

“SUPPORT TO TWO ELECTORAL CYCLES IN ARMENIA”
INFORMATION ON THE PROJECT PROGRESS
(February - August, 2012)

With the financial support from the European Union in the amount of EURO 1,704,237 the OSCE Office in Yerevan started implementation of the project entitled “Support to two electoral cycles in Armenia” in February 2012.

The project is initiated in order to provide comprehensive support for the improved efficiency of election administration and transparency of the electoral processes in line with international standards. The project is also designed to strengthen institutional capacity of electoral management bodies (EMBs) to plan, manage and deliver democratic elections. Through its fast and flexible support mechanism OSCE is well placed to ensure national ownership.

The first phase of the project aimed at support to parliamentary elections in Armenia.

The main activities in the run of the parliamentary elections included: Setting up of the Project implementation Unit (PIU), strengthening the technical capacities of CEC/TEC/PEC, training for domestic observers, including youth groups, supporting Passport and Visa department of RA Police in strengthening the technical capacities, facilitating awareness raising in the army, strengthening knowledge and awareness of general public on election procedures, print and broadcast media monitoring, training for journalists on election coverage, and assisting the HRDO to establish regional Ombudsman offices, hot lines and Rapid Reaction Groups.

The project provided **technical assistance** to strengthen capacities of the election management bodies (EMBs) and Police for data management and voter registration systems, as well as to consolidate data collection in the CEC.

The project made significant strides in **strengthening the professional capacities of the PECs** to carry out efficient and accountable administration of electoral processes.

The PEC trainings were held throughout the country and nearly 11,000 (79%) out of 13,811 accredited PEC members were trained. The conduct of the training as well as the quality of the training manuals were positively appraised by the project partners, including the CEC and observers of the process, including the OSCE/ODIHR, OSCE PA, PACE and EP observers.

The project made substantial progress in **improving knowledge and skills of police officers** involved in protecting public order and investigating pre-electoral violence.

Public Order Management Training was highly successful and was highly appreciated by the participants. The enhanced capacities of the police are mentioned in the reports by international and domestic observers. Public Order Management Training was highly successful and was highly appreciated by the participants.

Within the framework of the activities planned for the first stage of the project, a TV **Public Service Announcement** (PSA) on polling procedures has been produced to raise public awareness on polling procedures. Considering the recent adoption of the new Electoral Code, this activity was aimed at ensuring that general voters are informed of the voting procedures.

The PSA was broadcasted on the Public TV (H1) and posted on the CEC website (www.elections.am), OSCE website (www.osce.org/yerevan) and sites of other partner organisations.

Before the parliamentary elections the project supported the development and **production of a poster** that described the electoral rights and election procedures for military personnel. The poster was presented with the slogan "I defend my motherland also by voting" and is aimed to raise the awareness of the military personnel so they could better understand and participate in the elections.

The Ministry of Defence expressed its gratitude to the Office and the EU Delegation and stressed an importance of the project in terms of raising awareness of the military personnel of their fundamental rights as a key precondition for the fairness and transparency of the election process in the military

Domestic observer groups and human rights NGOs were supported so they can carry out professional short-term observation on polling days. Support was also provided to NGOs to conduct long-term media monitoring during elections and to work to improve journalists' capacities to report on elections in a qualitatively high and professional manner. The project further worked to promote civic participation of youth groups from the regions by training and involving them in parliamentary election observation.

In total five NGOs were involved in **domestic observation** with the support of this project providing 360 observers to parliamentary elections in 176 locations.

Within this task the project also addresses issues of restoring young people's interest in democracy, the power of free and fair elections and freedom of expression, through the direct participation of **youth as elections observers**. In total 90 young people were involved in the election processes as local observers on the parliamentary election day.

The project has been deeply involved in monitoring the **media's coverage of the 2012 Parliamentary Elections**. Based on the OSCE's assessment of the media landscape in Armenia, broadcast and print media coverage of the 2012 Parliamentary Elections were prioritized.

Media monitoring was conducted by civil society representatives in two areas broadcast and print media. The findings were reported through three press conferences, which were largely attended by the representatives of media.

Aimed at improving the quality of journalistic coverage of the 2012 parliamentary elections a **training workshop on the freedom of expression standards** related to election reporting was organized prior to the commencement of the official pre-election campaign for a group of 20 Armenian journalists, representing print, broadcast and electronic media.

The focus of the workshop was on the right to freedom of expression and the right to free elections.

One of the components of the project relates to **building capacity of the HRDO**. The OSCE Office has been providing support to the Human Rights Defender's Office (HRDO) since its establishment in 2004. Under this project the Office supported HRDO office in establishing six regional offices, establishment and maintenance of Hot Line and Rapid Reaction Groups.

In total **116 hotlines operating 24/7** were established and maintained..

During two months of operation (April-May, 2012) the **RRGs provided assistance in 119** cases. On election day 22 RRG crews operated throughout the country.

In April - May 2012 the HRD regional offices received 19 written complaints with regard to electoral processes. In addition, the HRDO's **Hot Lines received 125 calls, 45 of which related to electoral concerns in the regions**.

**“SUPPORT TO TWO ELECTORAL CYCLES IN ARMENIA”
HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE PHASE TWO
(September, 2012 - August, 2013)**

During the second phase the project supported conduct of the 2013 Presidential elections in Armenia through following major activities:

EMB training: The election commissioners throughout the country were trained on election administration, focusing on the voting process. The trainings also considered ethical and moral responsibility of all precinct election commission (PEC) officials for transparent elections. In total 15000 commissioners took part in the training.

As in the phase one the phase two also covered **information provision on elections to the army** through producing and distribution of information materials on electoral rights and procedures for military servicemen. The distribution was organized free of charge by the Ministry of Defense throughout the military units.

A training course was carried out for the prosecutors of the Special Investigative Service (SIS), which functions independently from the General Prosecutor, and is tasked with investigating crimes that involve high-level officials, have political importance or those that are related to electoral fraud. The training was aimed at enhancing the SIS capacities in efficient investigation of election-related crimes. The training addressed one of the fundamental issues – the lack of public trust towards elected authorities and democratic institutions in general. The training was conducted by international and national experts.

To address the need to enhanced public understanding of their electoral rights and the corresponding procedures the project promoted **production and distribution of awareness raising materials**. This activity was mostly focused on the regions of Armenia where awareness by the population of their electoral rights is low and the prevalence of vote buying and selling and other electoral infringements is very high.

The project has supported production **of TV PSAs**, as well as print materials in co-operation with domestic NGOs.

A specific focus of the project was working with the **young voters**, and in particular, with the first time voters- graduates of high schools. The first time voters were trained on electoral procedures, their electoral rights and obligations.

The project continued facilitating **domestic long and short-term observation** through several civil society organizations. The monitors were trained on election legislation and of the most important issues to be monitored, security tips and practicing in filling out observation forms. Apart from the training, all monitors were provided with a brief printed guide for their reference, which was developed by the trainers of the contracted IPs.

The project continued **monitoring of the coverage of 2013 Presidential elections by the Armenian broadcast media**. The monitoring was conducted in three phases: several months before the polling day, two weeks prior to the commencement of the official pre-election campaign and the official campaign period. The monitoring adhered to obtain quantitative and qualitative data, determining how free and impartial the Armenian broadcast media are in informing the voters of the parties/blocs running in Parliamentary elections and the presidential candidates.

Prior to presidential elections a **training was organized for a group of about 30 Armenian journalists**, representing print, broadcast and electronic media, on freedom of expression standards related to election reporting. The participants were guided through the legal and practical sides of the electoral process and electoral system in Armenia.

The project continuously supported HRDO in running **the regional offices**, established in the phase one and **maintaining of the hotline, as well as operation of the RRGs** for the capital and regions of Armenia. As in the previous phase the hotline has enabled the institution to receive and document alleged violations in the course of elections and to ultimately address those through immediate on-spot visits of the Rapid Reaction Groups (RRG).

The respective **PSAs were produced** to raise public awareness on operation, format and functions of the rapid reactions groups and the way they can be of assistance to general public during the elections.

Preparation of flyers and PSAs gives a close insight of HRDOs current activities, its role and functions during elections through regional offices as well as mechanisms of protection.

The Office has also covered the Municipal elections in Yerevan by supporting another round of trainings for precinct electoral commissions and promoting domestic observation. The latter activity resulted in a full coverage of the polling day procedures by 10 civil society groups and an unprecedented coalition building among the domestic observers. The entire process of observation has been co-ordinated among the involved organisations and a joint observation statement has been issued on the day following the polling. This consolidated effort has resulted in a more impactful public visibility of the observation and its findings. It has also proved conducive to further co-operative work of the civil society.