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**DELEGATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA**  
**ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE**

**Statement**  
**On Presidential elections in Armenia**  
**delivered by Ambassador Jivan Tabibian**  
**at the 703<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council**  
**February 28, 2008**

Mr. Chairman,

Today, the elections in Armenia are an important subject for our delegation. We listened very carefully to the few comments, both to their encouragements and their observations and some of their criticism.

Let us say that since it is a pleasant surprise hearing this unprecedented instance of our neighbor Azerbaijan's comments about our domestic politics which raise an issue we must reflect on, take care of and deal with. The notion that a soldier serving on its immediate borders for the purpose of carrying the State's security work should be deprived of his civic rights to participate in Elections is not acceptable. Actually the overall coordinator of the EOM in Armenia Senator Anne-Marie Lizin of Belgium had made the soldiers' rights to participate an issue of importance.

Mr. Chairman,

If I were to express fully all my comments and views, they will take us uncomfortably beyond the time you will allow me. So I have a solution to this: I will touch some major points, but since I have noticed lately that several colleagues have a genuine interest in knowing what is going on in Armenia in the post-election phase. I want to invite anyone who wants to come and ask me questions, information, interpretation. I assure everyone we will be even more candid than I am here. I have no problem with candor in these matters.

Let us discuss the matter of our elections in three parts.

One: the pre-election. There are a couple of observations. Everybody recognized it was competitive; it was an open field. There were no limits or conditions put as to who could run. The candidature fees were more than before but not unreasonable. Candidates did not need to be sponsored, and there were no conditions as to who would be pre-qualified to be a candidate. We can all agree this was a good thing.

The second point refers basically to the pre-electoral media situation. If one reads carefully, one will see that there was no totally unambiguous condemnation or criticism. In fact we provided evidence, after the second interim report, that one of the candidates who complained the most about not being given the right to appear and use the media, was invited 6 times to various TV channels and had refused to appear. Date and channel names are available for the curious. Also in the matter of media, we have to keep in mind that as we all know, anywhere in the world, particularly in all democratic societies, incumbency proffers certain advantages of exposure. I can elaborate on this theme anywhere and anytime, but not here given time limitations. Politicians

like to be incumbents. And please do not ask me to illustrate here the statistics about incumbents' reelection rates in various electoral democracies. All this is well known; not bad or good. It is just part of the landscape.

The third point we want to make about the pre-election phase, is to invite all of you who have access, and today with the internet we all have access to, to find the work done by a British organization called 'Populus'. 'Populus' is a highly respected opinion research operation whose findings are used most frequently by 'The Times' of London. 'Populus' had come and conducted pre-election public and political opinion assessments, both for the parliamentary elections of May 2007 and the Presidential elections of February 2008. It is very instructive to read their findings before the elections. Their data and conclusions have two implications. First, that what they found corresponds directionally, almost within a couple of percentage points to the results of the elections in terms of what people express as intentions, opinions, preferences, important concerns and policy issues. Their findings correspond directly with what happened after. This research which was done not by an Armenian firm, before its results came out at the end of January-early February, was derided by opposition papers and other groups as unreliable and biased. Why unreliable? The expert technician at 'Populus' had to explain that just because the survey was administered by a subcontractor, 'Populus' had its own techniques of random verification, their own statistical methods and margins of error. As professional work, theirs' is good enough for 'The Times' to be used frequently.

Why do we say this? Because one of the most recurring sentences in others' observations or criticisms, depending on their writing style, goes from "concern for low" to what we heard from one delegation, as "dangerously low" public confidence in the electoral process. If confidence in the process before elections was that low, then the research would have indicated great indifference towards voting and we would not get on Election Day a 69.9% turn out.

I did a brief research and found that in several of our member states sitting around this table participation in elections hovers from under 50% to 58-59%. Of course there is the exceptional, encouraging rate in Belgium of 91%, but there, voting is required by law; most others are grouped somewhere between 60% and 75%.

I am not, and I am going to use this word to some delegations' displeasure, a professional psephologist (to the interpreters, a psephologist is an expert in election analysis). The expertise exists and it is used. Technically I am not a psephologist. However one thing one finds when people do not trust a process, they do not go to vote. We know where they vote 40% or 50% they have deep doubts or feel there are no sufficient alternatives among the candidates.

This expression of concern is very interesting and therefore we should be looking at it more carefully.

The second group of issues has to do with the notion of how often in the various findings there is the phrase "unsubstantiated allegations". Unsubstantiated allegations enter the realm of electoral campaign methods but they are not something on the basis of which one can determine any kind of guilt or responsibility.

We will invite all of you to discuss with me further the post election phase. What is the post election phase? One party particularly, refuses to recognize the results. It claims it has won 99%

that all kinds of fraud were totally pervasive, sufficient to switch from 21.5% according to the final report presumably to, well over 50%. This is a claim that has taken the form of asking for recounts. That particular frustrated party led by the former president has asked for recounts. The total number of recounts asked by all parties' of the opposition including three from the governing party is for 161 precincts out of 1923. Therefore they have been demanded formally for 83% of the precincts to be recounted. Of those, 135 have been followed up. Therefore, a large majority of contested precincts have been reexamined; a quite high percentage.

We will give you one example. The American delegation spoke about arrests. Very curious information: I found that there was one arrest of the chair of a precinct electoral commission, where there were gross violations of the process. Curiously, that chairman belonged to the majority party who had indulged in the unlawful and unacceptable, conduct. The only PEC chairman that was arrested was a member of the Republican Party. People can say God knows how many more there were that deserved to be arrested? As you know I do not engage in those kinds of convoluted "what ifs".

Now the situation remains calm. One group has decided its only legitimate position is to stay in opposition. The government by all accounts has exercised restraint for 9 days without confrontation. The practical effect of this long vigil has disturbed a lot of people's lives, circulation and daily lives.

Let me say to you that what makes me personally perplex are leaders of who are continuing the so called rally, "so-called" because it was tolerated, left alone, not interfered with so far, but in strict terms not officially sanctioned by the municipality for reasons of safety, traffic and other disturbances. Nevertheless they have been tolerated. This opposition group has taunted, that is as meant to provoke a reaction by saying that the government and its security forces are basically "cowards" who do not dare come and dislodge them. It is not the best thing to do, to provoke and to call people cowards.

My final point is about dialogue. In an address to the nation, the newly elected President offers dialogue, reconciliation. He tells all opposition parties and their supporters that they remain citizens. He uses the little more inclusive notion of "brothers and sisters" and reassures them that the government is open to any form of collaboration with them, cooperation and reconciliation.

Mr. Chairman, this is all we have at this moment, but I am more than happy for those even more curious to engage in a little more in depth, factual, interpretive discussion with my delegation.

This matter was important enough for us, to be inordinately insensitive to the clock.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.