult to expect any growth of investments. The situation was believed to be aggravated also because of the outflow of capital and labor force. Referring to integration processes, the speaker mentioned that before the choice between the EEU and the EU Armenia first had to think about closer cooperation and integration with the neighboring countries and only after consider joining other structures. At Article Club on March 15 another representative of the Congress – PPA Alliance Aram Manukyan used clear figures to present the economic gap between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The speaker highlighted that it was necessary to be strong to acquire peace, whereas peace would require the opening of the borders, the creation of favorable conditions for investments and development of the industry.

Another MP candidate from the Alliance Vahagn Khachatryan analyzed the economic situation of Armenia at Media Center on March 15 and mentioned that the authorities seemed to be doing everything to impede the SMEs from succeeding. The economy is in a critical state, and we have economic growth of only 0,2 percent. And during his conference at Article 3 on March 17th Khachatryan presented details and exact figures to describe the critical situation. In order to overcome this situation the alliance proposed to change the whole system of gross income redistribution. Besides, it is proposed to announce a 3-5 year tax moratorium for small and medium businesses. Vahagn Khachatryan mentioned that Armenia needed economic growth badly; it was necessary to open the borders, develop regional cooperation and establish good neighborly relations with the neighbors. The speaker also highlighted that the economic problems of Armenia lay within the political domain; moreover, everything in the country needed to be changed by 180 degrees. The election platform envisaged to return the means of illicit enrichment since 1991 to the state budget; it was believed necessary to create free trade relations to cooperate with all countries in the world. Referring to foreign relations, the MP candidate Vladimir Karapetyan stated at Media Center on March 17 that the EEU and EU were completely contradictory to one another, and it was not realistic to launch negotiations on the Association Agreement that contained an economic component without leaving the EEU. At the press conference held at Media Center on March 21 Vahagn Khachatryan referred to the issues of the mining industry and mentioned in this context that closed borders hindered the sales of mineral ore, adversely impacting on its cost price.

At the press conference held at the ANC office on March 23rd Levon Zurabyan mentioned that Armenia needed not just a regular, but an accelerated economic growth to be

able to ensure its security. Such a growth is possible only by means of the settlement of the Karabakh conflict and in conditions of open borders. The speaker also highlighted that relying on remittances was an unviable model.

Social Sector. During press conferences in the first stage of monitoring the representatives of the alliance hardly ever referred to social issues, and Zoya Tadevosyan's hint at the press conference at Hayq Center on March 4 that "people are poor, in dire straits" was the only exception.

In the second stage of monitoring the representatives of the alliance referred to social issues much more frequently. Thus, Vahagn Khachatryan referred to healthcare issues at Media Center on March 15 and stated that the insurance system should be actively applied in this sector. The speaker highlighted the vulnerable aspects of the pension fund system and proposed to make use of the successful model of car insurance as best practice. According to Vahagn Khachatryan, the rapid social polarization in the country has led to social intolerance. To overcome this the alliance proposed the concept of meritocracy in its platform, that is to say, people should be paid based on their merits and occupy deserved positions in the society, not the opposite. Even though the alliance bears liberal ideology, still, the economic situation in the country dictates the need for paying special attention to the vulnerable class, as well as ensure rises of pensions and minimal wages, reduction of gas and electricity tariffs. Vahagn Khachatryan was convinced that the poor needed to be given an opportunity to become sustainable. Vahagn Khachatryan elaborated on these thoughts at Article 3 Club on March 17th, highlighting that the number of people making use of the social product had to be increased, as today according to official statistics there is a 29,8 percent poverty rate. MP candidate Aram Manukyan also referred to the topic of poverty during the press conference at Hayatsq Club on March 21st. He stated that poverty was widespread, and the issues of earning a living were urgent, especially in remote villages.

The representatives of the alliance did not hold a press conference during the third stage of monitoring.

Republican Party of Armenia

Economic Sector. At their 17 press conferences during the first stage of monitoring the representatives of the RPA devoted only 7 minutes and 45 seconds to economic issues. This may be considered extraordinary for the ruling party. As a rule, RPA members avoided evaluations of the economic situation. In this regard, only Vardan Ayyvazyan's consideration is an exception: "We all know that the socio-economic situation in Armenia is difficult" (the press conference at Hayeli Club on March 1). The speakers did not voice any recommendations relevant to the sector, confining themselves only to the substantiation of the pursued policy. Particularly, during the press conference at Blitz Info on March 1st and Pastark Press Club on March 3rd Gagik Minasyan mentioned that Armenia finally succeeded in the policy of "both—and" (that is to say, both its membership to the EEU and its cooperation with the EU), even though from the very beginning there was no agreement on the part of the EU on such a combination, and we were forced to choose from the "either-or". According to the speaker, the countries of Eastern Partnership that followed that route had to face serious challenges, whereas Armenia managed to avert those. Now the European Union is demonstrating a more flexible approach and the framework agreement that we are going to sign creates extensive opportunities for economic cooperation. Moreover, Armenia has become a link of not contrasting, but combining interests, which may enable economic cooperation between the EU and the EEU, as well as contribute to the economic cooperation of both the EU and the EEU with Iran via Armenia.

During the press conferences held in the second stage of monitoring the ruling party paid more attention to economic themes. However, at this stage, too, the major focus was on

presenting substantiations for the policy pursued. Thus, at Hayeli Club on March 15th Khosrov Harutyunyan spoke about the external debt and responded to the opponents by saying that this situation was not at all dangerous in this regard, for the country was able to service its external debt, and the international financial institutions continued their collaboration with the government of Armenia. The speaker pointed out a number of steps implemented at the tax and customs administration, mainly assessing them positively. Khosrov Harutyunyan singled out the need for ensuring an efficient and targeted use of loan and budget money as a yet unsolved issue. The speaker did not agree with those oppositional competitors who expressed a conviction that taxes for the use of mineral resources should be increased in the mining sector. He considered it impossible to curb shadow economy to the extent proposed by other political forces. Referring to the economic recommendation put forth by the Republican Party, Khosrov Harutyunyan mentioned that Armenia must solve the problem of exporting competitive goods to the foreign market. In this regard it is proposed to follow the practices of many countries in South-East Asia and to have competitive production by means of attracting investments. It was considered necessary to create a foundation for stimulating investments with the participation of the government and potential investors and at the same time to create a favorable tax environment and an atmosphere of trust.

At Hayeli Club on March 17th MP candidate Vahram Baghdasaryan also calmed the electorate down by arguing that the external debt was not dangerous. As for the state budget, they aimed to stabilize the economy in 2017, whereas growth was expected in 2018 – 2020. On March 23rd MP candidate Anania Maghaqyan reminded that during his pre-electoral meetings Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan promised to implement two investment programs of 3,2 billion and 5,3 billion USD in one year. More or less critical approaches were demonstrated by the MP candidate Lernik Alexanyan at the press conference held at Henaran Club on March 24th where he mentioned that the existing market relations harmed the Armenian economy, for the institutions that were needed to regulate those relations were not there. By contrast, at Sputnik Armenia Media Center on March 25th MP candidate Hermine Naghdalyan only expressed her satisfaction with the activities of the new government, dwelling on neither the deficiencies nor the prospects of economic development.

During the third stage of monitoring the party representatives did not touch upon economic issues in their press conferences.

Social Sector. During the press conferences in the first stage of monitoring the RPA speakers did not make any reference to social issues or their solutions, if we do not consider the 2 mentions of the word “social” when speaking on economic issues.

In the second stage of monitoring, unlike the first one, the representatives of the ruling party did make some reference to social issues. Thus, at Hayeli Club on March 15 Khosrov Harutyunyan dwelt upon healthcare and confessed that it was not accessible for a vast group of people, but he also reassured that this problem was being solved. Hayk Babukhanyan, who was nominated on the party slate, speaking about emigration (at Noyyan Tapan press hall on March 20th) mentioned that in order to prevent it, the socio-economic problems had to be solved so that people could earn their living in their motherland. At Hayeli Club on March 31st, dwelling on the same issue, MP candidate Anania Maghaqyan highlighted that emigration and unemployment were caused by injustice. At a press conference held at Media Center on March 24th Ruzanna Muradyan referred to the education sector and presented the programs for social benefits to be provided to students and pupils from vulnerable families. Other issues in the sector and their probable solutions were not discussed.

Many were the cases of the RPA candidates making abstract statements on the social situation in the country, addressing neither their causes, nor the planned follow-up actions. For example, “People are most of all interested in jobs, people are more interested in social issues” (Vardan Ayyazyan, Tesaket Club, March 23), “There is a considerably large mass in the country

that has a very low level of welfare” (Hermine Naghdalyan, Sputnik Armenia, March 25), “The socio-economic situation in Armenia is hard” (Aragats Akhoyan, Hayeli Club, March 29).

Only during the third stage of monitoring at one of the post-election press conferences (Hayeli Club, April 6) did Republican Lernik Alexanyan point at social polarization as the number one issue.

Communist Party of Armenia

Economic Sector. On February 17 during the first stage of monitoring, at the press conference in the House of Moscow Tachat Sargsyan, leading the slate, made a reference to the RA Constitution and underlined the fact that mineral resources belonged to the people, expressing a standpoint that mines needed to be nationalized with the profit being channeled to the state budget. The Communists were convinced that agriculture could not develop on the small land plots; hence it was necessary to create bigger farms. According to Tachat Sargsyan, it was necessary to establish very tough control over the banking system. This would contribute to the development of the economy.

During the same press conference number two on the slate Vazgen Safaryan highlighted that the industry of the country was in dire strait since economic relations with the CIS countries as well as internal economic integration were not sufficient and did not yield positive results. Consequently, in the event of overcoming the 5 percent threshold and appearing in the Parliament they would propose radical changes in the economic policy, namely:

- To extend state intervention in the economy for the state to govern and regulate it,
- Communists envisaged the recreation of the machinery, seed farming and cattle breeding stations that operated during the Soviet years for the development of agriculture. In order to sell the agricultural produce, consumption cooperatives need to be created,
- To draft bills on the mobilization of industry and pass them at the Parliament. This would enable the creation of cooperatives both inside and beyond the country, primarily with Russia. This could lead to the significant increase in the share of industry in the GDP which is only 17% today.

Later at the press conference on February 27th Vazgen Safaryan stated that the state itself should own and manage the large factories. In general, communists related the issues of economic developments immediately with industrial development.

Speaking about foreign economic relation the leaders of the party stated that they had expressed themselves in favor of Armenia’s membership to the EEU since that solved two issues, namely economic relations with the former Soviet republics were restored and an opportunity was given to access the 170 million Eurasian market. So far there have been no visible results, because the relations are not made proper use of. The party will contribute to increasing the efficiency of those relations.

In the second stage of monitoring the Communists paid more attention to economic issues in their press conferences. As a rule, they referred back to the Soviet times and insisted that Armenia should again be turned into an industrial country.

Particularly, at Hayeli Club on March 8th Naira Martirosyan recalled the socialist state and said that we did not have anything at the moment, the factories did not operate, according to her, market relations did not justify themselves, and as a solution she proposed the restoration of industry and the reopening of plants. The same approach was demonstrated by MP candidate Dmitri Adbashyan, who speaking about aviation said that though very powerful in the Soviet times, it was in a miserable state at present. According to the speaker, in the current conditions it was necessary to adopt a new Air Code.

The ways of restoring the industry, from the Communists’ perspective were presented in more details by Vazgen Safaryan, number two on the slate: at Hayatsq Club on March 10th he

said that the state should play an active role in the economic policy and increase state equity with business entities. According to the speaker's words, Nairit and the Vanadsor Chemical Industrial Plant had to be reopened and the processing of the local raw materials – copper, molybdenum, gold, and silver had to be organized locally. To solve those large-scale issues it was necessary to create a Ministry of Industry and Foreign Relations. Besides, Communists proposed to deepen relations within the EEU creating joint enterprises and a common economy.

At Hayeli Club on March 13th MP candidate Silva Adamyan referred to the mining industry, mentioning that the development of that sector enriched the businessman, but the state did not receive sufficient profit to use it for the solution of other problems.

Tachat Sargsyan, the leader of the party, dwelt on the same topic at Pastark Club on March 13th and proposed even further-reaching recommendations, namely to nationalize the mines and ore. The speaker saw the development of agriculture in the restoration of collective farms. Tachat Sargsyan expressed a conviction that the EEU would assist the development of the economy. Communists welcome Armenia's membership to EEU.

At Hayeli Club on March 14 MP candidate Irina Hovakimyan stated that the Communists would pursue the development of military industry to ensure the security of the country. At Hayeli Club on March 15 another candidate, Asya Otaryan, prioritized the development of large industry, voiced the position of the Communists that the country could not progress only through small and medium businesses. At a press conference at the same club and on the same day Vazgen Safaryan referred to the CPA platform and stated that the party was a bridge between the society of the past and that of the future in terms of altering the economic policy, thus bringing about growth of 7 – 8 percents.

On the same day at another club, namely Media Center, Vazgen Safaryan highlighted an important issue, stating that almost 34 percents of the budget was spent on social issues as a consequence of an incorrect policy. The speaker stressed the need for enhancing the role of the state as a regulator, guiding market relations, and creating budgets that envisaged an investment policy. On March 20th at Pastark Club Vazgen Safaryan prioritized struggle against shadow economy and proposed curbing the pressure of indirect taxes down to zero, to collect budget revenues only through direct taxes, i.e. income tax, profit tax. Speaking on the development of agriculture, the speaker mentioned the need for the creation of machinery stations and processing agricultural produce.

For the reoperation of the industry, including Nairit and other large enterprises Communists propose the use of the population's deposits with the provision of shares at higher interest rates. Besides, they plan on attracting cheap interstate loans. At their joint conference at Hayeli Club on March 31st Tachat Sargsyan and Vazgen Safaryan stated that the Communists would develop the transportation infrastructure and would search for new opportunities in order to build the Armenia – Iran and Vanadsor – Fioletovo railroads.

In the third stage of monitoring, namely on April 12th at Pastark Club, Vazgen Safaryan, taking into account the results of the elections, underlined that all the forces elected into the Parliament were lead by liberal approaches in the economic policy, hence, there would be no serious opposition at the National Assembly when developing the economic policy. Once again the speaker referred to the issues and proposed solutions voiced on the previous press conferences, highlighting that the demand for introducing effective economic policy models had to be presented to the public and be it enrooted in public consciousness.

Social Sector. In the first stage of monitoring the representatives of the Communist Party participated in only 2 press conferences and spoke about social issues in very general terms. By the CPA's assessment, in the recent years the people of Armenia had found themselves in more difficult conditions. If elected into the Parliament, the Communists promised to focus on the radical changes of the situation. The party prioritized the reduction of unemployment level and the creation of new jobs. By nationalizing the mines, the Communists intended to solve urgent social issues: raise pensions, ensure free healthcare.

In the second stage of monitoring the Communists held 22 press conferences and, as it has already been mentioned, were among the leaders in terms of addressing social issues. On March 10th at Hayeli Club a leader of the party Vazgen Safaryan stated at a press conference that the social guarantees taken away from people had to be returned. From this perspective he prioritized provision of employment, as well as universal access to healthcare. Continuing the elaboration of these ideas, at a press conference at Media Center on March 15th Vazgen Safaryan said that the problems of overcoming unemployment and creating jobs could be solved primarily by the development of the industry which would also contribute to doubling minimal wages. As for affordability of healthcare, the speaker presented the platform provision about the creation of insurance agencies with state equity, guaranteeing every person's treatment. Besides, the CPA proposes to exempt the sale of medicine from value added tax, to bring prices down and make medication more affordable.

The Communists envisaged raising the pensions twice in the upcoming five years. At a March 17th press conference at Hayeli Club Naira Martirosyan and Silva Adamyan referred to unemployment and social insecurity, and saw the solution in the re-operationalization of the industry with state equity. According to the Communists, overcoming unemployment would help to essentially reduce emigration. In other press conferences the Communists presented other platform provisions, too, which envisaged the return to the free education system and free kindergartens. In the press conference held during the campaign the leaders of the party paid special attention to the rapid social polarization, stating that it was aggravating and could very adversely impact on the situation in the country.

At the only press conference in the third stage of monitoring the representatives of the party did not address social sector issues.

Ohanyan – Raffi – Oskanian Alliance

Economic Sector. In the first stage of monitoring on February 13, still at the formation of the alliance and its presentation event Armen Martirosyan, number two on the ORO slate, was very critical in his assessment of the country's economy, pointing at the main problems hindering the development of the sector, such as systemic corruption, coalescence of business and power, artificial and illegal monopolies. Along with this, the representatives of the alliance highlighted the following:

- Small and medium business is under a heavy tax burden,
- Investments are scarce,
- It is the budget in Armenia that dictates the economic policy, not the opposite,
- External economic relations are not used efficiently,
- There has been an outflow of 10 billion USD from Armenia,
- There is no effective and efficient lending and subsidy provision in agriculture.

To solve the above-mentioned problems, the alliance considers it necessary to implement systemic changes, develop a new economic strategy, revising the policies of the sectors involved. This will be based on the liberalization of the economy and the creation of development guarantees. To achieve this aim, the following is also envisaged:

- To alleviate the tax burden for small and medium businesses to boost economic growth,
- Mobilize the potential of the Diaspora and create favorable conditions for compatriot business people abroad to attract their investments to the RA,
- Radically change the approach to the economic policy: it will be formulated not coming from the capacity of the state budget, but on its own, aiming at creating a stronger budget,
- By means of a bilateral agreement with the European Union to introduce higher economic standards, which will place the economy on the right track for development,

- To create conditions for reopening the US-funded Millennium Challenges project in Armenia. This will enable the improvement of rural roads, the development of the rural infrastructure, the establishment of small enterprises of processing agricultural produce.

In the second stage of monitoring, even though the members of the alliance referred to economic topics noticeably much less frequently, they addressed other issues, too. Thus, if in the first stage they generally spoke about the alleviation of the tax burden from small and medium businesses, on March 10th at the press conference held at Hayatsq Club MP candidate Susanna Muradyan clarified the matter stating that ORO envisaged 5 years of tax holidays for SMEs with a circulation of 60 million drams. The gap created by this lack of budget inflows could be filled by means of the termination of illegal outflow of the capital. On March 17th at Media Center MP candidate Gegham Nazaryan referred to external economic relations and stated that the alliance did not plan to launch a process of leaving the EEU for it believed that the EEU was a huge and very important market for Armenia. On March 28th at Noyyan Tapan press hall MP candidate Tereza Sargsyan prioritized the following in the economic sector: healthy competition and the creation of favorable conditions, elimination of monopolies and lending at low interest rates for the development of small and medium businesses. At the wrap-up conference held on March 31 the leaders of the alliance highlighted their commitment to the idea of liberalization of economy.

In the third stage of monitoring at the press conference held at Hayatsq media club on April 5th Armen Martirosyan touched upon this topic only once, as a reference, saying that there would be no reform in the economy after the elections.

Social Sector. In the first stage of monitoring all the members of the alliance only devoted a total of 1 minute and 39 seconds to social issues. The problems highlighted by the speakers and/or the proposed recommendations were overly general and did not point at solutions. Particularly, on February 13th Seyran Ohanyan, leading the slate of the alliance, stated that those who wanted and were capable of working would have such an opportunity as a result of created jobs. MP candidate Susanna Muradyan spoke about the proposal of the alliance to raise the wages of contract military servicemen at the press conference held on March 4th. However, she refrained from details at what expense.

The recommendations on creating favorable conditions for the young people's employment proposed by the same candidate were more definite. Thus, at the press conference held on February 22nd she stated that it was necessary to arrive at a mutual agreement with employers: when hiring young people employers should not require work experience and would benefit from 6- or 12-month social tax holidays. The candidate also shared her conviction that in case the budget was transparent, it would be possible to double up the lump-sum payment for a 4th child.

In the second stage of monitoring the representatives of the alliance mainly addressed the same topics: the need for raising military servicemen's wages, an increase in the benefits for children's birth, the creation of a maternity capital fund. The only exception was the press conference held at Blitz Info Club on March 29th when the speaker Susanna Muradyan recalled the outflow of about 10 billion US dollars, and expressed the intention of the alliance to return and use this sum for building housing for the 3000 homeless families in Gyumri.

During two post-election press conferences monitored in the third stage the representatives of the alliance did not make any reference to social issues.

Armenian Revolutionary Federation “Dashnaktsutyun”

Economic Sector. In none of the three press conferences in the first stage of monitoring did the representatives of the party refer to the economic problems of the country, except for mentioning them only once when Aghvan Vardanyan, running the second on the ARF slate,

stated at the press conference held at the ARF office on February 15th: “Today struggle against shadow economy in Armenia is in progress.” No assessments, problems or recommendations were presented.

In the second stage of monitoring, unlike the first one, the ARF members did touch upon economic issues, though they allocated less time to this discussions as compared with their adversaries. In terms of content, reference to economic themes was just declarative. For example, “it is necessary to boost the economy” (Artur Yeghiazaryan, March 8, Henaran Club), “It is necessary to ensure adequate economic growth”, “It is necessary to create conditions for ensuring economic growth (Smbat Saiyan, March 15, Media Center).

At a press conference on March 9th at Media Center another MP candidate Suren Parsyan stated that the ARF as a collegial party was for the fair distribution of the economic product, and that currently there were investments, there were business projects that needed to be implemented step by step. However, he did not provide details on what projects these were or how they were to be implemented. The speaker also said that the EEU and the EU were good markets for Armenia and at the same time Armenia could contribute to the initiation of negotiations for creating a free trade zone within the EEU – Iran cooperation framework.

From among all ARF party representatives Bagrat Yesayan was the one to cover economic topics in more detail at the press conference held at Hayatsq Club on March 30th. He stated that the economy in Armenia was fully divided among large business entities. Small and medium business entities had no opportunity to find large-scale investments and the loans borrowed from the banks were of usurious nature and could not be effective. In this regard, the representative of the ARF voiced a proposal on amending the legislation of the banking system, so that the system could stimulate the development of the economy and lead to an environment where large businesses paid the major share of taxes but at the same time opened up possibilities for small and medium businesses. The speaker also raised the problem of inefficiency in mining industry, stating that the mineral resources were being exploited unsparingly, and only large business entities benefited, whereas the state budget did not receive the expected revenues. In order to solve these problems, according to the speaker, it was necessary to change the nature of economic relations, but the member of the party did not provide details on how that was supposed to be done.

Social Sector. During press conferences in the first stage of monitoring ARF representatives did not refer to this sector.

In the second stage of monitoring social issues were covered, though rarely. Thus, at Hayeli Club on March 7th MP candidate Anahit Harutyunyan responded to the opponent’s argument that certificates had to be issued to vulnerable families to pay for higher education, stating that it was a misconception that all socially vulnerable people should have higher education. At the press conference at Media Center on March 9th ARF member Suren Parsyan said that the party was against the mandatory pension fund, not specifying what it was proposing instead.

At the same center another MP candidate – Smbat Saiyan, referred to the issue of salaries on March 15th and stated that the minimal salary needed to be periodically raised based on the cost of minimum expenditure basket, whereas the salary of state servicemen should ensure a prosperous standard of living. As for healthcare, the speaker was in favor of the introduction of a mandatory insurance system, also arguing that the state should make the payments for the vulnerable groups.

At the press conferences held by the ARF members it was noticeable that they often expressed their disagreement with the recommendations related to the social sector proposed by some adversary political forces. Particularly, at the press conference held at Hayatsq club on March 30th Bagrat Yesayan considered it unrealistic to ensure the complete return of deposits in the former USSR Savings Bank, as well as the raise of pensions by 25 thousand drams.

None of the party representatives held a press conference in the third stage of monitoring.

OTHER TOPICS RAISED AT PRESS CONFERENCES

Besides economic and social issues, the monitoring team recorded all other issues the speakers touched upon. However, according to the methodology, the time devoted to the other topics was not counted by the justification that they were of secondary importance to this study. Below we have presented the topics dwelt upon by the political forces running for Parliament during press conferences held in the first and second stages of monitoring in the same order.

Other issues raised by the EXIT alliance

Stage One

- The composition of the EXIT's slate, pre-electoral political rearrangements,
- The formation of the pre-electoral oppositional arena and the involvement of former officials,
- The aims of the alliance,
- The need for creating guarantees of having no political prisoners in the country,
- Opportunities for creating a coalition government through negotiations,
- Election bribes and sale of votes, as well as fight against these phenomena,
- Environmental problems in Armenia,
- Karabakh issue and its future,
- Energy sector problems,
- The situation on the frontline and the organizational problems related to it,
- A security system for the country and strengthening of the army,
- Possibilities for power change and the formulation of a foreign affairs agenda by means of joint actions of political forces,
- Elections in the difficult conditions set by the Electoral Code,
- The possibility for holding free and fair elections and the need for ensuring effective public control,
- Issues of the formation of an institutional opposition,
- EXIT's opportunities to create coalitions and exclude the involvement of RPA representatives,
- The case of "March 1st" and the protection of human rights,
- Issues, related to the low level or lack of awareness among the electorate,
- Campaign strategy, attraction of more allies,
- Emigration and repatriation problems,
- The participation of the Diaspora in the political life of Armenia,
- Customs-related issues faced when importing fuel,
- The need for forming an independent judicial system,
- Access to quality higher education,
- Women's engagement in politics,
- Absence of the political debate culture and civilized elections tradition.

Besides the above-mentioned, the following topics were touched upon in **Stage Two**:

- Need for reforms in the education sector,
- Specific features and impediments to the organization of the election campaign,

- Corruption as a threat to national security, need for creating an independent anti-corruption body,
- Lack of public trust in the institution of elections,
- The mission and prospects of the Exit alliance,
- Need for the development of relations with NATO,
- Circumstances of “Bread Bringer’s” (Artur Sargsyan) death and political reactions,
- Foreign policy during the campaign,
- Samvel Babayan’s arrest and related political processes,
- Involvement of school teachers in the process of winning votes for the RPA candidates,
- Attitude to sociological surveys and sociological organizations.

During the only post-election press conference in the **third stage** of monitoring the representatives of the Exit alliance made a statement where they specified that both in the course of the campaign and on the day of elections the citizens’ will to vote has been subject to illegal administrative and financial pressures. They also highlighted that there were no facts proving the violations and abuses in order to litigate the results of the elections.

Other issues raised by the Free Democrats Party

Stage One

- Pre-electoral political rearrangements,
- Design of the pre-election party slate,
- Need for changes in the education sector,
- Exploitation of mines and environmental problems,
- Ensuring healthcare for disabled military,
- Political competition, pre-electoral rhetoric and ethics,
- The formation of pre-electoral coalitions by the opposition and former officials,
- The reasons for not having a united opposition,
- Lack of an ideological struggle, the distribution of the affluent between the opposition and the ruling power,
- The involvement of the youth in the slates,
- The solution of the Karabakh problem in a package version,
- The issue of involving Nagorno Karabakh in the negotiations,
- Spreading the culture of civilized campaign,
- Liberalization as the main ideology of the party,
- The situation on the frontline and the organization of defense in relation to it,
- The reconstruction of the army and the transition to paid military service,
- Opportunities for struggle against election bribes and other violations,
- Elections by the new rules of the game, dictated by the new Electoral Code,
- Political competition,
- Lack of the will to hold free elections and bribing of poor voters by the authorities,
- Elections: political competition or a struggle of resources?
- Security system of Armenia: not CSTO, but NATO.

Besides the above-mentioned, the following topics were touched upon in **Stage Two**:

- The essence of Armenian – Russian relations,
- Specific features and impediments to the organization of the election campaign,

- A comparative analysis of the platforms of the Free Democrats Party and other forces,
- Women's involvement in politics,
- Violations of the electoral legislation during the campaign,
- The need for revising defense policy,
- The need for internal and external investigations of the April war,
- Circumstances of "Bread Bringer's" (Artur Sargsyan) death and political reactions,
- The coverage of the campaign in the media,
- Samvel Babayan's arrest and related political processes,
- The use of the administrative resource during the campaign,
- The problems of Syrian Armenian immigrants,
- Involvement of school teachers in the process of winning votes for the RPA candidates,
- Attitude to sociological surveys and sociological organizations.

During the press conferences in the **third stage** the representatives of the party strongly criticized the elections that had taken place, singling out the reasons of their defeat, particularly, the black PR against them, manipulations with the data of surveys, the factor of giving money to the voters by the ruling power, as well as guidance and control over the process of voting. The speakers also referred to the information circulating in the political circles and the society according to which RA President's son-in-law, Michael Minasyan (the RA Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Vatican) supported the Exit Alliance and to his response on this matter. They highlighted the atmosphere of fear in the public. As an outcome of the elections, it was recorded that the Parliament to be formed was of worse quality than the previous one.

Other issues raised by the Armenian Revival Party

Stage One

- Interparty work and design of pre-election slate,
- Political rearrangements and competition,
- Social focus of the Party platform,
- Probability of forming a coalition after the elections,
- The situation on the frontline and organization of defense in this regard, recruiting professionals,
- The need for transitioning to paid army service,
- Karabakh issue, package version,
- Lack of ideological struggle, money race,
- Need to stimulate the activity of the electorate,
- Election bribes and their causes,
- Emigration as a serious challenge and the possibilities of overcoming it,
- The poor composition and activity of the previous Parliament,
- The making of the political system as an urgent issue,
- Possible post-election alliances,
- The deficiencies of the new Electoral Code,
- The need for a program to ensure the security of the country,
- The party leader's factor in the elections,
- Probable collaboration among oppositional forces,
- The necessity for eliminating the monopoly held by the authorities,
- The significance of electoral platforms in the elections,

- Relations among the political parties participating in the elections,
- The issues of culture in the electoral platform,
- Representatives of large businesses in the National Assembly,
- Legislative amendments directed not at business, but societal interests,
- The involvement of NGOs in election processes.

Besides the above-mentioned, the following topics were touched upon in **Stage Two**:

- General assessment of the campaign,
- The necessity for reforms in the education sector,
- Possibilities of contract military service,
- The problem of electoral intimidations in Armenia,
- Media coverage of the campaign,
- Circumstances of “Bread Bringer’s” (Artur Sargsyan) death and political reactions,
- The attitude to sociological surveys and sociological organizations,
- Women’s participation in the elections,
- Intentional impediments to exercising the candidates’ powers,
- Involvement of school teachers in the process of winning votes for the RPA candidates.

In the third, post-election stage the party did not hold a press conference.

Other issues raised by Tsarukyan Alliance

Stage One

- The factor of political leaders in the elections,
- Political rearrangements and design of the electoral slate of the alliance,
- The chances the alliance has in the elections and the presented platform,
- The need for political competition,
- Electoral bribes in the pre-election process,
- Pre-election race and possibility of change of government,
- Emigration and the ways of overcoming it,
- The 15 points of the alliance’s platform targeting changes in the situation in the country.

Besides the above-mentioned, the following topics were touched upon in **Stage Two**:

- Clashes between RPA and PAP supporters and political evaluation of the events,
- The general assessment of the campaign,
- Issues of increasing the efficiency of state governance,
- Importance of the rule of law,
- Revelation deficiencies of the electoral code,
- The factor of Tsarukyan in the political struggle,
- Circumstances of “Bread Bringer’s” (Artur Sargsyan) death and political reactions,
- Samvel Babayan’s arrest and related political processes,
- CEC’s behavior during the campaign,
- The regulation of Artsakh problem and the unacceptability of Levon Ter-Petrosyan’s recommendations,
- Elections and possible coalitions,
- The attitude to sociological surveys and sociological organizations,

- Involvement of school teachers in the process of winning votes for the RPA candidates.

In the third post-election period of monitoring the Alliance did not hold a press conference.

Other issues raised by Congress-PPA Alliance

Stage One

- Formation of an alliance and the submission of the election slate,
- Probable political collaboration in the post-election period,
- Political rearrangements,
- Election bribes in the election process,
- The participation of the army in political processes,
- Description of the election process and ANC's steps,
- A platform addressing the Karabakh issues by means of an international peace treaty,
- The difference between the ANC's and RPA's platforms regarding the establishment of peace,
- Emigration and the need for its prevention,
- The situation in the army,
- Issues of trust held by the people and the power,
- Recruitment of new candidates and ensuring their election by coercive methods,
- Possibilities of controlling the elections and the reduction of violations,
- The reasons of not forming a wide oppositional alliance,
- The case of "March 1st" and the protection of human rights,
- Political prisoners and human rights,
- Political consensus around the mechanisms of controlling the election process, however not around the Electoral Code,
- Fight against corruption,
- Post-electoral prognosis,
- The electorate of ANC,
- Advantages of open borders,
- Intelligentsia on the slate of the alliance,
- Probable collaboration among opposition forces for the sake of controlling the election process.

Besides the above-mentioned, the following topics were touched upon in **Stage Two**:

- Pre-election intimidation and pressure,
- Revelation of the deficiencies of the Electoral Code,
- The role of women in politics and their participation in the elections,
- Demographic issues arising as a result of emigration,
- Elections and probable coalitions,
- Circumstances of "Bread Bringer's" (Artur Sargsyan) death and political reactions,
- The current state and development potential of relations between Armenia and Russia,
- The quality and orientation of the electorate,
- Pre-election clashes and brawl among competing political forces,
- Environmental issues in the pre-electoral platform,
- General assessments of and impressions from the campaign,
- The attitude to sociological surveys and sociological organizations.

In the third post-election period of monitoring the Alliance did not hold a press conference.

Other issues raised by the Republican Party of Armenia

Stage One

- Political rearrangements,
- Design of the party slate, interparty life,
- Alliances, figures and not ideas,
- Ensuring the security of Armenia and Nagorno Karabkh as a priority issue and a campaign slogan,
- The significance of the 2017 elections,
- The need for revising Armenia – Belarus relations in the context of Lapshin’s extradition,
- The wrap up on the last National Assembly session,
- Issues of elections organization and political competition,
- Parliamentary elections and expectations of raising the level of public trust,
- The causes of deserting the political arena,
- The technological innovations for controlling the elections and the expectations thereof,
- The young people in the RPA slate,
- The political composition of the future Parliament, prognosis,
- Camp shifts without ideological frameworks, potential adversaries,
- Description and rationale of the policies pursued by the authorities,
- Issues of the orientation of the electorate in the conditions of new political unions and figures,
- Specificities of rating-based voting,
- The mandate of the opposition in the new Parliament,
- The stability of alliances,
- Responsibility of the authorities as organizers of elections,
- The difficulties of differentiating among donations, charity and election bribes,
- An analysis of the specific features of the election race,
- The problem of emptying of rural settlements,
- The military situation at the Armenian – Azerbaijani line of contact,
- The RA President’s visit to Brussels, and Armenia – EU negotiations around the framework agreement,
- Criminalization of election bribery.

Besides the above-mentioned, the following topics were touched upon in **Stage Two**:

- Rationalization of party’s policies regarding various sectors,
- The peaceful settlement of the Karabakh conflict,
- The process of interparty rearrangements,
- Clashes between the RPA and PAP in the pre-election period,
- “Bread Bringer’s” (Artur Sargsyan) death and political reactions,
- Charity and election bribes as a pre-electoral factor,
- Quality and orientation of the electorate,
- The significance of Armenian identity, family and the Armenian language in the election platform,
- Specific features of the foreign policy,
- Samvel Babayan’s arrest and related political processes,
- Issues in education sector as presented in the electoral platform,
- The attitude to sociological surveys and sociological organizations,

- Involvement of school teachers in the process of winning votes for RPA candidates: substantiation and counterarguments for oppositional forces,
- Criticism of oppositional forces.

During press conference in the **third**, post-election stage the representatives of the party touched upon the following issues:

- Brief assessment of the elections held in compliance with the new Electoral Code: according to the RPA a huge step forward has been recorded in terms of the unprecedented participation of the electorate, control over voting was excluded, no political force appealed against the results, this parliament is much better by the quality of its composition and intellectually,
- Election bribery has been considered blameworthy, need for learning lessons for the deficiencies of the rating voting,
- The representation of ethnic minorities in the Parliament.

Other issues raised by the Communist Party

Stage One

- Design of the pre-electoral slate,
- Issues of effective struggle against corruption,
- The principle of the self-determination of nations as a priority direction for Communists,
- Stalinism as a cruel time period,
- Need for intercultural dialogue,
- The return of Communists as a public demand,
- The need for preventing emigration,
- Post-Soviet injustice towards Communists,
- The need for Communist ideology in the new Parliament,
- Alliances are formed without an ideological foundation,
- Access to education for ordinary citizens,
- EEU as a guarantee for the security of the country.

Besides the above-mentioned, the following topics were touched upon in **Stage Two**:

- The structure of the future Parliament: prognosis,
- Opportunities for strengthening strategic partnership with Russia,
- Peaceful settlement of the Karabakh issue,
- Issues of education in the pre-election platform,
- Demographic crisis in remote villages,
- Judicial reforms,
- The activities of local self-governments,
- “Bread Bringer’s” (Artur Sargsyan) death and political reactions,
- The attitude towards sociological surveys,
- The use of the administrative resource in the pre-electoral period,
- Media coverage of the campaign.

During the only press conference in the **third** post-election period of monitoring the speaker did not refer to the other issues.

Other issues raised by Ohanyan – Raffi – Oskanian Alliance of Parties

Stage One

- The formation of a joint alliance, its goals, objectives and ideas,
- Pre-electoral political rearrangements,
- Rigging of the previous elections,
- Need for the formation of an independent judicial system,
- Analysis of the activity of the authorities,
- Issues of raising the level of combat readiness and efficiency of the army, stimulating contract service, and ensuring a security system,
- The need for changing the situation in the country,
- Guarantees for ensuring the security of Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh,
- The probable solution of the Nagorno Karabakh issue,
- The reasons for refusal to collaborate with the authorities and justifications,
- The need for releasing political prisoners and the exclusion of having such in the future,
- The participation of the army in the voting process,
- The importance of collaboration with the civil society,
- Challenges and advantages of the new Electoral Code,
- Adversaries of the ORO Alliance and the potential for coalition,
- Need for making up a separate list for voters residing outside Armenia,
- The factor of the electoral bribe in the elections,
- Armenia's relations with the EEU, EU, CSTO and NATO, as well as separately with China, India and Russia, from the security perspective,
- The justifications for radically changing the pyramid-shaped political system in the country,
- Prevention of emigration,
- Solution of environmental problems,
- Competition of oppositional forces with one another and the fight against the authorities.

Besides the above-mentioned, the following topics were touched upon in **Stage Two**:

- Pre-electoral violence and intimidation,
- The arrest of Oskanian's son and political evaluations,
- The role of women in politics and participation in elections,
- Need for amendments to the Constitution and the Electoral Code,
- Foreign policy in the pre-electoral platform, revision of Ambassadors,
- The issue of political debates in the pre-election struggle,
- Involvement of school teachers in the process of winning votes for the RPA candidates: justifications and counterarguments to the oppositional forces,
- Samvel Babayan's arrest and related political processes,
- The attitude to sociological surveys and sociological organizations,
- Intentional impediments during the campaign,
- The level of the electorate's awareness.

At the press conferences of the **third**, post-election stage the representatives of the alliance referred to the illegitimacy of the authorities, including that of the Parliament, and as a consequence, the incapability of finding effective solutions to the problems the country is facing. The following negative evaluation was given to the pre-electoral processes and the elections:

- Instead of political elections there was a public auction of votes,
- The number of voters is exaggerated, the ruling party has “won the votes” of the dead and residents of foreign countries,
- The voting was guided by those in the authorities’ service,
- The new Parliament has been formed by three people – Serzh Sargsyan, Gagik Tsarukyan, Michael Minasyan,
- The opposition was unable to unite, even after the elections.

Other issues raised by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation “Dashnaktsutyun”

Stage One

- Design of the party slate, interparty work,
- The plans of the Armenian Cause offices in 2017,
- Analysis of the situation at the border between Karabakh and Azerbaijan,
- Political development in the South Caucasus region,
- The new power formed through elections and expectations thereof,
- The need for a qualitative change of power and issues of overcoming systemic defects,
- The potential of a real coalition with the RPA,
- The new electoral system and the exclusion of forgery,
- The contribution of Dashnaktsutyun in the formation of the new electoral system,
- The factors of the population’s poverty and electoral bribes in the elections,
- Preconditions for holding free and fair elections.

Besides the above-mentioned, the following topics were touched upon in **Stage Two**:

- Violations of the law during the campaign,
- Education issues as reflected in the platform,
- Violence among the representatives of the PAP and RPA, ARF and RPA and political evaluations of the events,
- Fight against corruption,
- Ensuring the combat readiness and efficiency of the army,
- Peaceful settlement of the Karabkh problem and the involvement of the NKR in the negotiations process,
- Demographic problems and repatriation,
- Samvel Babayan’s arrest and related political processes,
- Involvement of school teachers in the process of winning votes for RPA candidates: substantiation and counterarguments for oppositional forces,
- The ideological aspect of the electoral race,
- The deficiencies of the rating election system and the need to refuse from it,
- The attitude to sociological surveys and sociological organizations,
- Criticism of Levon ter-Petrosyan’s recommendations.

In the third, post-election period the party did not hold a press conference.

CONCLUSION

The results of the monitoring show that already in the time period prior to the official election campaign of the 2017 April 2 Parliamentary elections the political forces, in general, made quite an active use of press conferences as a means to present their ideas and approaches to the electorate. 63 press conferences were held in different media halls in the capital from February 6th to March 4th 31 of which hosted 2 and more political figures, thus the total number of speakers amounted to 114.

During the 27 days of the official campaign, Stage Two of monitoring, the political forces' activity in this regard was even more intense. 110 press conferences were recorded, with the participation of 201 political figures. As for the post-election period, the activity of the political forces abruptly reduced, there were only 9 press conferences held with the participation of 15 political figures. In total, during all the three stages of monitoring 182 press conferences were held with the participation of 330 representatives of parties and alliances.

It terms of participation rates in press conferences in the first stage of monitoring the Republican Party was the most active of all the forces in the election race, followed by the EXIT alliance, the Free Democrats and the Armenian Revival Parties. The most passive ones were the Armenian Revolutionary Federation "Dashnaksutyun" and the Communist Party of Armenia.

During the official campaign the picture changed completely. First of all, the EXIT Alliance and the Free Democrats Party exceeded the RPA with the participation rates. Besides, almost all political forces in the election race, with the exception of Ohanyan – Raffi – Oskanian Alliance, abruptly increased their participation in press conferences. Thus, the indicators of the Exit Alliance and the Free Democrats Party grew two and more times. There was almost an equal increase in the participation of the Armenian Revival party and the Congress – PPA Alliance. Whereas the rates of the most passive participants of the first stage, namely Tsarukyan Alliance, ARF and the Communist Party, grew respectively by more than 3, 5 and 10 times.

In the post-election period the press conferences held by the political forces were rare. Most probably, this was conditioned by the absence of any post-election developments, namely protests and other mass initiatives to question the results of the elections. Only 5 of the 9 political forces participating in the elections held press conferences. The RPA, ORO and Free Democrats were the relatively active ones, whereas the ARF, Tsarukyan, Congress – PPA Alliances and the Armenian Revival Party did not hold a post-election press conference at all.

In terms of the duration of press conferences in the first stage of monitoring Ohanyan – Raffi – Oskanian Alliance (399 min. 40 sec.), the RPA (309 min. 5 sec.) and the EXIT (298 min. 45 sec.) were the leaders. However, as for the amount of time allocated for economic and social issues, the EXIT (29 min. 17 sec.) exceeded not only the aggregated rate of ORO (12 min. 39 sec.) and RPA (7 min. 45 sec.) but also the other adversaries running for Parliament. In the second stage the situation completely changed in this regard: Ohanyan – Raffi – Oskanian Alliance became obviously more passive and were at the bottom, whereas the RPA occupied the position of the leader. Though yielding to the Republicans by about 100 minutes, the Free Democrats came next, and the latter were followed by the Communist Party, who had the lowest indicator in the first stage.

In general, in the second stage, i.e. during the 27 days of the campaign, the vast majority of parties and alliances paid attention to socio-economic problems many times more, that during the first stage of monitoring. Moreover, almost all political forces spoke more on economic issues than on social issues in their press conferences. The EXIT Alliance was the only exception

the representatives of which gave preference to social issues in the second stage. Whereas in the first stage they preferred to address economic issues, moreover, in terms of the time devoted to this component of the speeches the EXIT Alliance was the leader, whereas in the second stage the alliance was ahead of 6 other political forces by this indicator. The obvious leader here was the Communist party, followed by the Free Democrats, Tsarukyan Alliance and the Armenian Revival Party.

The tendency of resorting to economic rather than social issues was preserved also in the course of the third stage, during the post-election press conferences. Moreover, here too, the indicators of the Communist Party and the Free Democrats were higher than those of other forces.

It is noteworthy that the representatives of the RPA spoke much less on economic topics during the press conferences in the first stage (7 min.45 sec. in total), and they did not refer to social problems at all which was extraordinary for a party that aspired to retain power. On the days of the official campaign the Republicans somehow rectified the situation, yet, their indicators were much closer to the forces, occupying the last positions than those of leaders. During the post-election press conferences the Republicans did not change their initial approach: they bypassed issues in the economic and social sectors, not addressing these issues to the extent possible.

As for the content of speeches, in both the first and second stages of monitoring the speakers representing the ruling parties tried to justify the pursued policy, instead of identifying the problems and proposing recommendations. The political forces of the oppositional camp manifested the opposite behavior, evaluating the present socio-economic situation as a crisis, mainly referring to the current issues and giving promises of radically changing the situation. Just like in the previous campaigns, this time again it was impossible to avoid those promises and the declarative nature of ideas. Also the solutions, calculations and the sequence of steps for attaining the set tasks were not always described.