
Armenia Should Make The Next Step Towards Development Of Pluralistic Forms Of Statehood And Democracy

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An Interview with Head of OSCE Yerevan Office, Ambassador Vladimir Pryakhin

Activity of Yerevan Office of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is considered most successful among the OSCE participating States. It has become possible due to your personal merit, particularly, your active involvement as the Head of the OSCE Yerevan Office, and your successful co-operation with local authorities . How effective do you consider Office activities nowadays?

Over the last 3.5 years activities of the Office have expanded and become effective, which is evident not only from office activities' indicators, but in the first place due to Armenia's current state. Armenia is a full-fledged national and sovereign state, enjoying authority, respect and recognition of the world community. Significant (positive) changes are observed in the country: the country has reformed its state and political structure turning from a country with strong presidential system into a parliamentary-presidential republic. This is, undoubtedly, a progressive step forward in line with the present political realities. The country politically has become more stable and the authority of the government has considerably grown, which is a positive moment, indeed. In future, I'd like to see development of the civil society and mass media, so that they can find their place in the political process. Speaking politically, Armenia needs to make another step towards development of pluralistic forms of statehood and democracy.

The best guarantee of the Office's success is the mutual desire of the OSCE and the Republic of Armenia on the state and public levels for cooperation, adoption and dissemination of OSCE values and standards throughout Armenia, for democracy and freedoms, as well as new democratic institutions, cannot be imposed from outside. It requires a serious, deep and sincere desire for modernization, integration to European values, which is evident here. There is no political force in Armenia that would be against this. Naturally, it helps the Office's work. Which were the priority areas of the OSCE's activity in Armenia when you headed the Office? What essential tasks have you accomplished during these years?

The Office contributed to the structural reforms in the country. We had worked with the Armenian authorities on the Constitutional amendments for a long time. Now, 1.5 a year later, one can say that it was a successful contribution to the country's development in very complicated conditions. The Constitutional amendments have made the country's political structure more advanced despite of some subjective factors.

Besides, the request of the Armenian authorities and many OSCE participating States for increasing the economic and ecological component of our Office's activity has been largely met. Now, more than one-fourth of our budget is spent on economic and ecological projects. Aarhus movement, the so-called "green democracy" movement, has been successfully implemented in Armenia because the right to environmental information is one of the fundamental human rights. Currently, we have 9 Aarhus Centres throughout Armenia opened with our support. Moreover, we have responded to the request of the Armenian authorities to assist in elimination of rocket fuel component nicknamed mÃ©lange, which has been stored in Armenia since 1989. We have succeeded in

the implementation of this project due to close co-operation with local authorities and support of the international community. The implementation of this project is nearing completion. It is 872 tons of environmentally hazardous substance. By eliminating melange Armenia has become an example for other states, also as solving global problems.

The Office also has its contribution to the work on electoral legislation.

Does the present Electoral Code meet the European standards or it needs further improvement? Yes, the Office contributed to the country improving the electoral legislation. Now, it allows conducting free and fair elections if there is a political will. It does not mean that the document needs further improvement. One should not overdo it, as continuous changes may become an obstacle to the election process itself, the work of commissions, and even to voters.

What do you think of the present political culture in the context of the past elections? How would you assess the general political and social situation in the country?

The situation is more stable, people are more confident in their future, in general. I'd call the situation as favorable. Despite the disagreements between isolated political segments, there is a national consensus on basic issues of the country's development. It is positive, indeed. However, there is also a negative part or a task for the future.

Thus, the system of political pluralism in the country needs improvement in order for both the parliamentary and non-parliamentary political forces have an influence on the political process and decision-making. Returning to the one-party system of the past years, which brought nothing good should not happen. At present Armenia has grown to the level where the fight for power can and should take place through making comparisons of constructive programmes of social-economic development of the country. Thus, just declaring conceptual views of the policy, and particularly, the social policy, and a proposal for raising pensions and improving the electricity supply system, for instance, are not enough. Such programmes must be a basis for comparison of political platforms and a serious claim for power. From this point of view, I think that all the political parties in Armenia face heavy tasks. Moreover, Armenia is speeding up the process of integration into Europe. The political culture in Armenia is one of the highest in the post-Soviet area due to the local traditions. Nevertheless, Armenia still has much to do. Despite their good political insight, Armenians are using it in the Soviet archaic form, which is outdated. Now, it needs to follow progressive experience of various democracies, and Armenia succeeds in it, especially in the legislative sphere. However, much is still to be done to fulfill the new legislation.

Do you think the 15-percentage gender quota in the parliament is enough for strengthening women's role in it?

It seems it has not changed much in reality since there were 7 women in the parliament of the former convocation, and they are 12 now. No, it is an essential change. The women in the parliament grew in number almost twice.

Every vote is 1.3% of the total; so 12 votes are additional 6-7%. My view on it is that "little pigeons can carry great messages." In principal, the quoting has not received a unique-estimate even in different OSCE participating States. Our position is that Armenian women must participate in decision-making especially in politics and in the parliament. Therefore we positively considered the new quota and the amendment to it saying that women must not go last in the party list. I know all the women elected to the

parliament. These are active and well-prepared participants to the political process. I think it has seriously strengthened the parliament. New persons, particularly, businessmen, have come to replace many politicians who had formed the country's political culture for years.

What impact it will have on big politics?

Frankly speaking, we have not yet looked at the increase of businessmen in the parliament, as it is not essential for us. It is more important that they are elected through free and fair election. The material welfare of deputies should not be regarded when assessing them as political figures.

After all, a man can use his/her authority, wealth and brain for the welfare of the country.

What would you advise to your successor? Can you name him already?

The chairmanship is currently selecting the candidates. I know that these are rather competent candidates. I'd like my successor to continue what has been started. The project "Melange" must be successfully brought to an end within the coming months. Moreover, the police reform project aimed at creating a new democratic police needs further attention. Much has already been done, but the police needs to acquire new democratic skills of dealing with people, so that they feel themselves as servants of the people rather than their supervisors. We are very grateful to the donor-states, particularly, to Belgium, Finland, Norway, Switzerland, Germany, Holland, USA, Canada, which contributed to both the "Melange" and the Police Assistance Programmes.

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