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## **The Two-Party Political System and Perspectives of its Development in the Republic of Armenia**

**KEY WORDS:**

*two-party political system, bipolar political system, constitutional reforms, enlargement of political parties*

Constitutional reforms implemented in the Republic of Armenia in 2015 marked the beginning of a new stage of the development of the Armenian political system. The Concept Paper on the Constitutional Reforms of the Republic of Armenia, among the conceptual fundamentals regarding the electoral system, particularly, stated that “for ensuring sustainable electoral system during elections to the National Assembly its main characteristics must be enshrined in the Constitution. In particular, that will allow for full realization over time of the potential of the electoral system to promote the bipolar political system. Reforms of the electoral system must create necessary conditions and serve as an impetus for the democratization of political parties and their strengthening and for the promotion of a sustainable political system. It is necessary to establish specific barriers for political parties and alliances of political parties for enlargement of political parties and stabilization of the party system”<sup>1</sup>.

In pursuance of the mentioned conceptual approaches, Article 89 of the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia (with the amendments dated as of 06.12.2015) stated: “3. The National Assembly shall be elected by a proportional electoral system. The electoral code shall secure the formation of a stable parlia-

<sup>1</sup> Concept Paper on the Constitutional Reforms of the Republic of Armenia, Elaborated by the Specialized Commission on Constitutional Reforms adjunct to the President of the Republic of Armenia. Yerevan, September 2014 (see [http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-REF\(2014\)033-e](http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-REF(2014)033-e)).

mentary majority in the National Assembly. If a stable parliamentary majority is not formed as a result of the first round of the National Assembly Election or by formation of a political coalition, a second round of the election can be conducted. Formation of new alliances is allowed in case of conducting the second round. The limitations, conditions and procedure of forming a political coalition shall be prescribed by the Electoral Code”<sup>2</sup>.

Further, Draft Electoral Code of the Republic of Armenia was elaborated, stating regulations regarding the formation of a stable parliamentary majority (adopted on 25 May, 2016 by the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Armenia (with the amendments dated as of 06.12.2015), <http://concourt.am/armenian/constitutions/index2015.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Electoral Code of the Republic of Armenia

Article 96. Minority and majority additional mandates

1. Where any political party, alliance of political parties receives, as prescribed by Article 95, the majority but less than 54 per cent of the total number of mandates, that political party, alliance of political parties shall receive as many additional mandates, so that the integral part of the per cent of mandates of that political party, alliance of political parties equals to 54 percent.
2. Where based on elections any political party, alliance of political parties receives more than 2/3 of the total number of mandates, other political parties, alliances of political parties shall receive as many minimum additional mandates (AM) so that in the result the total number of their mandates (TNM) equals to 1/3 of the total number of mandates of the National Assembly or more.

Article 97. Formation of political coalitions

1. Within 6 days after adoption of the decision provided for in point 2 of part 1 of Article 95 of this Code any political party, alliance of political parties having passed the electoral thresholds may form a political coalition with at least two other political parties (alliances) having passed the electoral thresholds, where the sum of the votes cast for them is sufficient for making up 54 per cent of the total number of mandates, and they have come to an agreement as to the candidate for Prime Minister.
2. Coalition member political parties, alliances of political parties must, by 18:00 of the day of deadline for forming a coalition, submit to the Central Electoral Commission the decisions on forming a coalition of permanently functioning governing bodies of coalition member political parties, all member political parties to alliance of political parties. The decision on forming a coalition must contain the surname, name, patronymic of the candidate for the Prime Minister. In case of failure to submit or incomplete submission of the mentioned decision within the prescribed time limit the coalition shall be considered as not formed.
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4. The Central Electoral Commission shall, on the day following the expiry of the deadline provided for in part 2 of this Article, adopt a decision on holding a second round of elections or on election of the National Assembly.

Article 98. Second round of election of the National Assembly

1. The second round of election of the National Assembly shall be held on the 28th day after voting. Two political parties, alliances of political parties, having polled the maximum votes during the first round, shall have the right to run in the second round of election, with the exception of the case prescribed in part 3 of this Article.

The above-mentioned raises a necessity of an analysis to what extent the further adopted constitutional and legal regulations ensured the promotion of the enlargement of political parties and bipolar political system, stated in the Concept Paper; which of the options of the two-party system can be implemented in the Republic of Armenia; and what kind of developments we can predict in the discussed sphere.

In this context we would firstly like to emphasize that, to our mind, the main conceptual fundamentals of the Concept Paper on the Constitutional Reforms of the Republic of Armenia in this regard were the promotion of a sustainable political system, stabilization of the party system and democratization and strengthening of political parties. Meanwhile, the promotion of the **bipolar political system and enlargement of political parties** were the main tools for gaining these aims.

A two-party system is a party system where two major political parties dominate politics within a government. In various countries the term has differ-

2. New alliances may be formed with political parties, alliances of political parties, having the right to run in the second round, which shall be formed of political parties, alliances of political parties having passed the thresholds, where they have come to an agreement on the candidate for Prime Minister.

The letter on forming a new alliance, signed by heads of member political parties to the new alliance, all member political parties to an alliance of political parties which is a member to the new alliance, shall be submitted to the Central Electoral Commission by 18:00 of the fifth day following adoption of the decision on holding the second round as prescribed by the Central Electoral Commission. The mentioned letter must contain surname, name, patronymic of the candidate for Prime Minister. In case of failure to submit the mentioned letter within the prescribed time limit or in case of submitting it incompletely, the new alliance shall be considered as not formed.

3. Where political parties, alliances of political parties, having received the maximum number of votes, form a new alliance together, then the next political party, alliance of political parties, having received the maximum number of votes, not included in the new alliance shall receive the right to run in the second round with which a new alliance may also be formed. The letter on forming that new alliance, signed by heads of member political parties to the alliance, all member political parties to an alliance of political parties, shall be submitted to the Central Electoral Commission by the heads by 18:00 of the seventh day following the decision of the Central Electoral Commission on holding the second round as prescribed by the Central Electoral Commission.
4. If the new alliance, the member political parties to which together have received 54 per cent or more of the total number of mandates, wins in the second round, they shall preserve the received mandates.
5. If the new alliance, the member political parties to which together have received 2/3 of mandates by the results of the first round, wins in the second round, other political parties, alliances of political parties shall receive additional mandates as prescribed by part 2 of Article 96 of this Code.
6. The political party (the alliance) having won in the second round or the new alliance which (the member political parties to which together) has (have) received 54 per cent or less of mandates by the results of the first round, shall receive additional mandates as prescribed by parts 1 and 3 of Article 96 of this Code.

ent senses. In the United States, for instance, the sense of the two-party system describes an arrangement, in which all or nearly all elected officials belong to one of the only two major parties, and third parties *rarely* win any seats even in the legislature<sup>4</sup>. In such systems, while chances for third party candidates winning election to major national office are remote, it is possible for groups within the larger parties, or in opposition to one or both of them, to exert influence on the two major parties. In contrast, in the United Kingdom, for instance, the term two-party system indicates an arrangement, in which two major parties dominate elections, but in which there are also viable third parties, which do win seats in the legislature and influence the state's politics<sup>5</sup>.

Interesting to know that notwithstanding the fact that the United States has been continuously considered to be one of the most known and referred patterns of the two-party system, the Founding Fathers were against establishing such a system. According to John Adams: "There is nothing which I dread so much as a division of the republic into two great parties, each arranged under its leader, and concerting measures in opposition to each other. This, in my humble apprehension, is to be dreaded as the greatest political evil under our Constitution"<sup>6</sup>. In his farewell speech George Washington stated: "The alternate domination of one faction over another, sharpened by the spirit of revenge, natural to party dissension, which in different ages and countries has perpetrated the most horrid enormities, is itself a frightful despotism. But this leads at length to a more formal and permanent despotism. The disorders and miseries, which result, gradually incline the minds of men to seek security and repose in the absolute power of an individual; and sooner or later the chief of some prevailing faction, more able or more fortunate than his competitors, turns this disposition to the purposes of his own elevation, on the ruins of Public Liberty"<sup>7</sup>.

The above-mentioned leads us to a conclusion that though these speeches are nowadays used to challenge the effectiveness of the two-party system in the United States, their essence was a little bit different. To our mind, axial point

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<sup>4</sup> It should be mentioned that the absolute majority of seats both in the Senate and the House of Representatives of the US Congress has been continuously shared between Republicans and Democrats (see <http://www.senate.gov/history/partydiv.htm>, <http://history.house.gov/Institution/Party-Divisions/Party-Divisions/>)

<sup>5</sup> In the 1951 general election, 97 percent of Britons voted either Conservative or Labour. In the May 2010 general election, that percentage was down to 65 percent, and neither major party got a majority in the House of Commons (Read more at: <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/417744/uk-two-party-system-has-become-thing-past-michael-barone>).

<sup>6</sup> Carson McGrath. The Problem with our Bipartisan System, Jan 8, 2016 (<http://theodysseyonline.com/umass/problem-with-bipartisan-system/188839>).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

here is that the Founding Fathers were against splitting the country into parties, in general, and not against the two-party system in particular.

It is worth mentioning that the two-party system is now frequently criticized in the United States. Those, who criticize the latter, consider it as a system, destroying America. The reason is that, to their mind, Democrats and Republicans are in a death match, and the American people are caught in the middle. Moreover, they consider that this duality is making the American political debate stupid, as there is no rational discussion about anything, meanwhile the problems can't be solved unless discussing them rationally<sup>8</sup>.

In political science the idea, that within presidential systems, multiparty democracy is more difficult to sustain than two-party democracy, is widespread. In contrast, it is accepted that in parliamentary systems even multiparty system can create the basis for a stable government, for instance, via a coalition building<sup>9</sup>.

To our mind, all the above-noted ideas show that the axial issue and the main aim of this discussion, as a rule, aren't perceived properly, and are considered to be in the choice between two-party or multiparty systems. We believe that the most important issue here should be (and factually it is) having a stable political system and sustainable government. Meanwhile, the choice between two-party or multiparty systems is just a tool for reaching the noted aim.

Hence, one should always take into consideration that for having a stable democracy, not the number of political parties, but the real level of political polarization is important. It is also obvious that there are no absolute mechanisms for establishing a stable democracy and a stable political system. The tools for reaching this aim are always different in various systems and depend on a number of factors, which should be paid proper attention while finding a solution to the discussed issue. This is evidenced also by the fact that the same reasons are often presented for criticizing the two-party system in the United States, and the existing party system of Armenia and various other similar systems. Hence, a certain solution can be appropriate for Armenia, but inapplicable for the United States, and vice versa, taking into account various factors, such as legal, political, social, economic, cultural, historical, etc.

In regard to Armenia's case it should be noted that it is obvious that the number of parties hasn't led our political system to the political diversity. Obvious is also the fact that such a political situation and such a party system can't be a basis

<sup>8</sup> See M. Coblenz, *The Two-party System is Destroying America*, January 28, 2016 (read more at: <http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/politics/267222-the-two-party-system-is-destroying-america>).

<sup>9</sup> See S. Mainwaring, *Presidentialism, Multiparty Systems, and Democracy: the Difficult Equation*, September 1990 (read more at: <https://www3.nd.edu/~kellogg/publications/workingpapers/WPS/144.pdf>).

for a stable democracy and a sustainable political system. Hence, at this stage the solution can be found in the enlargement and democratization of political parties as a means for ensuring a stable political system.

To our mind, the previously presented constitutional and legal regulations are intended and can be a basis for the establishment of such a system. At the same time, we do not think that their only possible result can be the formation of a two-party system in its American perception as discussed above. In our opinion, the presented regulations allow also the existence of viable third parties, which are able to win seats in the legislature, besides the major parties, dominating elections.

Hence, it should be noted that the concrete outcomes of the mentioned regulations are difficult to precisely predict now, at their inception stage. Besides the existing legal regulations, they depend on various other factors, such as political, social, cultural, etc. At the same time, one thing is obvious: the new provisions can be a legal basis for ensuring a sustainable electoral system, for the enlargement of political parties and stabilization of the party system. Meanwhile, making precise predictions regarding the development of the concrete type of the two-party system is irrelevant at this stage, as, to our mind, according to the elaborated legal provisions possible are both options. Hence, it will be reasonable to speak about the perspectives of their development just after the factual implementation of the mentioned regulations.

#### **ABSTRACT**

The article considers the issues regarding the perspectives of development of the bipolar political system in the Republic of Armenia. The author concludes that the most important issue in regard with political systems is having a stable political system and sustainable government. Meanwhile, the choice between two-party or multiparty systems is just a tool for reaching the noted aim. Taking the above-mentioned circumstance into account, the author draws conclusions regarding the perspectives of development of the bipolar political system in the Republic of Armenia.

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