

Dear Chairman, distinguished delegates of the EPP Political Assembly

On behalf of the Heritage Party, whose candidate Raffi Hovannisian actually won the presidential elections of 2013 but with the EPP then-leadership's complicit knowledge was stolen by Serzh Sarkysyan, the current occupant of the presidential chair, I have the honor, however painful, to report the following:

On December 6 of this year, a referendum on Amendments to the Constitution took place in Armenia. As usual, the elections were rigged by the ruling Republican party. It is very inconvenient for me to speak about this as that party is an EPP observer member together with Heritage, which I represent. But the scale of violations of the referendum has surpassed all previous elections.

Closest to home, Heritage Party board member Hrayr Manukyan was beaten right at the polling station during the vote count only for the fact that he tried to prevent the violations as member of the local electoral commission. And this crime was committed with the complete indifference of the police, which was present at the polling station. This example became reflective of the harsh reality that the crime of election theft was widespread and multi-faceted and bore a systemic character.

So as not to seem biased, I quote the preliminary report of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) observation mission, the independent observation mission of the European Platform for Democratic Elections (EPDE), consisting of civic observers from the European Union and Armenia as well as the considered position of the Civil Society of Armenia as presented in an Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Armenian National Platform statement.

As mentioned in the preliminary report of the cross-party observation delegation of PACE, headed by Andreas Gross, “the referendum was driven by political interests instead of the needs of the Armenian public” and “the core of the constitutional change - the shift from a presidential to a parliamentary system - was understood by too many citizens as being a means for the current president to remain in power after the end of his second (and what would have been final) term.” The report also underscored seven points on the different methods of election fraud employed by the authorities – from inaccuracy of the voting lists and the misuse of administrative resources by executive bodies to the evidence of large-scale organized vote buying and carousel voting, as well as confirmed reports of multiple and open voting and pressure on, and attempts to corrupt, election officials, soldiers, and average voters.

The Preliminary Statement of the Citizen Observer Initiative and the European Platform for Democratic Elections, 700 observers of which were deployed to 500 precincts in all regions of the country on voting day, concluded that “due to the high number of electoral violations and crime, including intimidation of voters, falsification of protocols and numerous reports on ballot box stuffing, we believe that the Referendum results do not reflect the free will of Armenian citizens and should not be considered to be legitimate.”

Finally, the representatives of the Armenian National Platform (ANP) of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum expressed their deep frustration regarding numerous violations recorded during the preparation, conduct, and vote counting of the December 6 referendum on Amendments to the Armenian Constitution. “We assert that the authorities resorted to all possible leverages of influencing the outcome of the voting - use of administrative resources, vote buying, instruction of voters, pressure and violence exerted against opposition members of electoral commissions, proxies, observers and journalists,

ballot box stuffing, voting for absent and dead citizens, as well as multiple voting by the same citizens, stealing of ballot boxes and voter registers, etc,” reads the statement.

I would also like to mention the unequal conditions under which opposition parties operate in Armenia, where the ruling party, occupying governmental positions through fraudulent elections and conflicts of interest, strangles all possible sources of funding for the political opposition.

Whereas the ruling party uses tens of millions of euros from all possible sources of funding - from the state budget itself to a web of oligarchs and the comprehensive abuse of administrative resources - to fulfill not only its official functions but also for distribution of election bribes and financing of the huge system of election frauds, the only source of funding of the political opposition is the state budget, the overall amount of which, for example for the Heritage Party, is 7,600 euros per year. Could you imagine? Another source allowed by law is the voluntary contribution, but businessmen are afraid to donate even small sums to opposition parties, having before their eyes recurring instances when those citizens brave enough to make such donations (both publicly and even privately) have been artificially and purposefully driven into bankruptcy or dispossession under the administrative pressure of governmental structures which in reality provide a convenient but unlawful façade for the ruling party.

Colleagues, it is our well-founded and time-tested suggestion that the EPP express its value-anchored attitude toward the electoral violations committed by its member party, breaches so rampant and organized as to amount to collective treason against the Armenian Constitution and citizenry and to render the referendum null and void.

Hovsep Khurshudyan, Heritage Party (Armenia), delivered at Brussels, 11 December 2015