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Armenian Association of Women  
with University Education



Kingdom of the Netherlands

# **WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

## **IN THE 2012 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS**

### **IN THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA**

**Yerevan 2012**

ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN WITH UNIVERSITY EDUCATION  
GENDER STUDIES CENTER

**WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION  
IN THE 2012 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS  
IN THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA**

Analytical Overview

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# STUDY METHODOLOGY

## I. Goals, Objectives, and Methods

The study was aimed at examining and evaluating women's political participation in the 2012 parliamentary elections; conducting a qualitative analysis of women's participation in the legislative field and in political decision-making; identifying the negative practices and stereotypes preventing women's political participation; and developing recommendations on increasing women's role in civic and political life of the society and increasing their representation in political life.

The study has been conducted taking into account general approaches of solutions of gender equality issues which are defined in the following international conventions and declarations: *UN Convention on Political Rights of Women*, *UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, *Beijing Declaration and the Beijing Platform for Action*, *Millennium Declaration*, and the *Millennium Development Goals*.

During the study, the document "Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, Armenia" (**CEDAW/C/ARM/CO/4/Rev.1, 2 February 2009**) as well as the observations additions (**CEDAW/C/ARM/CO/4/Rev.1/Add.1, 1 November 2011**) were taken into account, particularly the recommendations related to electoral processes and women's representation in the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia.

During the study, the provisions and recommendations of the utmost important documents related to democratization and ensuring gender equality of the Council of Europe were also taken into account, such as the provisions of:

- "*Declaration on Equality between Women and Men as a Fundamental Criterion of Democracy*" (Istanbul, 1997);

- “*Comprehensive Approach towards Gender Equality Issues*” (Strasbourg, 1998),
- “*Balanced Participation of Women and Men in Political and Public Decision Making*” [Council of Europe Recommendation (2003)3];
- “*Gender Equality: A Core Issue in Changing Societies*” [Declaration and Programme of Action (Skopje 22-23 January 2003)];
- “*Women’s Participation in Elections*” [Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1676 (2004)];
- “*Mechanisms to Ensure Women’s Participation in Decision Making*” [Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1738 (2006)];
- “*Combating Sexist Stereotypes in the Media*” [Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1931 (2010)];
- “*Increasing Women’s Representation in Politics through the Electoral System*” [Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 1706 (2010)];
- “*Promoting the Most Favourable Gender Equality Laws in Europe*” [Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 1780 (2010)];
- “*A minimum of 30% of Representatives of the Under-Represented Sex in Assembly National Delegations*” [Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 1781 (2010)];
- “*Gender Policy Concept Paper*” adopted by the Government of the RA in 2010;
- “*Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men*” draft law passed the 1st hearing at the National Assembly of the RA.

***The following issues have been put forward in the course of the study:***

- to examine the gender situation in Armenia on the threshold of the 2012 electoral processes and to identify the reasons of gender imbalance in the political sector;
- to separate the objective and subjective reasons affecting women’s political participation;
- to reveal the factors and preconditions determining women’s electoral practice;
- to analyse the experience of women’s political participation;
- to organise focus groups and roundtable discussions with representatives of political parties and civil society;
- to organise meetings of political parties with NGOs and to conduct interviews with groups of identified experts;



- to follow election campaigns of political parties;
- to analyse participation of NGOs in electoral processes.

*The following methods have been used in the course of the study:*

- Analysis of:
  - women's representation in legislative bodies, executive decision-making structures, and local self-government bodies;
  - statistical data describing the gender situation in the country;
  - platforms of political parties and election platforms of parties, alliances of parties and of female candidates by the majoritarian electoral system;
  - situation of women's political participation before and during the 2012 parliamentary elections of the RoA;
- Focus group discussions with representatives of political parties and civil society before the elections;
- Roundtable discussions with representatives of political parties and civil society on election outcomes;
- Interviews with female candidates, leaders, and activists of political parties and NGOs before and after the elections;
- Analysis of media coverage of women's participation in elections.

The focus group and roundtable discussions with representatives of political parties and civil society were conducted throughout the country in Yerevan and in 11 towns of 9 regions: Ararat, Armavir, Aragatsotn, Vayots Dzor, Geghargunik, Kotayk, Lori, Tavush, Shirak.

## **II. Study Phases**

The study was conducted in 2 phases:

- Pre-election and election day phase,
- Post-election phase.

### **1. First Phase: Pre-Election and Election Day**

#### ***1.1. Throughout the pre-election phase, observations and assessments of women's political participation in the legislative field and in political decision-making were made by the following analyses:***

- Analysis of women's representation in the National Assembly and in decision-making levels of the executive power during the 5 years following the 2007 parliamentary elections. Particularly, the analysis

reviewed statistical data of women's representation in the RoA National Assembly, in the management of the Standing Committees of the RoA National Assembly, in political decision-making levels of the executive power, in local self-government bodies, and in electoral committees.

- Analysis of women's political participation before the elections based on registration with political parties taking part in the elections, compilation of party lists for elections under the proportional system, and registration of party lists and candidates under the majoritarian electoral system in the Central Electoral Commission.
- Analysis of political party platforms, gender strategy in the parties' policies, gender balance in party management, behaviour for women's advancement in management bodies of political parties, work of women's councils, and their influence on development of inter-party democracy.
- Analysis of gender mainstreaming of candidate lists for the proportional and majoritarian electoral systems.
- Analysis of election campaigns of political parties.

**1.2. *The following points have been examined:***

- political party platforms, gender issues in political mode of action, and in-party strategies;
- mode of action of women's advancement on the threshold of the 2012 elections and their representation in management bodies of political parties;
- gender balance in party leadership on national level and in regional party structures,
- actions of women's councils of political parties and their influence on development of inter-party democracy, political agenda of women's councils on the eve of elections,
- political party actions towards developing women's political reserve,
- women's participation in election campaigns of political parties,
- peculiarities of campaigns in the 2012 elections and percentage of women's participation,
- position of civil society, especially of women's organizations, on participation in electoral processes and observation missions.

**1.3 9 focus group discussions were organized during the first phase of the study,** including 6 focus groups with representatives of political parties and 3 focus groups with leaders and activists from NGOs.

Key questions based on the focus of the study were defined in advance for the focus group facilitators - general questions for both types of focus groups and specific ones for political parties and for NGOs.

Questions were formulated to determine **opinions of the focus group participants – (both representatives of political parties and NGOs) about:**

- changes in societal perceptions of women's political participation after the 2007 elections,
- motivations of women and men on being elected MPs,
- factors hindering or promoting women's political participation,
- influence of women's councils of political parties on inter-party democracy and opportunities for increasing women's role in party activities;
- cooperation areas of political parties and NGOs and its influence on democratization in the country.

*Within the focus groups with representatives of political parties,* questions were asked to identify what the participants think about the activities of parties on increasing women's role in civil and political life after the adoption of the Gender Policy Concept Paper and implementation strategy of the Concept by the Government of the RoA, as well as on changes in political actions of parties, on gender representation in the governing bodies of political parties and in regional structures, on women's participation in electoral processes, and in compilation of candidate lists of political parties under the proportional system.

*Within the focus groups with representatives of NGOs,* questions were asked to identify what the participants think on the tendencies ensuring balanced participation of women and men in all areas of civil and political life after the adoption of the Gender Policy Concept Paper and implementation strategy of the Concept by the Government of the RoA, as well as about possible forms of participation of women's organizations in the 2012 electoral processes.

During both focus groups with representatives of political parties and NGOs, a goal was set to raise participants' awareness about the draft law on "Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities of Women and Men" which passed the first hearing in the National Assembly.

**The focus groups with representatives of political parties** were organised in Yerevan, Vanadzor, Artashat, Hrazdan, Abovyan, and Sevan. **83** representatives from **11** political parties took part in them, including 24 participants from the Republican

Party of Armenia, 17 from the Rule of Law party, and 12 from each party “Prosperous Armenia” and “Heritage”. 17 women from the focus group participants have been included in the lists of 8 political parties and one alliance of political parties taking part in elections.

**The focus groups with representatives of NGOs** were organised in Yerevan, Gyumri, and Yeghegnadzor with participation of 48 leaders and activists from 32 NGOs.

*1.4 14 interviews were conducted with the women running as candidates for the National Assembly under the proportional system, and 6 interviews were conducted with activists of NGOs who gave expert opinions on electoral processes, including with:*

- Arpine Hovhannisyan, Margarit Yesayan, and Naira Karapetyan, nominated by the "Republican Party of Armenia" list,
- Elinar Vardanyan, “Prosperous Armenia” party list,
- Nvard Manasyan, “Armenian Revolutionary Federation” party list,
- Heriqnaz Nazaryan, “the Rule of Law” party list,
- Lyudmila Sargsyan and Lilit Makunts, “Armenian National Congress” alliance of political parties list,
- Anahit Bakhshyan (“Heritage” party) and non-partisan Satik Seyranyan nominated as a candidate under the majoritarian system,
- women activists from political parties - Maria Titizyan (“Armenian Revolutionary Federation” party, vice-president of Socialist International), Mariam Apresyan (“Prosperous Armenia” party), and Frida Harutyunyan (“Heritage” party).

**6 interviews were conducted with leaders of NGOs**, including with **Natalya Martirosyan** (chair, Armenian National Committee of the Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly), **Gohar Shahnazaryan** (co-president, Women’s Resource Centre), **Nona Margaryan** (president, Professionals for Civil Society NGO), **Aida Topuzyan** (president, Women’s Republican Council), **Aghavni Karakhanyan** (president, Institute for Civil Society and Regional Development NGO) as well as with **Elena Vardanyan** (chair, Committee on Demographic and Gender Affairs, Public Council).

The experts followed the meetings of candidates nominated by political parties and running under the majoritarian system; the public speeches of female candidates and other stakeholders involved in the electoral processes and the debates with their participation; the press-releases and other events organized by political parties and NGOs; and relevant websites.

The experts also learned from other sources of information, in particular from opinion polls carried out around election time and from findings of sociological surveys.

*1.5. In the process of assessing and evaluating women's political participation in the 2012 RoA National Assembly electoral processes, the main focus was on examining the following issues:*

- To what extent the correlation of the proportional and majoritarian seats had an impact on gender composition of the parliament?
- How did the amendments to the Electoral Code affect women's opportunities in participating in elections under the proportional and majoritarian electoral systems?
- To what extent did the mandatory 20% quota of women's representation in party lists stipulated in the RoA Electoral Code create preconditions for increasing women's numbers in the National Assembly? How are women's candidacies identified for inclusion on party electoral lists?
- What are factors for women's low or high competitiveness in elections?
- What factors promoted or hindered women's political participation?

*1.6. Based on the assessment and evaluation of women's political participation in electoral processes, several conclusions were made.*

- **The analysis of political and election platforms** of the "Republican Party of Armenia" "Prosperous Armenia", "the Rule of Law", "Armenian Revolutionary Federation", "Heritage", Armenian Communist party, Armenian Democratic party and "United Armenians" party, "Armenian National Congress" alliance of political parties participating in the 2012 Parliamentary elections resulted in the following conclusions:
  - Despite the fact that the RoA Government adopted the Gender Policy Concept Paper in 2010 and "The Republic of Armenia Gender Policy Strategic Program for 2011-2015" in 2011, gender is not at all mainstreamed into political party platforms;
  - Not a single political party, including those who compose the Government coalition and responsible for its policy and implementation, has identified tasks on the implementation of the Gender Policy Concept Paper; promotion of women's participation in civil and political areas; advancement of women in political decision-making level or achievement of gender-balanced representation in all levels of power;
  - The political parties taking part in the 2012 elections have not identified

their tasks relating to the implementation of recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in connection to the 3rd and 4th periodic reports of Armenia for 2002-2007. In fact, gender issues were totally absent from platforms of the majority of political parties; no attention has been paid to women's issues within inter-party activities or, in general, to issues of promotion of women's political participation.

- The analysis of progress of women's representation in electoral lists of political parties showed that 235 women were included in the lists of 8 political parties and one alliance of political parties taking part in the 2012 Parliamentary elections, which comprises 22.9% (the quota requirement is 20%), though in the 2007 parliamentary elections (when the quota requirement was 15%), women's representation in political party lists comprised 22.6%.

Thus, the increase of gender quota from 15% to 20% has not significantly increased women's representation in political party lists, which was the goal of that provision stipulated in the Electoral Code of the RoA, according to which *“The number of representatives of each gender must not exceed the 80% of each integer group of five candidates (2-6, 7-11, 12-16 and subsequently till the end of the list) starting from the second number of the electoral list of a political party, of an alliance of political parties and of each of the parties included in all alliance for the elections to the National Assembly under the proportional electoral system.”* The majority of the political parties understood this word by word that women should not be before the 6<sup>th</sup> number and “fixed” for women the 6<sup>th</sup> place and consequently the 11<sup>th</sup>, the 16<sup>th</sup>, the 21<sup>th</sup> and in the same periodical order next numbers.

The consequence was that only 4 women were nominated in the first group of 5 candidates of party lists or 1.7% of all women nominated in the electoral lists; and 15 women or 6.4% in the first group of 10 candidates. Compared to the 2007 elections, the number of women included in the first group of 5 candidates in political party electoral lists decreased by 4 and twice in the first group of 10 candidates. Thus, the discriminatory principle of women's composition on the lists, even in the case of 20% quota stipulated by the law, did not lead to the formation of a gender-sensitive composition of the National Assembly.

The results of the elections showed that policies of the parties were not directed towards ensuring a gender-balanced representation in the National Assembly as a representative democratic organ. The parties did not develop special or consistent measures for promoting women's roles within parties or in civil and political life of the society during the pre-election period.

The top bodies of the parties did not work purposefully on awareness-raising of party members about the necessity for special temporary measures as a tool for reaching gender equality and for creating preconditions for balanced democracy in Armenia. The policy of parties is imitation from the point of view of incorporating gender approaches and reaching real results of gender equality in political performance.

Ignorance of necessity of special temporary measures within the governing organs of political parties, which are mainly composed of men, hinder the advancement of women and the assurance of gender equality and achievement of balanced representation in the legislative and executive bodies.

The patriarchal mentality of the majority of male MPs, as well as the fact that many of them do not actively participate in legislative activities and are not ready to resign their MP mandates and leave the RoA National Assembly, remain serious obstacles on the way to setting higher gender quotas and real mechanisms for achieving those levels.

Power structures, education systems, and mass media within Armenia do not fulfil the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women related to information/awareness activities, forming positive images in society's consciousness of the importance of women's civil and political participation and overcoming gender stereotypes or portraying women's roles correctly in mass media.

The focus groups with representatives of political parties and NGOs showed that many leaders and activists are not aware that the RoA Government adopted the Gender Policy Concept Paper, the implementation strategy of the Concept or the concluding observations of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> periodic reports of Armenia. The only focus group participants that were aware of this were those, who cooperated with women's organizations or took part in educational courses organised by the women's leadership school of the Association of Women with University Education or by other NGOs.

*The understanding of necessity of gender quotas has not been formed in political parties, the NGO sector, or in society's consciousness. Despite being important stakeholders of the political process political parties (to a larger extent), NGOs (to a lesser extent), and mass media do not work on interpreting and explaining the necessary and effective tool of the gender quota which would ensure a balanced participation of women and men in the legislative power, the National Assembly, a democratic representative body. A quota, as a temporary measure for achieving gender equality, is still accepted as a duty in European societies because a balanced democracy is an important condition for forming the basis of the civil society.*

- *The summary of the opinions expressed during the focus groups* showed that the representatives both of the political parties and NGOs considered the increase of gender quota to 20% in the RoA Electoral Code as a positive development; however, many participants of the focus groups considered the involvement of women's candidacies in the first group of 5 candidates of party lists starting from the 6th place as a discrimination and expressed opinions that 20% women's representation can not be ensured by the National Assembly election outcomes.

Opinions were also expressed during focus group discussions that the majority of the political parties do not work purposefully on developing female personnel; they do not organise educational programs on capacity development regarding political-legal issues, and they do not promote leadership skills thoroughly by actively involving women in activities of political parties. Parties do not take necessary steps to increase gender awareness of their members, especially of men, who are more inclined to gender stereotypes.

Political parties also do not show interest in involving women in inter-party activities, in advancing them into the top positions within the executive branch or into the top bodies of the local self-government.

The participants of the focus groups mentioned that the increase of gender quota from 15% to 20% probably would not lead to women's 20% representation in the parliament; however, it could help political parties to start thinking about the development of female political personnel and women's systematic involvement in political activities of parties rather than simply limiting their involvement to the pre-election period.

Also, as in case of the 2007 election's monitoring, the focus group participants expressed an opinion that many Armenian women's councils of political parties, which were established based on an example of Western countries, do not play essential role in developing and advancing women's personnel. Women's councils do not influence party decisions, such as the compilation of political party electoral lists. It was mentioned that there is still no interest in political parties to promote women to top positions and to executive decision-making structures. It was also highlighted that women are not united in parties around the concepts of gender equality and women's advancement. Women's councils of political parties do not feel responsible for advancing women in political activities.

According to many focus group participants, in the pre-election period, the involvement of female party members is limited to involvement in election committees and other administrative works. Female members of political parties are not considered as public policy stakeholders; therefore, women's political



participation does not become a priority among the public at large. Women are not involved in the development of pre-election policy, in compilation of electoral lists, or in pre-election campaigns.

The overwhelming majority of focus group participants from NGOs mentioned that active participation of women's organizations has not been noticeable in the 2012 electoral processes. Moreover, compared to the 2007 elections, the participation decreased to some extent. The participation of NGOs in electoral processes mainly manifested by organising educational programs of NGO activists with various groups of electorates directed at raising awareness about amendments made to the Electoral Code.

Very few women's NGOs, which conducted observation missions on the day of the election, were registered as local observers in the Central Election Commission. However, women were widely represented in the lists of other NGOs observing the elections. For example, a large group of women was represented in the observation mission of "The Choice is Yours" NGO.

Many activists from women's NGOs representing the education sector were included in electoral commissions. This was also mentioned in Radmila Sekerinska's speech, head of the Election Observation Mission of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

Other than distinct examples of cooperation between women's NGOs and women's councils of political parties, in general, cooperation was not formed between them either in the preparation phase or during the elections.

## **2. Second Phase: Post-Election**

### ***2.1 Women's participation in election campaign analysed during post-election period***

#### **Observation of women's political participation in election campaign included:**

- Assessment of actions of political parties on women's participation in the RoA National Assembly elections;
- Analysis of women's participation of political parties in the campaign;
- Research of monitoring materials of sociological centres, NGOs and mass-media on the electoral processes;
- Analysis of press conferences and conclusions of international observers on the election results;
- Research of reports of local observers and press conferences on the election results.

**2.2 6 Roundtable discussions conducted in post-election period:**

- 4 roundtable discussions with representatives of political parties,
- 2 roundtable discussions with leaders and activists of NGOs.

**The roundtable discussions with representatives of political parties** were organised in Yerevan, Dilijan, Etchmiadzin and Gavar with participation by 55 representatives of 13 political parties, including 18 representatives from the Republican Party of Armenia, 7 participants from “the Rule of Law” party, 3 representatives from “Prosperous Armenia” party; 3 representatives from “Armenian Revolutionary Federation” party and 5 representatives from “Heritage” party. 28 activists from NGOs also took part in the focus groups.

**The roundtable discussions with representatives of NGOs** were organised in Vanadzor and Ashtarak with participation of 48 leaders and activists from 21 NGOs.

The following questions were discussed during the focus groups with representatives of political parties and NGOs:

- What is your evaluation of the election results?
- What were your expectations regarding women’s participation in elections and to what percentage were they fulfilled?
- What are the dynamics of women’s political participation compared to the 2007 elections?
- Are there any real outputs from increasing the gender quota from 15% to 20% in the RoA Electoral Code?
- What is your assessment of women’s campaigns nominated under the proportional and majoritarian electoral systems?
- What were the women’s successes and failures in the 2012 elections and the reasons for their manifestations?
- What were the incentives for women’s resigning of MP mandates?

During the roundtable discussions with participation of NGO representatives, taking into account the peculiarities of their work, the questions related to: participation of women’s organizations in electoral processes; NGO support to women nominated under the proportional and majoritarian electoral systems; and the influence of elections on the formation of public opinion about the necessity of women’s political participation were also discussed.

**2.3. Based on the results of the second phase, several conclusions can be made.**

- **The campaign of the 2012 RoA parliamentary election** was significantly different from previous elections. During meetings with voters, a majority of

the political parties did not appear as democratic institutions, from the point of view of women's campaign involvement. The leading parties' campaigns, such as the Republican Party of Armenia and "Prosperous Armenia," were focused mainly around their leaders.

The participants of the roundtable discussions with representatives of political parties also mentioned, that compared to the 2007 elections, their participation in the 2012 campaign was minimal; this was especially highlighted during the focus groups organised in the regions. Women were not active participants in the 2012 RoA parliamentary election campaign despite representing a significant potential within parties.

Inter-party democratic representation is not present within political parties in Armenia. In fact, women are isolated from defining policies for political parties and from participating in strategically important decision-making; their participation is mainly marginalised to within the charity field.

NGO representatives, participating in the roundtable discussions, mentioned the decrease of women's civic and political activism compared to the 2007 elections, as well as an ongoing tendency to exclude women from political decision-making levels and the practice of involving women mainly in the middle levels of electoral processes.

➤ **Political parties underestimate the role of NGOs in electoral processes**

Although several NGO leaders were included in electoral lists of political parties under the proportional system, the electoral processes showed that NGOs, as civil society institutions, were ignored by political parties. The participation of NGOs in electoral processes was not systemized from the beginning.

Many participants from the roundtable discussions with NGOs, as well as leaders of several large organizations during individual meetings, mentioned that political parties "mixed" the observation mission of NGOs in election processes with their youth structures and partially with involvement of students. The process of certification of NGO representatives, the impartiality of those certificates, and the number of local observers (31500) rouse suspicion.

The majority of the participants described the participation of the NGO sector in the 2012 election processes as passive and mentioned that *women's organizations could not initiate actions supporting female candidates since NGOs' involvement in political work is prohibited by law.*

According to assessments by NGO leaders, NGOs of Armenia undoubtedly play a significant role in women's socialization issues. Moreover, NGO leaders pay special attention not to the direct support and backing of female candidates in election

processes, but to the purposeful and consistent work of NGOs during pre-election period. At the same time, many participants mentioned that political parties, their organizational structures, and women's councils do not show initiative in establishing and strengthening cooperation with NGO sector.

There were also suggestions related to the necessity of generating programs on increasing women's public and political involvement, especially in the regions. An opinion was raised on the necessity of unification of women's NGOs for increasing the effectiveness of their activities.

➤ **Assessment by participants of the roundtable discussions with representatives of political parties and NGOs on outputs of electoral processes**

**The roundtable discussions** provided an opportunity to reveal the mechanism of "sieving" the candidates from electoral lists by political parties in which women comprise a large number. According to roundtable discussion participants, the self-withdrawals of MP candidates, particularly of women, are done under compulsion, i.e. "by dictation of party discipline". It is notable that some participants of the roundtable discussions with representatives of political parties defined self-withdrawals as "a manifestation of party discipline", while others described it as a violation of the rights of party members taking part in elections and democratic principles of party work.

During the debates, female NGO activists stated that women's self-withdrawal practice could be described as pressure on women and hidden discrimination against them. Female leaders and activists, who were aware of legislation and party work, mentioned that the problem of self-withdrawal of MP candidates is hidden within the description of gender quota article of the Election Code. This gap or, according to many people, deliberate definitional loophole must be corrected. The participants suggested fixing the situation in one of two ways:

1. *To review the provision to state that women must comprise 20% not of the electoral lists of political parties while registering in the CEC but that women must comprise 20% of the list of those passing to the Parliament for the parties overcoming the 5% barrier.*
2. *To create a provision that a woman who withdraws her mandate will be replaced by the next woman from the party electoral list.*

According to the representatives of women's organizations, these measures will cause political parties to form their electoral lists with more responsibility and will eliminate the inclusion of women in the lists who, from the start, are intended to withdraw their mandates at the necessary time for the party.

### III. Conclusions on Women's Political Participation in the 2012 Parliamentary Elections of the RA

As it was already mentioned above, the 2012 parliamentary elections of the RoA took place following the amendments in the Electoral Code of the RoA, particularly the gender quota increased from 15% to 20%, and the requirement was introduced to include women candidacies in each group of 5 candidates of party lists starting from the 6<sup>th</sup> place, so the proportion of representatives of each gender must not exceed the 80% of each group of 5 persons.

5 parties passed to the parliament by the election results: *Republican Party of Armenia* - 44.1%, *Prosperous Armenia* - 30.2%, *Heritage* - 5.8%, *Armenian Revolutionary Federation* - 5.7%, *Rule of Law* - 5.5% and one alliance of parties *Armenian National Congress* - 7.1%.

Women's representation in the 5<sup>th</sup> Convocation of the Parliament comprises 10.67% compared to 9.2% of the 2007 elections, which could indicate that **the increase of quota ensured just a slight progress.**

In *Republican Party of Armenia* faction, which got the majority of seats at the RA parliament, only 9 out of 69 MPs are women (13%).

In *Prosperous Armenia*, which is the second largest faction, there are only 2 women among 37 MPs, which represents only 5.4% whereas women in the same faction comprised 12% in the 4<sup>th</sup> Convocation of the Parliament.

Among 7 MPs in *Armenian National Congress* faction, there is only 1 woman (14%).

*The Armenian Revolutionary Federation* faction passed to the Parliament without women, whereas in the 2007 elections, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation was one of the two parties which exceeded the 15% quota stipulated by law with women's representation at 18.7%.

Only 2 factions among the 6 of the 5<sup>th</sup> Convocation of the Parliament had 20% representation by women: *Heritage* and *Rule of Law* factions each containing 1 woman out of 5 MPs.

On average, political parties included women at 22.8% of their proportional electoral lists, however, the de facto result of elections was that the representation percentage was cut in half.

Since only 2 out of 14 women were elected under the majoritarian electoral system, one can claim that the parliamentary parties did not progress in meeting the gender quota stipulated by law.

Moreover, the 20% quota, which was stipulated in the Electoral Code aimed at

ensuring women's appropriate representation, was somewhat diminished. In fact, the mechanism for promoting the increase of female representatives as stipulated by law did not work due to inter-party reshufflings and self-withdrawals.

The study of the changing number of women elected as MPs under the majoritarian electoral system, reveals a decreasing tendency starting in 1995, which is explained by severe fighting and commercialization of the elections under the majoritarian electoral system, by using negative campaigning, and partially by a decreasing number of single-mandate constituencies. As a result of the amendments of the Electoral Code, the number of single-mandate constituencies decreased twice from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Convocation of the Parliament (1999) to the 4<sup>th</sup> Convocation (2007), and the number of women nominated under the majoritarian electoral system decreased 10 times.

However, it's worth comparing women's participation under the majoritarian electoral system to the 2007 elections. While in 2007, 6 out of 11 women announced self-withdrawals without participating later in election competition, in the 2012 elections there was only one self-withdrawal as opposed to 40 male candidates under the majoritarian electoral system. The number of votes for women under the majoritarian system running by self-nomination principle increased. In 2007, all 5 women were nominated by their party's initiative, and in the 2012 elections, 6 out of 11 women were non-partisan, and only 2 were nominated by parties.

Women's low representation in the Parliament is the consequence of the situation that in the 2012 elections as well as in 2007 the **post-election self-withdrawal practice was maintained**. According to the data of the Central Election Commission, 102 candidates submitted self-withdrawal applications, including 26 women candidates comprising 25%. Moreover, 24 of those represented parties that, according to the election results, gained the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> places by MP.

If in case of the Republican Party of Armenia only one out of 14 self-withdrawn women was on the passing place of the list with the remaining ones being nominated starting from the 46<sup>th</sup> place, then 3 out of 10 women from Prosperous Armenia that have resigned their mandate were included before the 28<sup>th</sup> place, therefore were on passing places.

*Thus, the 20% quota introduced in legislation and the requirement of involving women in each group of 5 candidates in political party lists starting from the 6<sup>th</sup> place, did not ensure real increase in women's representation. The gender composition of the newly elected parliament, as an organ of representational democracy, continued to be gender-imbalanced. Women comprise only 10.67% of the RoA Parliament, which is significantly lower than the international average index of 19.6%.*

*Some positive changes took place in the leadership and Standing Committees of the RoA Parliament.* Hermine Naghdalyan was elected a vice-speaker of the Parliament, Naira Zohrabyan was elected a chair of the Standing Committee on European Integration and Elinar Vardanyan was elected a chair of the Standing Committee on Protection of Human Rights and Public Affairs.

The review and assessment of women's political participation in the 2012 parliamentary elections gave us an opportunity to raise reasons of women's low competitiveness in elections and those factors that hinder women's political careers:

- lack of a system for developing female candidates and a lack of reserve for nominating candidates on the state level;
- limited representation of women in areas of society and governing levels where women can pass political preparation courses and be entered into politics;
- slowness of the steps of the state gender policy directed at advancing women and overcoming gender imbalances in decision-making levels;
- underestimation by political parties of the necessity to develop measures for increasing women's representation in the parliament as an organ of representational democracy;
- deficit of inter-party democracy, lack of mechanisms for promoting women in public and political fields and lack of women's political socialization;
- imperfectness of electoral processes, severity of political struggles, criminalization of political struggles, and high level of commercialization of elections;
- weakness of democratic institutions, NGOs, and mostly of women's organizations and the lack of women's movement;
- absence of political experience among women and absence of mastering new campaign management technologies among female candidates;
- insufficient level of society's political culture and lack of a system for preparing and developing female leaders;
- distrust towards female candidates which is based on misperceptions and discriminatory actions within society from both men and women,
- women's low self-esteem and inner psychological barriers as consequence of a lack of a systematic political socialisation of women within parties and in society;
- prevalence of patriarchal values in society and of gender stereotypes, and overall lack of promotion of women's political participation,
- stereotypes of women's participation in the political life of society spread through mass-media.

#### IV. Recommendations

The review and assessment of women's political participation in the 2012 parliamentary elections provided an opportunity to come up with several recommendations:

*On implementing the recommendations of the UN Convention on Political Rights of Women, of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on 2002-2007 Country Report of Armenia, and in the area of improving Armenian legislation with the goal of achieving gender equality:*

- **To the RoA Government:**
  - Ensure the implementation of international obligations, particularly Actions of Eastern Partnership, achieving gender equality and women's involvement in political activities.
  - Take measures towards increasing the effectiveness of the state gender policy implementation and ensure widespread control of implementation of international obligations related to advancement of women in decision-making levels by ministries and local authorities.
  - Examine the experience of European countries and the possibility of incorporating methods into state actions for achieving gender equality in all areas of civil and political life.
  - Finance the activities of political parties that take into account gender policy implementation and ensure the advancement of women's political participation.
  
- **To the RoA Parliament:**
  - Quicken the adoption process of the draft law "Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men," which contains tools for achieving gender equality in all areas of civil and political life.
  - Corresponding to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommendations discuss the issue of amending women's representation quota in party lists to at least 25% in the RoA Electoral Code; fix in the legislation that at least one representative of different sex must be represented in each group of five candidates of the list, and in the case that a woman withdraws her candidacy, the next woman from the list must replace her.



▪ **To Political Parties:**

- Develop and implement actions to integrate a gender component in the programs and practice of political parties, and to raise awareness of party members.
- Examine the experience of achieving gender equality of European political parties and the possibility of using positive discriminatory methods.
- Promote training for women in political parties and form women's advancement mechanisms in the governing structures of parties.
- Improve cooperation between women's councils of political parties and NGOs in regard to women's political advancement issues.

▪ **To Non-Governmental Organizations:**

- Support the organization of women's leadership schools in the capital and the regions using the principle of identifying the most competitive women leaders.
- Develop modules and programs for women to take part in election campaigns, including enhancing their political, legal, and economic knowledge; knowledge of electoral campaign technologies; skills for working with media; and psychological trainings on leadership.

▪ **To Society, in General:**

- Expand inclusion of gender education at schools and universities.
- Conduct educational programs raising gender awareness within the public at-large through all types and means of mass media.
- Conduct special educational courses for journalists to fairly represent female leaders; and to promote the inclusion of PR campaigns in the media on overcoming gender stereotypes and on women's advancement, especially during the election period.

## CHAPTER 1

### ARMENIAN NATIONAL LEGISLATION AND INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS REGARDING THE PROMOTION OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

# 1

The study of women's political participation in the elections of the 5th Convocation of the National Assembly of the RA and the assessment of the gender situation on the eve of the 2012 elections took into account the implementation of requirements and recommendations contained in international instruments on ensuring equal rights and equal opportunities of women and men in all spheres of the country's public and political life and of Armenia's international obligations.

The implementation of the UN conventions ratified by Armenia and the Council of Europe regarding resolutions and recommendations on gender mainstreaming in activities of state institutions, in development of strategies, and in planning and decision-making levels was analysed. During the study, Concluding Observations<sup>1</sup> of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women related to the 3rd and 4th periodic reports of Armenia as well as Addition of Observations<sup>2</sup> were taken into account, particularly observations directed to the Parliament relating to electoral processes and women's representation in the National Assembly.

The National Assembly of the RA ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1993 and the Optional Protocol of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 2006. The Convention, which is a fundamental tool for ensuring gender equality, interprets not only "discrimination against women" but also outlines mechanisms for overcoming it. "Adoption of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women" is recommended by States Parties<sup>3</sup>.

1 The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, consisting of 23 experts, reviews the implementation process of the Convention and studies reports from countries that adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

2 CEDAW/C/ARM/CO/4/Rev.1/Add.1, 1 November 2011.

3 The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Article 4.

Monitoring of the situation revealed that despite the adoption of important documents<sup>4</sup> by the Government relating to gender equality, the policy in Armenia remains gender neutral. It is not a coincidence that the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, expressed concerns related to observations in the 3rd and 4th periodic reports of Armenia “... *the State party’s preference for gender-neutral [laws], policies and programmes, which may lead to inadequate protection for women against direct as well as indirect discrimination, hinder the achievement of formal and substantive equality between women and men, and result in a fragmented approach to the recognition and enforcement of women’s human rights*”<sup>5</sup>.

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, regarding the gender quota of the Electoral Code, recommended “to raise, and consider raising it beyond the proposed 20 percent” and “to increase women’s representation in political and public life, including at the international level”. The Committee encourages the State “to review the use of temporary measures according to article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention and in the Committee’s general recommendations Nos. 25 and 23. The application of such measures for increasing women’s political representation should include the establishment of benchmarks with timetables or increased quotas”<sup>6</sup>.

In 2007, Armenia ratified the UN Convention on Women’s Political Rights, which proclaims the equality of women with men in all elections, the right to vote without any barrier or any discrimination, the right to be elected, and the right “to have positions of public state service and take all public and state functions stated by national law”<sup>7</sup>.

Armenia joined to the Beijing Declaration and the Beijing Action Plan, signed the United Nations Millennium Declaration and the Millennium goals<sup>7</sup>, taking responsibility to incorporate gender-mainstreaming systems in all the areas of social and political life, including in decision-making levels. Armenian representatives participated in the sessions of the UN Commission on the Status of Women and

4 In 2004 the Government of the Republic of Armenia adopted “2004-2010 Republic of Armenia National Action Plan on Improving the Status of Women and Enhancing Their Role in Society”; in 2010 - the Gender Policy Concept Paper; in 2011 - the RA Gender Policy Strategic Program 2011-2015. In 2011 the National Assembly of the RA adopted by the 1st hearing the draft law “Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men”.

5 The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Concluding Observations, Armenia, CEDAW/C/ARM/CO/4/Rev.1, 2 February 2009.

6 Ibid.

7 In the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Concluding Observations, the Committee urges the State party “to use entirely the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action which strengthen the Convention provisions while implementing the liabilities taken by the Convention” and stresses that “the effective implementation of the Convention is principally important for achieving the Millennium Development Goals...”.

were present in the discussions of the utmost important issues related to women's status.

In July 2010, the UN General Assembly, with the purpose of achieving gender equality and quickening the process of expanding women's rights and opportunities, established a UN special structure "the UN Women" dealing with gender equality and expansion of women's rights.

The Council of Europe adopted recommendations on gender-related aspects of politics and political participation. Unlike the UN conventions, these recommendations are not binding for the member states, however according to the Article 15b of the Statute of the Council of Europe, the Committee of Ministers has the authority to request the governments of member States "to inform it of the action taken by them with regard to such recommendations". Moreover, it is impossible to imagine a democratic state that does not follow the principles proclaimed in the aforementioned documents. Also, the provisions are subject to obligatory implementation by the Council of Europe member States, including Armenia.

The following documents are fundamental related to ensuring gender equality issues:

- Declaration on Equality between Women and men as a Fundamental Criterion of Democracy (Istanbul, 1997);
- Comprehensive Approach towards Gender Equality Issues (Strasbourg, 1998);
- Balanced Participation of Women and Men in Political and Public Decision Making [Council of Europe Recommendation (2003)3];
- "Gender Equality: A Core Issue in Changing Societies", [Declaration and Programme of Action (Skopje 22-23 January 2003)];
- "Women's Participation in Elections" [Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1676 (2004)];
- "Mechanisms to Ensure Women's Participation in Decision Making" [Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1738 (2006)];
- "Increasing Women's Representation in Politics through the Electoral System" [Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 1706 (2010)];
- "Combating Sexist Stereotypes in the Media" [Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1931 (2010)].

In the Explanatory Note of Recommendation (2003) 3, it is mentioned "the Council of Europe for many years, pays special attention on issues of democracy and equality."

The concept of the "democratic principle of equal representation" was first discussed within the framework of the seminar on "The democratic principle of equal representation: Forty years of Council of Europe activity" (Strasbourg, 6-7 November 1989). The seminar was followed by a report on the democratic principle

of equal representation prepared by a group of experts and published in early 1995. In addition to interpreting the concept of “democratic principle of equal representation,” the report contains recommendations related to strategic directives directed at the fact that women may be allowed to become full and active members of society, using the same rights as men, and taking with them the entire responsibility. These strategic directives propose setting goals and thresholds for equality using various state agencies and political parties.

During the following years, the above-mentioned thresholds were included in a number of documents. In particular, the recommendations from “Women’s Participation in Elections” proposes to “set the objective to increase the minimum representation of women in parliament and other elected assemblies to the level of at least 40% by the year 2020”<sup>8</sup>.

In the documents of European institutions, recommendations are provided on ways of ensuring equality, such as:

- where electoral systems are shown to have a negative impact on the political representation of women in elected bodies, adjust or reform those systems to promote gender-balanced representation<sup>9</sup>;
- develop specific training and publicity packages to encourage female candidates to compete in elections<sup>10</sup>;
- adopt appropriate legislative and/or administrative measures to support elected representatives in the reconciliation of their family and public responsibilities and, in particular, encourage parliaments and local and regional authorities to ensure that their timetables and working methods enable elected representatives of both sexes to reconcile their work and family life<sup>11</sup>;
- make the public administration exemplary both in terms of a gender-balanced distribution of decision-making positions and in equal career development for women and men<sup>12</sup>;
- encourage parliaments . . . . to use comprehensive approaches to the issues of men and women’ equality in the labour field<sup>13</sup>;
- promote participation by representatives of civil society, particularly by those who show a keen interest in gender equality issues, in all political

8 The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1676 (2004) on “Women’s Participation in Elections”.

9 From the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1676 (2004) on “Women’s Participation in Elections”; as well as Appendix to Recommendation Rec(2003)3 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on “Balanced Participation of Women and Men in Political and Public Decision Making”.

10 The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1676 (2004) on “Women’s Participation in Elections”.

11 Appendix to Recommendation Rec(2003)3 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

debates, thus creating a “bridge” for women between civil society and political life<sup>14</sup>.

In many documents of the European institutions, emphasis is placed on women's political involvement within political parties, in particular:

- encouraging political parties to adopt positive measures to ensure increased representation of female candidates<sup>15</sup>;
- instituting gender-neutral quotas for required numbers of female and male candidates on party lists. Double quota (e.g. “zipping”) systems are especially recommended because they ensure that women are sufficiently well placed to be elected. Quotas should be time-limited and proportionate to needs<sup>16</sup>;
- taking action through the public funding of political parties in order to encourage them to promote gender equality<sup>17</sup>;
- give financial incentives to those political parties which achieve the aim of a minimum 40% representation of women in the party's decision-making bodies and amongst candidates elected<sup>18</sup>.

There are also special recommendations in the documents on “indicators for measuring progress in the field of political and public decision-making” for usage in the monitoring of women's political participation:

- i. the percentage of female and male elected representatives in parliaments (supra-national/national/federal/regional) and local assemblies according to political party;
- ii. the percentage of female and male elected representatives in parliaments (supra-national/national) compared to the number of candidates according to political party (the success rate);
- iii. the percentage of women and men in national delegations to nominated assemblies such as the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly and Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe and to international organisations and forums;
- iv. the percentage of women and men in national, federal and regional governments;
- v. the number of female and male senior/junior ministers in the different fields of action (portfolios/ministries) of the national, federal and regional governments of the member states;

14 The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 1489 (2006) on “Mechanisms to Ensure Women's Participation in Decision Making”.

15 The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1676 (2004) on “Women's Participation in Elections”.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 1489 (2006) on “Mechanisms to Ensure Women's Participation in Decision Making”.

- vi. the percentage of the highest ranking female and male civil servants and their distribution in different fields of action;
- vii. the percentage of female and male judges in the supreme court;
- viii. the percentage of women and men in bodies appointed by the government;
- ix. the percentage of women and men in the decision-making bodies of political parties at national level;
- x. the percentage of female and male members of employer, labour and professional organisations and the percentage of women and men in their decision-making bodies at national level<sup>19</sup>.

Recently, during the 2 years following the above mentioned documents, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe also adopted Recommendation 1949 (2010) on “Promoting the most favourable gender equality laws in Europe” in which **“Equality between women and men is an essential precondition of all democratic societies. However, despite the progress achieved in Europe in this area, women’s rights vary considerably between member states.** Moreover, with the current economic crisis there is a danger of a backlash leading to a reduction in women’s rights”<sup>20</sup> is emphasized.

Recognizing that equal rights of women and men and the protection of their human rights are essential to peace, sustainable democracy, economic development and therefore to security and stability in the OSCE region and recalling the Beijing Platform for Action, the OSCE adopted 2004 Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality<sup>21</sup>.

OSCE’s efforts in this regard include the following areas: to further develop and strengthen a continuous and sustainable gender-mainstreaming process; to promote a gender-sensitive and professional working environment and management culture and efforts towards gender balance in staffing; and gender-mainstreaming in the OSCE activities, policy, projects and initiatives. Moreover, “the emphasis is put, in particular, on the expansion of women’s opportunities and on women’s participation in public, political and economic life equally with them in the context of democratic and economic development of participating States”<sup>22</sup>. The OSCE advises to comply with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), to ensure equal opportunities for women’s participation in political and public life, and to create national machinery for improving women’s situation.

19 Appendix to Recommendation Rec(2003)3 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

20 The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 1780 (2010) on “Promoting the Most Favourable Gender Equality Laws in Europe”.

21 Decision No. 14/04 on 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality (Sofia, 7 December 2004).

22 Ibid.

In 2010 the OSCE organized a Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on “Gender Balance and Women’s Participation in Political and Public Life” (Vienna, 6-7 May 2010), in which the issue of “Empowering women as political party members and as elected officials” was discussed in the 2nd session. During that session, it was particularly emphasized that “Political parties can be seen as gatekeepers of women’s political participation. According to internationally adopted commitments and standards, the principle of nondiscrimination on the basis of gender applies to political parties both in terms of the membership of executive and decision-making bodies and as candidates on the ballot. In addition, internal party pluralism and transparency in decision-making are key factors which influence women’s opportunities to gain nomination and support from their parties for elected offices”<sup>23</sup>.

Observing the national context of the policy of encouraging women’s political participation, it should be noted that despite the fact that Armenia ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1993, the Government of the Republic of Armenia was more active in the issue of ensuring gender equality in the political field at the end of 1990s.

On December 29, 2000 a Council on Women’s Issues under the Prime Minister of Armenia was established, which had a consultative status. In 2004 the Government of the Republic of Armenia adopted “2004-2010 Republic of Armenia National Action Plan on Improving the Status of Women and Enhancing Their Role in Society”.

In 2005, Armenia’s national report on the Millennium Development Goals was presented, in which Armenia agreed to increase women’s representation in 2015 to more than 25% in total numbers of the National Assembly, ministers, deputy ministers and governors and to more than 10% among heads of communities<sup>24</sup>.

The National Assembly of the RA ratified the Optional Protocol of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the UN Convention on Political Rights of Women.

Considerable changes were made in the legislation of the RA. In 2007 amendments were introduced to the Electoral Code of the RA in which a 15% quota for women in the electoral lists of political parties under the proportional system was added. In 2011 the Electoral Code’s gender quota was raised to 20%, and the following sequence of gender representation in the electoral lists of parties was presented:

<sup>23</sup> 6 May 2010 Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on “Gender Balance and Women’s Participation in Political and Public Life”, 6-7 May 2010, Hofburg, Vienna, Annotated Agenda, <http://www.osce.org/ru/odihr/67683>

<sup>24</sup> [http://www.un.am/am/MDGs\\_in\\_Armenia](http://www.un.am/am/MDGs_in_Armenia)



“The number of representatives of each gender must not exceed the 80% of each integer group of five candidates (2-6, 7-11, 12-16 and subsequently till the end of the list) starting from the second number of the electoral list of a political party, of an alliance of political parties and of each of the parties included in an alliance for the elections to the National Assembly under proportional electoral system” (Article 108, paragraph 2).

Since 2008, the gender issue is discussed in the programs of the Government of Armenia. Thus, in “Social Protection” section of the RA Government Program for 2008-2012, gender equality is presented among priority issues. In the strategic priorities of “Sustainable Development Program” adopted by the Government of Armenia on October 30, 2008 the equality of women's and men's rights and opportunities was recognized.

On February 11, 2010 the Government of the RA adopted the Gender Policy Concept Paper, and in 2011 the RA Gender Policy Strategic Program was adopted for 2011-2015.

The following duties of the Government are clearly mentioned in the section on “Gender Policy Implementation Strategy in the Sphere of Power and Decision-Making” of the RA Gender Policy Strategic Program 2011-2015: to ensure implementation of principal recommendations of the UN *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* and of the Beijing Conference and fulfilment of the obligations assumed by the Republic of Armenia under other international documents that Armenia ratified and that target gender equality; to take special measures to secure women's 30% representation in decision-making positions in legislative and executive branches of government.

In 2011 the National Assembly of the RA adopted the draft law “Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men” by the 1st hearing.

These positive changes in the legislation of the RA, as well as strategies and programs adopted on the state level, contributed to an increase of women's political activism, which has resulted in a change in the gender situation in Armenia and has created preconditions for achieving gender balanced representation in power structures.

## CHAPTER 2

### WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS AND PARTY AGENDAS

# 2

#### 1. Women's Political Participation

During this study of women's political participation, activities through which citizens influence or try to influence the political system were considered. International experience shows that the degree of political participation by women is significantly lower than by men. The reasons include the culture of the society regarding gender, discriminatory behaviour towards women for centuries, gender stereotypes, and the double burden of women.

The types and forms of political participation, as well as stakeholder activities, are changing parallel to the deepening of democratic processes. As deep changes of societal consciousness take place, the political agenda is being enriched. Parallel to women's participation in the political life of countries, radical changes take place in social life of society; the political agenda is changed, and the issue of human rights protection increases to a new level. This is explained by the fact that democratic societies see the direct link between ensuring gender equality and democratization.

From the perspective of gender equality, a new concept for evaluating achievements of democratization called "balanced democracy" appeared, the ideal of which is 50:50 representation of women and men in political structures.

The concept of a "balanced democracy" was discussed for the first time within the framework of a seminar "Balanced Democracy - 40 Years of Activities of the Council of Europe" on November 6-7, 1989 in Strasbourg, and afterwards in an expert report on balanced democracy published in early 1995.

During the following years, the reasons that women's political participation is hindered were carefully examined. It had already been mentioned in the Beijing Action Plan in 1995 "Traditional order of work of many political parties and state

agencies as previously hinders women's participation in public life. Discriminatory approaches and behaviour, family and child care obligations and huge expenses demanded for applying and getting state posts can hinder women's efforts for getting political posts".

- Consider examining party structures and procedures to remove all barriers that directly or indirectly discriminate against the participation of women.
- Consider developing initiatives that allow women to participate fully in all internal policy-making structures and appointive and electoral nominating processes.
- Consider incorporating gender issues in their political agenda, taking measures to ensure that women can participate in the leadership of political parties on an equal basis with men.
- Take positive action to build a critical mass of women leaders, executives and managers in strategic decision-making positions.
- Provide leadership and self-esteem training to assist women and girls.
- Create a system of mentoring for inexperienced women and, in particular, offer training, including training in leadership and decision-making, public speaking and self-assertion, as well as in political campaigning.

Many European organizations work on developing mechanisms for achieving gender equality, in political field including: the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, the Council of Europe Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, the Council of Europe Gender Equality Commission, and the Reporters Group on Gender Equality Issues of the Committee of Ministers. The European Institute of Gender Equality was established for developing policies in the gender field. The recommendations of those institutions are compulsory for the countries that have signed or ratified the following documents.

These documents have an important role among the documents commended by the European structures:

- "Declaration on Equality between Women and Men as a Fundamental Criterion of Democracy" (1997)
- "Comprehensive Approach towards Women's and Men's Issues" (1998)
- The Council of Europe Committee of Ministers recommendations on "Balanced Participation of Women and Men in Political and State Decision Making Processes" [Rec (2003)3]
- The 5th European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men, Declaration and Programme of Action on "Gender Equality: A Core Issue in Changing Societies", (Skopje, 2003)

- “Women’s Participation in Elections” [Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1676 (2004)]
- Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 1489 (2006) on “Mechanisms to Ensure Women’s Participation in Decision Making”
- “Increasing Women’s Representation in Politics through the Electoral System” [Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 1706 (2010)]
- “Combating Sexist Stereotypes in the Media” [Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1931 (2010)].

The Council of Europe suggests legal and administrative measures to its member states in regard to encouraging women’s political participation and to “consider action through the public funding of political parties in order to encourage them to promote gender equality”<sup>25</sup>. In addition to the Recommendation [Rec (2003) 3] of the Committee of Ministers on “Balanced Participation of Women and Men in Political and Public Decision Making” to member states (adopted on 12 March 2003), it is also recommended in its appendix and explanatory memorandum to “inform political parties of the different strategies used in the various countries to promote the balanced participation of women and men in elected assemblies; encourage them to implement one or more of these strategies and to promote balanced participation of women and men in positions of decision making within the party structures”<sup>26</sup>.

Experience shows that political parties can influence the formation of a positive public opinion on women’s political participation, on nomination of women’s candidacies in state Executive and Legislative bodies and in local self-government elections. In many countries political parties became initiators of incorporating gender issues in their party platforms and political agendas in order to overcome gender imbalances. As the most important function of political parties is choosing candidates for elected posts and formation of Government, parties must show motivation in preparation of qualified personnel for ruling elite.

The following factors are important for encouraging women’s political participation:

- The degree of inclusion of gender issues in party’s moral system.
- Party traditions and creation of a positive environment for promoting gender equality issues within the party.
- Political practice promoting gender equality of party leaders, the existence of gender discourse in their public speeches.
- Gender equality in real policy within party and in appointing posts on state level.

<sup>25</sup> Recommendation Rec(2003)3 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member states on “Balanced Participation of Women and Men in Political and Public Decision Making”, appendix and explanatory memorandum (12 March 2003).

<sup>26</sup> Ibis.

- Party motivation both for preparing men as well as women personnel.
- Women's percentage in election lists of parties, the level of readiness of political parties to include women in the election lists under the proportional system in the absence or presence of gender quotas.
- Gender composition of party leadership structures.
- Opportunities of women's participation in political decision-making processes, in having real influence within party, and the level of power.

***The international experience prompts that there are 3 approaches within parties' policies:***

- Discriminatory - when women are not allowed to become party members.
- Gender-neutral – when parties do not accept gender issues or accept it only by words. In this case, gender-neutral components are either absent or resembled in real policies of parties.
- Gender-sensitive – when parties develop mechanisms for advancing women in leadership and executive structures or implement “positive discrimination” policy by using special temporary measures.

Since 1970, parties in some countries inserted party quotas (quotas for management bodies in executive structures fixed in party statutes), as well as quotas for lists under proportional electoral systems during elections or stipulation of parliament seats. This policy on behalf of parties is usually conducted on a volunteer basis. This especially relates to political parties of the Northern European countries<sup>27</sup>.

## **2. Women's Political Participation Issues in Political Agendas of Parties – Gender Analysis of Party and Election Platforms**

The analysis of the gender situation in Armenia showed that political parties mainly use a gender-neutral approach. This is demonstrated in the gender composition of their leadership, in party platforms, and in forming electoral lists during election period.

A political party platform, as a document, reflecting the party's ideology, identifying goals and political activities, and enumerating ways of achieving those goals, defines the party's approaches towards societal issues, such as those related to gender equality and balanced participation of women and men in party activities. If a political party favours democratic values, gender is mainstreamed both in its main (strategic) and in pre-election programs.

<sup>27</sup> There is a provision in the charter of the Norwegian Democratic Party of Socialists stipulating a quota of at least 40% women's representation at every level of the party. Soon other parties also followed this example. Positive discrimination is practiced by many parties in Sweden and Finland, although there is no such requirement in the legislation of those countries.

Taking into account the fact that we had already conducted a gender assessment of political party platforms in previous years, during this study we aimed at revealing whether any changes were made in political party platforms after adoption of the “Gender Policy Concept Paper” and “2011-2015 RA Gender Policy Strategic Program” by the Government and whether party platforms became more sensitive after the Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women on “the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> periodic reports of Armenia for the 2002-2007 period”.

The following aspects of party platforms were considered during the 2012 analysis:

- Changes to gender policy implemented by parties and increase of gender sensitivity.
- Consistency of party interest towards gender issues.
- Comparison of main party and election platforms.

A study of party and election platforms of the “Armenian National Congress” parties’ block and the following parties was conducted: the Republican Party of Armenia, the Prosperous Armenia, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, the Rule of Law, the Heritage, The Democratic Party of Armenia, the Communist Party of Armenia and the “United Armenians” party.

Among the listed parties, the Republican Party of Armenia, the Prosperous Armenia, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, the Rule of Law and the Heritage took part in the 2007 Parliamentary elections.

The study of party platforms taking part in the 2012 Parliamentary elections showed that primarily social issues were addressed, particularly provisions on strengthening the family, protecting motherhood and childhood, and women’s reproductive role. These party platforms do not contain any provisions on ensuring balanced representation in decision-making levels and on developing women’s political participation.

***The platform of the Republican Party of Armenia emphasises:***

- “The state must support the development of political system and democratization, continuous improvement of society through partial and phase-by-phase reforms. Any reform must be in accordance with traditional values of the society directed at its modernization.
- The basis of Armenian society is a traditional family. The formation of strong and healthy families, the protection and development of national-traditional values within families should be among the most important state issues”.

As the ruling party, the Republican Party of Armenia is responsible for the RA Government policy and is called to support the implementation of the “Gender Policy Concept Paper” and “2011-2015 RA Gender Policy Strategic Program” adopted by the RA Government.

Equal rights and opportunities for youth, unprivileged families, people with limited capacities, and different communities are addressed in “Equal Rights, Equal Opportunities” separate section of the election platform of **the Republican Party of Armenia**. However, the issue of equal rights and equal opportunities of women and men is missing in the same section. While discussing equality, documents from the UN and European organizations stress “equal rights and equal opportunities of women and men.”

2 The issues of gender equality and gender in general are not included *in the election platform of the Prosperous Armenia party* in the sections “Building Legal State” or “Development of Civil Society.” Among the important issues on the platform, there is a provision on specialization, training, and job placement for women. An interesting provision suggesting “... to pass gradually to a mixed system of Alderman in communities – proportional and majoritarian, and later to 100% proportional electoral system” is included in “Development of Local Self- Government” section of the platform. The realization of this provision with implementation of gender quota mechanism would undoubtedly raise women’s representation in local self-government.

Provisions of *the main and election platform of the Prosperous Armenia party* are the same. However, it is emphasized in the “Peaceful, Stable Region” section that the party is called in the framework of “Eastern Partnership” program for harmonising Armenian political, economic, and civil infrastructures with European standards.

There are no provisions on gender equality in the Armenian Revolutionary Federation platform. However, there is a provision on ensuring women’s employment in the social-economic section of the election platform “Development of light industry will be considered ... by organising a production of a number of imported goods in Armenia (especially for women) from the point of view of ensuring employment”. An important provision is also included on women’s work experience who are on maternity leave: “A law will be passed, according to which for non-working women who take care of up to two years-old child, that period will be considered overall work experience”.

In “Building national, democratic, modern State” section, with other provisions, the necessity of passing to 100% proportional electoral system is mentioned.

The **Armenian Revolutionary Federation** was the only party that had a special section “Equality of Women and Men” in their platform in 2007. The measures aimed at achieving equality were:

- “Introduction of programs to create mechanisms for increasing women’s competitiveness in labor market and help them combine work with family responsibilities;
- Creation of effective quota mechanisms for exercising women’s political rights;
- Support for the passage and implementation of programs to increase women’s role in the society and for civil society initiatives aimed at ensuring the equality of the sexes”<sup>28</sup>.

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation actively promoted the draft law on “Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in Armenia” during parliamentary hearings. The Armenian Revolutionary Federation is a socialist party and a member of Socialist International; all over the world, these parties are known for having gender-sensitive programs and activities. The party’s retreat of its gender-sensitive provisions in 2012, as compared to 2007, is in fact temporary.

Important provisions are included in the platform of the “**Heritage**” party, which was amended in 2008. Along with the traditional provision on protection of motherhood, childhood and family, the difficult issue of country families is raised due to men’s migration: “One-time stable, traditionally irreplaceable and exemplary country families appeared on the edge of split due to men’s labour migration to close and further abroad”.

There is a provision on strengthening the Army in the program which says it’s necessary to give the opportunity to women to serve in the Army on a volunteer basis: “By this way it is possible to broadly involve women and girls on volunteer basis in special departments of the RA Military Forces.”

The party’s election platform also includes provisions on “Improving the electoral system by conducting of Parliamentary elections exclusively by proportional electoral system...”.

There is a recommendation on NGOs in the platform of Heritage party, which is “To make amendments in the RA law on non-governmental organizations by stipulating concrete mechanisms for civil control over activities of state bodies”.

There are no provisions on women’s political participation in the party platform, however the provision on inclusion of women in the NGO sector can promote women’s political participation.

Heghine Bisharyan, the head of the Rule of Law faction, is a co-author of the draft law on “Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in Armenia” which was sent to the Parliament by the Government and which passed the 1<sup>st</sup> hearing; however, gender equality is not considered a priority in either the party

<sup>28</sup> Armenian Revolutionary Federation Platform. Yerevan, 2007, pages 17-18



or election platform of the Rule of Law party. Much attention is paid to the issue of the protection of family in the “Priority to Solving Problems of Family, Motherhood and Childhood” section in the election platform and complex activities are suggested towards solving these issues.

Gender approach is missing in the platform of the Democratic Party of Armenia, though in 1995 women’s involvement in governing structures was first introduced in their party election platform.

The election platform of the “Armenian National Congress” parties’ alliance is a compilation of documents. It includes “Main Provisions of the Election Platform”, as well as a number of programs developed for different areas. A wide range of issues is included in the above mentioned documents; however a gender perspective is not incorporated in them.

In contrast with other parties, “The United Armenians”<sup>29</sup> party platform, adopted during the 6<sup>th</sup> ad-hoc Assembly of the party in 2012, foresees an “increase of women’s role in state and civil-political structures and their direct involvement in coordination of the utmost important processes”.

Several non-governmental organizations also analysed election platforms of political parties. Some of them presented party provisions in their speeches and mass-media for raising awareness of voters.

In particular, “Foundation for Civil and Social Development” NGO, on the eve of the RA 2012 Parliamentary elections, published “Political Parties Participating in the National Assembly Elections under Proportional System - Voter’s Guidebook” where objectives, goals, activities, and program fundamentals of political parties were presented based on questionnaires filled in by representatives of political parties. The guidebook’s introduction mentioned that questionnaire responses were completed by party representatives.

However, in our research we found out differences between the party election platforms and the opinions mentioned in the guidebook. The guidebook authors also noted this matter. Taking into account the goals of our study, we focused on the **“Protection of Women’s Rights and Combatting Violence against Women”** section.

Thus, during the study, we found that the following provisions are mentioned from the Republican Party of Armenia platform:

<sup>29</sup> The party was founded in 2000, but wasn’t politically active. In 2003, Ruben Avagyan, the party leader who is a rector of “MANC” university, was nominated a candidate for the president of the Republic of Armenia.

- “Involvement of gender component on national and regional levels in all spheres of social-political, economic and cultural life, in the development of policies and political practice.
- Formation of a unified system involving national and institutional mechanisms for developing and implementing gender equality policy;
- Provision of organizational activities of monitoring the process of developing and implementing gender equality policy”<sup>30</sup>;

According to provisions of the “Prosperous Armenia” party platform presented in the book, “The Party is called for the enhancement of women’s role in political life. It is important that women participate in political decision making and their enforcement”<sup>31</sup>.

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation party did not answer the questions of this section.

The “Rule of Law” party gave the following answers to the questions of the questionnaire that the integration of women in all spheres of society’s vital activities will ensure both a sustainable development of the society and will increase the level of protection of women’s rights”<sup>32</sup>.

The “Heritage” party suggested in all areas of public life:

- “to legislatively define guarantees providing women’s equal rights and equal opportunities in political, social, economic, cultural, public and other spheres, as well as to regulate relations arising in this connection.
- By the state policy provide gender equality, it is necessary to secure equally just and real opportunities for women and give them the right of electing state and local self-governing bodies and be elected”<sup>33</sup>.

The Democratic Party of Armenia highlights in its responses: “The democratic socialism excludes the social differences between a man and a woman. Taking into consideration physiological peculiarities, the party believes that it is necessary to set up privileges for women by ensuring their role in the society as a mother, coach who strengthens the family”<sup>34</sup>.

Each party of the Congress presented its viewpoint of women’s advocacy issues, and the viewpoints are rather different.

The research showed that the gender approaches presented in the guidebook were absent in election platforms of many political parties. But as the questionnaires were completed by “the responsible representatives of parties” we can assume that gender

30 “Political Parties Participating in the National Assembly Elections 2012 under Proportional System - Voter’s Guidebook”, Foundation for Civil and Social Development, Yerevan, 2012, page 131.

31 Ibid, page 21.

32 Ibid, page 146.

33 Ibid, page 34.

34 Ibid, page 115.

discourse should be present in parties' agendas. However, it's obvious that parties do not pay much attention to gender equality issues in political practice so that they include them in party platforms.

*Thus, there are no provisions devoted to the advancement of gender equality, development of women's political participation, and nomination of women in decision-making levels in the executive branch of power. By paying important attention to the issues of family protection, parties do not consider socio-political situation in their platforms, and instead they focus on general provisions of family protection by showing traditional behaviour and very often are limited to protection of motherhood and childhood.*

It's obvious that the recommendations of the UN and the Council of Europe related to ensuring gender equality to parties are not taken into account in party platforms, which could have enriched party platforms with new ideas and approaches including both in terms of protection of family and parents. Also, the acceptance and implementation of some recommendations could have significantly promoted women's status in all areas of public-political life, decrease of women's double burden, thus increasing their political involvement<sup>35</sup>.

The absence of mechanisms for women's advancement in political parties allows us to conclude that ensuring gender equality is not considered a priority in parties' policy within current democratization phase of society. The investment of gender-sensitive approaches could have promoted development of women's resources for the future. The implementation of special mechanisms for advancement of women to leadership bodies of parties by political parties and the development of internal democracy would have reduced discrimination towards women.

### **3. Assessment of Issues of Women's Role and Political Participation in Public Speeches of Party Leaders**

Although the research of party platforms revealed their gender-neutral nature, some positive changes in parties' political practices were noticeable, especially in public speeches of party leaders, where the issue of women's political involvement was voiced. Starting from 2009, after the involvement of Armenia in the Eastern Partnership program, the issue of women's political participation became more

<sup>35</sup> "Engaging the private sector, in terms of corporate social responsibility and adapting legislation by introducing flexible working arrangements for both the father and the mother, to facilitate a more balanced sharing of roles so as to relieve women of the double burden of employment and domestic duties, while encouraging men to take an active part in family life". The Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 1720 (2010) on "Investing in family cohesion as a development factor in times of crisis".

modernized. Party leaders and state-level political figures started to mention the necessity of involving women comprehensively in politics.

On November 2010, Serzh Sargsyan, president of the RA and Chairman of the Republican Party of Armenia, mentioned in his speech with the party's women's council: "We are a conservative party, and in our system of values family and children are certainly among the most significant components; however, neither I, nor the leadership of the Party would ever suggest that active life of the female-members of the RPA or active life of the Armenian women in general should be limited to building a strong, good family, bringing up children, and creation of warm family. ... We have always underlined the necessity of women's active involvement. It would be an unjustified luxury for us to attempt to curb women's potential. ... We have always been endorsing the female members of the Party but still have much to do. Undoubtedly, women's participation on the mid-level is pretty impressive. But all women, including members of the Republican Party and the entire state structure must be confident that their good performance, good work results in professional advancement"<sup>36</sup>.

In his speech to the Republican Party Congress held in March 2012 Serzh Sargsyan welcomed the increase in the number of women in the RPA and emphasised that being "the pillar of the family" does not mean a prisoner of the kitchen, "and it is best proved by the increasing presence of women in the ranks of the Party"<sup>37</sup>.

Serzh Sargsyan again touched upon the issue of the women's role in public life in the Conference dedicated to the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Republican Party held in May 2012: "I still think that women's role in all levels of Armenian's state and political system must be further strengthened... ***It's not a secret that women's active participation in political life increases the level of public alertness. It's not accidental that in those countries where women are actively involved in political life, corruption level is low***".

Hovik Abrahamyan, the Speaker of the RA National Assembly, and Tigran Sargsyan, the RA Prime Minister, each spoke several times about the importance of women's participation in the country's public and political life.

Party leaders actively voiced the issue of women's involvement on March 8<sup>th</sup>, as well as in their speeches in front of party activists. For example, Artur Baghdasaryan, the president of the "Rule of Law" party, welcomed the activities of the party's women's council and mentioned that the council was established based on the European party models, which provide opportunities to solve women's involvement issues

36 From the speech in front of the women's council of the Republican Party of Armenia on the occasion of the Party's 20th anniversary, <http://ankakh.com/2010/11/74207>

37 From Serzh Sargsyan's speech of the 13th Congress of the Republican Party of Armenia hold in March 2012 <http://news.am/rus/news/96634.html>

using legal and institutional mechanisms. The party leader also welcomed women's involvement in the executive structures of the power by expressing hope that "We are interested in the fact that women are able to be actively involved in the management process, as ideologically and politically decent trained and tempered women could be a powerful force in the political structures"<sup>38</sup>.

Periodically referring to the topic of women's political participation, Artur Baghdasaryan raised concern on women's low representation in power structures: "Women's representation is low in public-political life in Armenia, especially in state management structures"<sup>39</sup>.

Gagik Tsarukyan, the president of the "Prosperous Armenia" party, also refers to women's roles in party life and women's political participation. In his speech during the first session of the Young Women's Board established in 2012, he welcomed the creation of the Board and expressed hope that: "*Young women, being more responsible, must unite, try their skills in political, parliamentarian activities, and actively participate in party works*"<sup>40</sup>.

The analysis of speeches of party leaders shows that, although slowly, the topic of women's political participation is becoming a part of their speeches, which creates preconditions for parties to take more serious approaches towards these issues in decision-making levels.

#### 4. Gender Composition of Political Parties and Their Governing Bodies

According to the Ministry of Justice data, 74 political parties are registered in the country (2012). 19 of those parties took part in the 2012 parliamentary elections (10 are within the composition of the "Armenian National Congress" alliance).

Accurate descriptions of the composition of political parties are difficult to determine since many parties do not conduct statistical calculations and do not have correct figures about their gender composition. In this study, we reviewed the issue of women's representation in the political parties and alliances taking part in the 2012 parliamentary elections.

The data on gender composition of political parties available in the guideline "Parties taking part in the RA 2012 Parliamentary elections under the proportional system" published before the elections were used and analysed.

38 From Artur Baghdasaryan speech at the 7th Congress of party's women's union, 04.03.2012.

39 <http://news.am/arm/news/16121.html>

40 From Gagik Tsarukyan speech at the 1st Session of the Young Women's Board, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xclubebK\\_2s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xclubebK_2s)

### Women's Representation in Political Parties and Alliances

Party Name	% of Women in Parties	% of Women in Party Leadership	% of Women in Parties	% of Women in Party Leadership
	2007		2012	
1. Republican Party of Armenia	30%	2.8%	51%	10%
2. Prosperous Armenia	40%	11.4%	-	8%
3. Armenian Revolutionary Federation	25%	9.5%	14%	10%
4. Rule of Law	68.3%	30%	63%	9 %
5. Heritage Party	52%	22%	45%	45%
6. "Armenian National Congress" parties alliance	-	-	46%	12%
6.1 "Liberty"	-	-	32%	-
6.2 "Democratic Motherland"	-	-	27%	-
6.3 "Democratic Way"	-	-	27%	-
6.4 People's Party of Armenia	40%	17%	40%	-
6.5 Liberal Party of Armenia	-	-	42%	-
6.6 Green's Party of Armenia (Social-Ecological)	-	-	61%	-
6.7 Armenian National Movement	-	-	32%	-
6.8 "Armenian Motherland"	-	-	19%	-
6.9 "Republic"	-	-	No data available	-
6.10 "Conservative Party"	-	-	25%	-
7. Communist Party of Armenia	-	-	22%	20%
8. Democratic Party of Armenia	-	-	25%	-
9. United Armenians	-	-	38%	38%

This data show that the political parties can be classified into three groups by gender composition/women's representation:

- Women's representation is below 30%
- Women's representation is around 30-50%
- Women's representation is 51% and more.

As seen from the table above, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, the Democratic Party of Armenia, the Communist Party of Armenia, and 4 parties from the "Armenian National Congress" alliance are in the 1<sup>st</sup> group - below 30%. Out of 16 leadership positions of the "Armenian National Congress" alliance, only 2 are held by women.

The data shows that women's representation in the Armenian Revolutionary Federation has reduced from the previous election cycle. In 2003, women's representation in the party was at 19%. Later, the party expressed interest in becoming a member of the Socialist International. One of the principles of the Socialist International, declared in its ethical charter, is ensuring gender equality.<sup>41</sup>

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation became a member of the Socialist International in 2004, after which, the number of women in the party started to increase. With participation of the Socialist International experts, the party organized seminars to promote gender awareness. Women's representation in the party reached 25% in 2007. The party faction in the Parliament was one of the more gender-balanced ones. However, according to recent data, women's representation in the party decreased to 14% on the eve of the 2012 parliamentary elections. After the RoA parliamentary elections, there are no women in the party faction.

In the second group, where women's representation is around 30-50%, the Heritage party is included (45%), as well as the majority of the parties within the "Armenian National Congress" (the average representation in the union is 46%).

The Republican Party of Armenia, the Rule of Law, the "United Armenians" parties, and the Green's Party of Armenia (Social-Ecological), which is in the composition of "Armenian National Congress," are in the 3rd group (51% and more).

Some parties, such as the Prosperous Armenia party, do not have correct figures about their gender composition. The Rule of Law party, which is in the reformation process after the elections could provide only approximate data.

The research showed that in leadership positions of majority parties misbalance was maintained, although in some parties, women's representation increased slightly compared to 2007.

<sup>41</sup> Ethical Charter of the Socialist International adopted in the XXII Congress of the Socialist International in São Paulo, in 2003. Task was set "to foster gender equality in every area of private and public life, including within our parties, in decision-making positions in all fields and at all levels".

However, having a significant number or percentage of women with high political status in parties does not necessarily increase possibility of strengthening inner-party democracy. The information from the focus groups shows that women are often marginalized in parties, and hidden discrimination against women is significant in some parties. This is the case for speeches of not only women, but men as well in the focus groups. “For the time being, men have a prevailing role; women are involved just so it cannot be said that they are not”<sup>42</sup>. Or “As everywhere, the main core is men - leaders of the boards. It could be one-two women, and it’s for fashion”<sup>43</sup>.

Often women’s connectedness to family contradicts their political career and an idea is voiced that women taking part in politics are “different,” which is also a hidden discrimination. “Because women involved in politics are special type of people, who can consider sometimes public activities more than family and they are by their nature public women, usually especially single women belong to that category, this is my observation. Those women who are burdened with family problems have no time. Women involved in politics either do not have these problems or are exempted from them”<sup>44</sup>.

The existence of discrimination is also shown by sociological surveys. According to the results of the survey conducted at the end of the 2010 to the question “Is there discrimination against women in the Republic of Armenia?” 46.4% of all interviewees responded positively<sup>45</sup>. However, according to the results of the same survey, to the question “In which areas is there discrimination?” 23.8% of all responses mentioned political elections, 23.7% mentioned state management, and only 13.6% mentioned political parties<sup>46</sup>.

Opinions of female party members about discrimination range from complete denial to complete approval (without doubt there is discrimination).

“I have not met any discrimination in politics, in so many congresses I participated, both in our branch and in center, people consider your opinion, listen to you, I have not noticed in our party, I do not know about others, cannot say anything”<sup>47</sup>.

Women are involved only in those cases when women’s capacities are needed, and to receive awards, men are put forward: “There is (discrimination) undoubtedly. When women’s power should be used, women are being involved, and when it’s time for winning laurels, strong men come, posts, and so on”<sup>48</sup>. Women are not represented in

42 From a speech by a male member of the Armenian National Movement at a focus group in Artashat.

43 From a speech by a female member of the Prosperous Armenia at a focus group in Abovyan.

44 From a speech by a male member of the “Heritage” party at a focus group in Artashat.

45 V. Osipov, Participatory Processes: Factors, Obstacles and Attitudes // Gender Dimension of Civil and Political Participation in Armenia, Report on the Findings of the Sociological Study, Yerevan, 2011, page 40

46 Ibid, page 43.

47 From an interview with a female member of the “Heritage” party.

48 From an interview with a female member of the “Rule of Law” party.



leadership positions of parties: "... Women are not represented in leadership positions of parties, one must work and the other lead?"<sup>49</sup>.

The existence of indirect discrimination is shown by double standards that are often used towards women and men: "The thing which is forgiven for men, is not forgiven for women and everything is under men's power. The H1, other TV channels start to discuss women's wrong behavior, wrong message, wrong approach... Just two standards work towards women"<sup>50</sup>.

Very often, female party members reject the existence of discriminatory behavior; however, they cannot explain why they are not consulted with and why they do not take part in developing party lists under the proportional electoral system for the parliamentary elections or in developing party platforms. Moreover, the particular party or position is irrelevant. The difference of discrimination approaches is explained by the level of women's awareness.

Note that in General Recommendation No. 25 of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the following interpretation is given on Article 1 of the Convention: "Indirect discrimination can take place when the laws, strategies and programs based on gender quasi-neutral criteria, which in their actual impact have devastating consequences for women".

Gender-neutral laws, strategies, and programs can unintentionally reinforce the effects of past discriminatory practices. These can be based on men's lifestyles and do not reflect women's experiences, which are different from men's experiences. The existence of these differences can be explained by stereotypical notions about the role of women in society and by models of behavior, which are based on the biological differences between women and men.<sup>51</sup> Thus, if due to the existence of "the stereotypical perceptions, attitudes and models," women cannot compete with men within the parties, there is an indirect discrimination, and parties are obliged to contribute to adoption of laws that are aimed at ensuring equal opportunities by similar strategies and programs.

By gaining political experience and knowledge in Women's Leadership Schools and by creating ties with partners of other countries, a realization of discriminatory behavior takes place among women, and women's inter-party unions (women's councils and associations) become involved.

49 From a speech by a female member of the "Armenian Revolutionary Federation" party at a focus group in Sevan.

50 From a speech by a gender expert, a female member of the National Democratic Union party at a focus group in Yerevan.

51 <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/General%20recommendation%2025%20%28Russian%29.pdf>

## 5. Women's Councils and Unions as Socialization Institutes for Women

In many parties, inter-party associations (councils or unions) were set up. The study showed that, as in previous years, the work of these councils is mostly directed towards charity and implementation of party platforms, under which encouragement of women's political participation would fall is missing. Moreover, there is a split between the standpoint of women's councils and political attitudes.

For example, the following actions are listed in the program of women's council of the Republican Party of Armenia:

- implementing and propagating the Republican Party of Armenia ideology, charter issues, and programs;
- propagating Armenian spiritual, cultural, and historical values based on ideology of eternity of nation and homeland;
- revealing and solving various problems of women, family, motherhood and childhood, based on an imperative to ensure proper mode of life for each individual, family, and, therefore, of nation;
- forming of democratic and civil society and contributing to the strengthening of the Armenian statehood.

The leadership of the Republican Party of Armenia women's council consists of 10 members. As in previous years, the women's council operates committees on organizational, ideological/advocating, and social issues and on issues of culture, education, health care, women's entrepreneurship, and women's role in society.

The women's union of the Rule of Law party was founded in 1998 and has the following governing bodies: congress, women's council, department, and women's union president. The platform provisions mention that the union's goals are:

- Explore and raise women's issues;
- Improve women's legal and political culture;
- Protect social and legal interests;
- Increase women's functional role in strengthening of family;
- Promote and ensure women's representation in the labour market;
- Promote development of women's entrepreneurship activities;
- Cooperate closely with acting NGOs of the RA;
- Solve women's representational issues in executive and legislative bodies.

In fact, experience shows that political parties' women's councils focus more on charity, organizing various cultural events within their limited opportunities, and

contributing to women's employment issues. Nevertheless, as research on activities of political parties of recent years shows, and analysis of opinions of participants of focus groups and roundtable discussions within the framework of this study supports women's councils and women's associations do not carry out activities directed at women's political socialization, enrichment of their political-legal knowledge, or at increasing their role in parties. A focus on charitable activities marginalizes women's roles within parties and decreases women's participation in ideological and organizational activities, contributes to the unbalanced participation of women and men in the most important parts of the inter party work, and consequently limits the involvement of women's opportunities in development of inner-party democracy. The fact that excluding women from solving important party issues is not critically assessed is worrisome, especially because it is perceived as a fact of "women's roles" within parties.

The focus groups revealed that situational assessments by female party members and by women who actively participate in women's councils are different.

"I am a president of a women's council in Gegharkunik region, we are very active and carry on activities for women, for our women, we try so our women are in the centre of attention"<sup>52</sup>; or "Women's council is also a school, an institute for developing a woman as a political figure"<sup>53</sup>.

However, as shown by focus group discussions, opinions of female activists and members of women councils and of ordinary party members in this regard are divergent: according to opinions of female activists, women's councils play a big role by organizing various events and making women visible in parties; however, ordinary party members state that, "women's councils do not fulfil their functions;" "women's councils do not work in the regions;" and "among female party members, ideological and political work stays behind the problems which are dictated by time, particularly from implementation of obligations for achieving gender equality both inside the party and in public at large and political life of the country".

The participants of the focus groups and roundtable discussions mentioned that organized events often do not serve for raising their authority or self-esteem within parties. "Almost all parties have women's councils, but they are doing more charity; there are almost no women in regional structures"<sup>54</sup>. Or "Returning to the activities of women's councils of parties, we must fix that their activities do not differ from non-governmental and charity organizations. They act like 'It would do no harm' principle, solve issues of people's health, social support problems, but do not discuss

52 From a speech by a member of the Republican Party of Armenia at a focus group.

53 From a speech by Zhasmin Ghevondyan.

54 From a speech by a female member of the Republican Party of Armenia at a focus group in Sevan.

any serious problem and find a solution to it. The same refers to youth wings.”<sup>55</sup>

That is why many people expressed the opinion that women's councils do not promote women's political socialization. “I am against women's councils in the case of Armenia. Around the world, this experience seems very beneficial to me. But it seems to me, that it is a means for men in Armenia to isolate women. It's like they say - Go, this is a toy, go and play, deal with your affairs. So women are being cheated and do not enter into political issues, but deal with minor issues. It turns out that women deal with women's issues and men deal with political affairs. This is my impression, and I am afraid of it.”<sup>56</sup>

Or a different opinion: “I think that it is not considered a must that a woman should be empowered through this council.”<sup>57</sup>

There are no mechanisms for advancing women in political party activities in the majority of parties. During interviews this was pointed out by women for several times. Women often mentioned what difficulties they had to overcome in order to be seen and heard. To the question of whether women's advancement is promoted within a party, a women's council head replied: “I do not see either any particular obstacle or a special incentive, as such”.

To the question “As a president of a women's council, can you use the commission as a channel for making other women visible, or are there no such opportunities?” a regional women's council head responded: “There are no obstacles, if I have an initiative to involve women, no one will be against it; on the contrary, they will be happy, but the motivation is weak, the number of women interested in politics is small”.

As the previously presented table shows, the number of women in political parties is rather large. It is a different issue that not all of them are active. But is it not the main concern of women's councils to promote women's involvement within their parties and to combat discriminatory practices and gender stereotypes within parties?

55 From a speech by a female member of the Republican Party of Armenia at a focus group in Sevan.

56 From a speech by a gender expert, a female member of the National Democratic Union party at a focus group in Yerevan.

57 From a speech by Irina Gasparyan at a focus group in Yerevan.

## 6. Principles and Mechanisms of Formation of Party Electoral Lists under the Proportional System in the RA Parliamentary Elections

*“The number of selected women and men from each political party is an indicator of achieving the progress which relates to women’s representation in parliaments”<sup>58</sup>.*

The analysis of the mechanisms for compiling political party lists for the National Assembly elections, bears witness to an inter-party deficit of democracy. As in previous years, ordinary party members, as a rule, do not participate in the compilation of electoral lists and do not know on what basis electoral lists are composed. Even candidates on party lists are not aware of the compilation methods of the lists, and it often remains unknown what the basis is for assigning a particular place to a party member, whether it is a man or a woman. The study also showed that awareness about the methods of compiling lists is lower in the regions than in Yerevan.

The 20% gender quota of the Electoral Code played a decisive role in regards to women’s involvement in party lists. To ensure the necessary number of women, party leaders often approach women’s councils for support. “They invited chairs of regional women’s councils and asked them to provide lists of three or four women”<sup>59</sup>.

An innovation of the 2012 elections was that candidates of party lists were often offered the opportunity to write two applications at once: one to agree to being included on the list and the other for refusing the parliamentary mandate. During post-election roundtable discussions, although female candidates tried to justify their party’s policy, disagreement was observed regarding this policy.

No party of Armenia undertook initiatives or voluntarily implemented mechanisms for increasing women’s numbers in party structures or undertook special measures such as inter-party quotas. Below is a table showing the countries where quotas are used. Some post-Soviet republics, former Socialist countries, and countries with stable democracies are included in the table:

58 From the Recommendation Rec(2003)3 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on “Balanced Participation of Women and Men in Political and Public Decision Making”.

59 From a speech by Eleonora Malkhasyan at a focus group in Yerevan.

**Table.60 Trends in Women's Representation in Lower House of National Parliaments of States 2000-2012<sup>61</sup>**

N	State	2000	2005	2010	2012	Change	Legal quotas	Party quotas
	Armenia	3	5	9	11	8	+	
	Macedonia	8	19	33	31	23	+	
	Kyrgyzstan	1	0	26	23	22	+	
	Belgium	23	35	39	38	15	+	
	Spain	22	36	37	36	14	+	
	Moldova	9	22	24	20	11		+
	Uzbekistan	7	18	22	33	26	+	
	Greece	6	13	17	19	13		+
	Italy	11	12	21	22	11		+
	Bulgaria	11	22	21	21	10		
	France	11	12	19	19	8	+	
	Iceland	35	33	43	40	5		+
	Czech Republic	15	17	22	22	7		+
	Poland	13	20	20	24	11		+
	Turkey	4	9	9	14	10		+
	Netherlands	36	37	41	41	5		+
	Romania	7	11	11	11	4	+	
	Sweden	43	45	46	45	2		+
	Norway	36	38	40	40	4		+
	Finland	37	38	40	43	6		
	Lithuania	18	22	19	19	1		+
	Canada	21	21	22	25	4		+
	Austria	27	34	28	28	1		+
	Denmark	37	37	38	40	3		
	Ukraine	8	5	8	8	0		+
	Azerbaijan	12	13	11	16	4		
	Georgia	7	9	7	7	0		+

60 The table was composed based on the data of baseline study "Gender Equality in Elected Office: A Six-Step Action Plan" for developing an OSCE/ODIHR guidebook on supporting women's participation in political parties, 2011, page 16-17, <http://www.osce.org/ru/odihr/80989>

61 2012 data are presented as of 31 May.

This table shows that the results of introducing quotas in a number of countries are more modest than in others. Also, in different countries, election quotas produced greater results, while in others, party quotas did. The predictability of efficacy of particular quotas has not been reviewed. These differences stem from a number of factors including “*the design of quota policies*, in terms of their wording, requirements, and sanctions for non-compliance, as well as in *their perceived legitimacy*”<sup>62</sup>.

The causes of lower efficacy of gender quotas in Armenia was discussed in the previous chapter; regarding the legitimacy of quotas, they are rather legitimised. According to the results of the sociological survey conducted in 2011, 57.2% of the respondents responded positively for incorporating quotas, only 11.2% were against, and the rest were either indifferent to the problem or did not answer. It is interesting that among party members, the support for quotas was higher - 65.6%<sup>63</sup>.

Studies show that the public perceives gender quotas as necessary for achieving a balance in power structures, and parties should modify their methods of developing proportional lists, use temporary special measures more widely for ensuring gender equality both in parties and in general for nominating women for leadership positions in the country.

## 7. Barriers of Women's Political Participation

Politics was considered as man's occupation for centuries. Women were deprived of the right to be engaged in political activities. The first outbreak of women's political involvement was during the bourgeois revolution era, but they received the legal right to participate in politics only in the early twentieth century. However, up until now, political elites of most countries of the world are primarily men, and women's political participation is lower than men's. Also, more traditional societies feature lower levels of women's political participation, and as previously discussed, the factors that hinder women's political advancement have not changed.

During the study, the factors hindering women's political participation were examined and discussed by focus groups and roundtable discussion participants.

The factors hindering women's political participation can be divided into two groups:

- Institutional;
- Socio-cultural and psychological.

62 “Gender Equality in Elected Office: A Six-Step Action Plan”, page 31, <http://www.osce.org/ru/odihr/80989>

63 H. Hovhannesyan, General Indicators of Civil and Political Participation and their Gender Dimension // Gender Dimension of Civil and Political Participation in Armenia, Report on the Findings of the Sociological Study, Yerevan, 2011, page 16.

## 7.1 Institutional Factors Hindering Women's Political Participation

### 7.1.1 Absence of National Machinery Ensuring Gender Equality

The current mechanisms do not correspond to the criteria of national machinery<sup>64</sup> set forth in No. 6 of the General Recommendations of the CEDAW Committee,<sup>65</sup> in the Beijing Platform for Action<sup>66</sup>, and in the Council of Europe “Handbook on National Machinery to Promote Gender Equality and Action Plans – Guidelines for Establishing and Implementing National Machinery to Promote Equality, with Examples of Good Practice” (Strasbourg, 15 December, 2001, EG (2001) 7)<sup>67</sup>.

### 7.1.2. Insufficiency of Legislative Basis. In Particular, the Absence of an RA Law “On Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men”<sup>68</sup>

### 7.1.3 Imperfections of Electoral System in Terms of Women's Advancement in Politics

Imperfection and lack of a clear statement of special temporary measures of the Electoral Code of the RA. The 2012 parliamentary elections showed that the party list gender quota increase from 15% to 20% which was intended to enhance women's representation in the National Assembly did not result in a gender-balanced representation. This is due to the fact that it lacks mechanisms enabling prevention

64 See the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Shadow Report on Implementation of the CEDAW recommendations in the Republic of Armenia 2000-2006.

65 According to the recommendation, the effective national machinery should (a) Advise on the impact on women of all government policies; (b) Monitor the situation of women comprehensively; (c) Help formulate new policies and effectively carry out strategies and measures to eliminate discrimination. CEDAW Committee: General Recommendation No. 6 “Effective National Machinery and Publicity” (seventh session, 1988) <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/index.html>

66 According to the 201st point of the Beijing Platform for Action, “A national machinery for the advancement of women is the central policy-coordinating unit inside government. Its main task is to support government-wide mainstreaming of a gender-equality perspective in all policy areas. The necessary conditions for an effective functioning of such national machineries include:

- a) Location at the highest possible level in the Government, falling under the responsibility of a Cabinet minister;
- b) Institutional mechanisms or processes that facilitate, as appropriate, decentralized planning, implementation and monitoring with a view to involving non-governmental organizations and community organizations from the grass-roots upwards;
- c) Sufficient resources in terms of budget and professional capacity;
- d) Opportunity to influence development of all government policies”.

67 According to the Council of Europe guidebook, “A gender equality machinery is an institutional governmental and, in some cases, parliamentary structure set up to promote women's advancement and to ensure the full enjoyment by women of their human rights. Its main function is to monitor and to ensure the implementation of the law, of the principle of non-discrimination and equality between women and men”.

68 The RA Law “On Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men” has been adopted by the 1st hearing in the National Assembly.



of women being replaced by the following male candidates, in case of women's "voluntary refusal" of mandates.

- High degree of commercialization of elections: lack of legal restrictions on campaign expenses and limitations on women's financial resources.
- Low representation of women in the business sphere and small number of women entrepreneurs.

#### ***7.1.4. Absence of Real Mechanisms for Formation of Parties' Motivation to Advance Women***

- Deficiency of inner-party democracy
- Lack of party mechanisms for women's promotion
- Lack of differentiated system for development of women's resources and supporting women's leadership
- Lack of political inter-party associations related to ensuring gender equality
- Weak impact of women's unions on political party activities
- Absence of state funding to political parties related to gender policies.

### **7.2. Social-Cultural and Psychological Factors**

- Hegemony of masculine political culture
- Brutal and oligarchic nature of political fight
- Unequal opportunities of women and men in competition
- Different models of men and women's behaviour in society, which do not contribute to women's political socialization, and the existence of double standards towards men and women in politics
- Existence of gender stereotypes that do not encourage women's political activism
- Deficiency of positive examples of female politicians as role models in Armenian reality
- Not recognising discriminatory behaviour by society and by women
- Lack of ownership of methods for campaign creation for female candidates,
- Women's double workload and lack of time, which causes difficulties for combining family responsibilities and political advancement
- Lack of consolidated women's movement

- Not enough media support for women's political participation, which often produces a stereotypical vision of women's role in public political life
- Weak social partnership of governmental and non-governmental entities at all decision-making levels
- Low self-esteem and "self-discrimination".

The study showed that positive changes have been noticed in Armenia's state gender policy. These issues are mentioned in the "2011-2015 Strategic Program of Gender Policy of the Republic of Armenia", the use of which would contribute to the reduction of gender inequality. It is necessary to take also into consideration the above-mentioned factors that impede women's political activism. Encouragement of women's political participation will greatly contribute to implementation of the strategic goals of gender policy of the Republic of Armenia.

## 8. Conclusions

- Achieving the goals of gender equality is not a priority in the activities and policies of Armenia's political parties.
- Analysis of political party platforms shows that, with the rare exceptions, parties do not have a goal of overcoming gender imbalances in decision-making levels of executive and legislative powers.
- Policies of parties, as a rule, continue to remain gender-neutral. Organizational measures, such as participation in women's associations, councils, or other groups of women in political parties, does not ensure women's activism; women are underrepresented in the formation of party policy and in problem-solving of modern issues which are faced by party and the country at large.
- Issues of women's political participation are not reflected in program charters and documents of political parties. Political parties do not develop such mechanisms for the formation of their governing bodies that include balanced representation of women and men. No party initiated introducing gender quotas in Armenia.
- Women are not properly represented in top bodies of parties; consequently, their role is insignificant in the formation of party policies and in the strengthening of inner-party democracy.
- Modern methods of awareness raising for covering party activities and enriching women's knowledge and socialization are lacking.

- Gender equality ideas are not being advocated within the parties; women's councils do not conduct consultations about raising women's political participation; debates on gender topics are not being organized within political parties; small numbers of seminars do not lead to quality results, and do not increase women's influence; and parties do not promote the overcoming of hidden discrimination.
- After acceptance in a party, many women lose interest in party work over time because their role as an active player in the political party often leads to charity actions, which turns their political roles to statist and they become busy with trivial activities of the party.

## CHAPTER 3

### WOMEN IN ELECTORAL PROCESSES

#### 1. Women in the Proportional Lists of Political Parties

Out of 1026 candidates included in party lists of the 8 political parties and one bloc running for the 2012 parliamentary elections of the RA, 235 were women (22.9%). During the 2007 parliamentary elections of the RA, when the Electoral Code quota for women's representation was 15%, women comprised 22.6% of the party lists.

Thus, after the adoption of the 20% gender quota in the Electoral Code, the percentage ratio of sexes has not changed in party lists submitted to the CEC, which initially lowered the possibility of increasing women's number in the parliament. Analysis of the lists showed that the layout of the seats allocated to women has also not progressed.

The principle stipulated in the Electoral Code "The number of representatives of each gender must not exceed the 80% of each integer group of five candidates (2-6, 7-11, 12-16 and subsequently till the end of the list) starting from the second number of the electoral list of a political party" was understood word-by-word by the majority of the political parties to mean that women should not be placed before number 6, and they "fixed" the 6th place for women. Using the discriminatory principle of women's layout in the lists stipulated by law, the majority of parties used "the most convenient" option for them by saving for women, the 6th, 11th, 16th, 21th and further seats.

The consequence was that only 15 women were in the first group of 10 candidates (6.4% of all nominated women) and only 4 women were nominated in the first group of 5 candidates (1.7% of the party lists) from the 8 political parties and 1 party alliance. Compared to the 2007 elections, the number of women included in political party electoral lists decreased by 4 times in the first group of 5 and by more than half in the first group of 10 candidates.

### Comparative Table of Women's Participation under the Proportional Electoral System

	2003	2007	2012
<b>Women nominated under the proportional electoral system</b>	162 (1143) <b>14.1%</b>	297 (1313) <b>22.6%</b>	234 (1026) <b>22.8%</b>
<b>Top 10 candidates</b>	27 <b>16.6%</b>	37 <b>12.4%</b>	15 <b>6.4%</b>
<b>Top 5 candidates</b>	6 <b>3.7%</b>	17 <b>5.7%</b>	4 <b>1.7%</b>

In general, a majority of the political parties limited female candidates to the quotas stipulated in the Electoral Code. Only two parties included more women than prescribed by law: "United Armenians" - 37.9% and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation - 31.7%; however, the high percentage did not affect the final result. The women from "United Armenians" did not pass to the National Assembly and there were no women that passed with the parliamentarians from the Armenian Revolutionary Federation.

Women were least represented in the Rule of Law party list (20.2%), despite a high representation of women in the party (60%). Women comprised 20.3% of the list from the "Armenian National Congress" alliance, thus correctly in the limits of the assigned quota. Note that initially, the "Armenian National Congress" submitted a list where women comprised only 17.6%, so the quota was not met, and only during the final registration, with the introduction of an amendment, was the percentage of women increased to 20.3%. The fact that the quota had been violated at the beginning, speaks indirectly to the fact that the issue of women's inclusion has not been a priority when the list was being compiled.

However, two oppositional parties included more women in their lists than coalition parties: the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (32%) and "Heritage" (25%).

### Women's Representation in the Proportional Lists

Political Party	Total Number of Candidates in the List	Number of Women in the List	Ratio of Women in the List	Positions of Female Candidates
Prosperous Armenia	165	36	21.8%	6, 11, 16, 21, 26, 31, 36
Heritage Party	73	18	24.6%	3, 9, 11, 14, 17, 26, 31, 33
“Armenian National Congress” Alliance	123	25	20.3%	6, 11, 16, 21, 26, 31, 36
Armenian Revolutionary Federation	85	27	31.7%	6, 11, 16, 20, 22, 27, 30
Democratic Party of Armenia	45	12	24.4%	5, 6, 7, 8, 16, 21
Communist Party of Armenia	75	16	21.1%	6, 11, 16, 21, 26, 31, 41
Republican Party of Armenia	253	54	21.3%	6, 11, 16, 21, 26, 31, 36
United Armenians	29	11	37.9%	3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 16, 18, 20
Rule of Law Party	178	36	20.2%	2, 11, 16, 21, 26, 31, 36

In the top 5 candidates of party lists, referred to as “a sacred sanctuary,” women were only included by the following 4 parties: the Democratic Party of Armenia, “United Armenians”, “The Rule of Law” and “Heritage”.

The top 10 of the Democratic Party of Armenia (5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> places) and “the United Armenians” party (3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> places) included more women than that of the other parties. The other parties “reserved” for women the 6<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> places, even among the so-called “heavy weighted” parties who were seeking large numbers of seats. Minimal representation by women was seen not only in the top ten spots, but also in the top twenty, where generally no more than 3 women were presented. The Armenian Revolutionary Federation and “Heritage” are exceptions where 4 and 5 women, respectively, were included in the top twenty.

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation had an overall percentage of women on their list of 32% due to the use of the “zipper principle,” or an alternation of male

and female candidates in the list, as recommended in Europe. However, the “zipper principle” was used only after the 20<sup>th</sup> place.

Analysis of party lists shows that *parties were more conservative than society in terms of women's representation, which, according to the sociological survey results, is ready to see more women in the parliament than parties include in their lists.*

Thus, according to a poll conducted by the National Institute of Ministry of Labor and Social Research in 2008<sup>69</sup>, to the question “How many female parliamentarians do you think should be represented in the parliament?” 85.5% of the respondents chose the 20-50% range, which shows a deficiency between women's true representation in parliament in Armenia and expectations of the society. Only 14.5% of the respondents were of the opinion that the number of women in the parliament should be less than 10%, which is the de facto representation in the parliament.

## **2. Peculiarities of Party Electoral List Formation during the 2012 National Assembly Elections under the Proportional System: Women's self-withdrawals during Pre-Election Phase**

One significant difference from the 2007 National Assembly elections of the RA is that the process of electoral list formation by political parties became public property. Previously, the details of this process had not been published, but this was changed since this process had been accompanied by a series of public scandals, with women in the center. For the 2012 elections, parties had to give explanations about the principles underlying the list formation; however, their arguments were not convincing.

An analysis of the cases registered during the pre-election phase about parties' human resources policies leads to some general conclusions, of which, the gender component is significant.

When submitting the party list to CEC, Karine Hakobyan, a leadership member of “Heritage” party was represented in the 10<sup>th</sup> place of the unified list of “Heritage” and “Free Democrats” and complained about this during a press conference on the formation of party lists. According to her, the composition of the list was a surprise for her. In connection with this accusation, the party explained simply that democratic principles were not violated; that a working group was dealing with the lists, and Karine Hakobyan was not in the group.

<sup>69</sup> 1300 persons took part in the inquiry from Yerevan and all the marzes of Armenia.

Similar issues occurred in relation to other active representatives of “Heritage” party. Among them were Anahit Bakhshyan, parliamentarian of the fourth Convocation, who was presented in the 14<sup>th</sup> place and Larisa Alaverdyan in the 41<sup>st</sup> place. Moreover, comments in connection to this were presented not by the party leadership, but by the candidates themselves.

Anahit Bakhshyan, specifically stated “Why should I be offended?” that “the Heritage” party has always been guided by the rotation principle and the head of the party supports the opinion that it is necessary to always involve new people and not always rely on the same staff.

It should be noted that Anahit Bakhshyan was nominated in a single constituency, and despite possibility of a victory she did not pass and the result of the rotation was that the “Heritage” faction, originally made up of three women, entered into parliament with a new team, which had only one woman, Zaruhi Postanjyan in its composition.

Another “rotation” of “the Heritage” party remained even more unclear to the public. Larisa Alaverdyan was presented in the 41<sup>st</sup> place of the list despite being 2<sup>nd</sup> in the “Heritage” list during the last elections and contributing to the party’s entrance to the parliament. The 41<sup>st</sup> place aroused perplexity in society and mass media, especially among the remaining members of the 2007 “Heritage” faction.

To explain this, Larisa Alaverdyan stated that she symbolically selected the 41<sup>st</sup> place of the list to express her disagreement with the alliance with the Free Democrats. In any case, even being non-partisan, she avoided protesting before the elections which could have hurt party reputation and stated: “The 41<sup>st</sup> place in the list is a message sent to the public that eternal parliamentarians do not exist”. After the elections, she filed an application to the CEC severing cooperation with “the Heritage” party. After her comments during that phase, one could conclude that her disagreement was not only due to the method of list formation, but also with deeper reasons, including the party’s applied “political technologies - maybe competent, but for her unacceptable”.

*“I expressed my disagreement regarding the general principle based on which the list was formed... I was told that I would stay with the team until the end of the elections, because, as the law says, we had the right, how to say, to orient, I oriented... My disagreement is associated not with personnel, human aspects; it is much more profound and is connected with their applied technologies. It’s possible that from ‘the Heritage’ perspective everything is competent, but it is not acceptable for me. I am proud that I worked in that team and I hope that the 5 people who passed to the parliament will still work hard and it is possible that they achieve greater results than we had then. I just wish that if members of political parties move on, think not about today, but about 5 years” said L. Alaverdyan<sup>70</sup>.*

<sup>70</sup> From an interview with Larisa Alaverdyan.



Rotation of women in the Armenian Revolutionary Federation list created no less questions. According to parliamentary monitoring data<sup>71</sup>, parliamentarian Lilit Galstyan, who showed high activity during 5 years, appeared in the 20<sup>th</sup> place of the list. The party explained that they considered the 20<sup>th</sup> place satisfactory, even the 30<sup>th</sup> place. However, the fact remains that the Federation also did not support Lilit Galstyan in running under the majoritarian system. She stated that was ready to be nominated in a majoritarian constituency but was waiting for the party decision. However, it should be noted that Lilit Galstyan was the only woman in the Armenian Revolutionary Federation who was actively involved in the election campaign.

Even if we agree with the political parties that compilation of electoral lists is strictly an inter-party issue, society has a right to know on what basis they are formed. Also, if the principle of rotation is applied, then the following questions are raised: Why are women undergoing rotation more often than men? How long are parties allowed the luxury of alienating women who empowered their effort and at the same time were fully justified in having the trust of the party?

A difficult situation was created in respect to the Rule of Law party list. Before the election campaign, Susanna Abrahamyan, the party's press secretary, left the electoral list. Later, she stated that the 36<sup>th</sup> place showed that her efforts to protect the party's reputation had not been appreciated properly. In her comments, she accused the party leadership of violating democratic principles in the formation of the party list.

*“Our country has taken up unprecedented reforms directed at building civil society and the democratic state, in which, as we know, public awareness and media has its decisive role. In this aspect in the period of formation of the National Assembly, the most representative wing of the government, me, being the party's spokesperson just could not tolerate my appearance in the 36<sup>th</sup> row of the pre-election list. Moreover, the principle of democracy was not used in compiling the list, as making a decision solely cannot be considered democratic. Party council and candidates running under the proportional electoral system need to know in advance what part of the list they should be in, and give their consent in order to escape the existing situation, as several women have already removed themselves from the lists”<sup>72</sup>.*

The party did not respond to that accusation<sup>73</sup>. In the pre-election period, six women who were represented in 36-169 rankings left the Rule of Law party list. Except for Susanna Abrahamyan, the women themselves did not comment on their self-withdrawals in any way, and the widespread withdrawal of candidates was presented

71 [www.parliamentmonitoring.am](http://www.parliamentmonitoring.am)

72 From an interview with Susanna Abrahamyan.

73 According to 121 Article, 3 provision of the RA Electoral Code, candidates for a deputy shall have the right to withdraw their candidacy by submitting an application no later than by 18:00, 10 days prior to the voting day, as well as after the voting day.

in the media as a “complaining wave of women positioned in unsatisfactory places,” and the party was quick to declare that the self-withdrawals were connected with involvement of these women in the works of local electoral commissions<sup>74</sup>. Regardless of the reasons of self-withdrawals, women’s representation decreased by 17% in the Rule of Law party list, which the CEC did not refer to as a violation of law. However, such a low share is inappropriate for a party in which women make 60%.

Analysis of public statements and interviews with female candidates revealed two adverse patterns which are consequences of the same phenomenon. Some candidates described unsatisfactory places as an “unpleasant surprise;” however, for others, the inclusion on the electoral lists, particularly in satisfactory places, became “a pleasant surprise.” In both cases, such statements indirectly indicate that the formation of the lists had a non-democratic and non-transparent course in the parties.

### 3. Women Nominated under the Majoritarian Electoral System

Starting from the first Convocation of the Parliament, the number of women elected under the majoritarian system has generally decreased.

#### Elected Women under the Majoritarian System in 5 Convocations of the Parliament

	1995	1999	2003	2007	2012
<b>Number of women elected under majoritarian electoral system</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>2</b>

The decrease in the number of women in the National Assembly is explained by severe competition in majoritarian constituencies, commercialization of majoritarian elections, usage of negative campaigning, and partially by a decrease of number of majoritarian constituencies. *After changes in the Electoral Code, the number of single-mandate constituencies from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Convocation of the Parliament (1999) to the 4<sup>th</sup> Convocation (2007) was cut almost in half, while the number of women running under the majoritarian system was reduced by 10 times.*

In terms of nominating and electing female candidates, it would be more appropriate to compare the last two Convocations, since the number of the majoritarian

<sup>74</sup> According to data of the RA CEC, 12.04.2012.

constituencies remained the same at 41. In this comparison, one can speak about women's activism in the majoritarian constituencies, as well as about the increased possibility to be elected.

### The trend of the Number of Women Nominated under the Majoritarian Electoral System

	2003	2007	2012
<b>Women nominated under the majoritarian electoral system</b>	<b>22 (558)</b>	<b>5 (132)</b>	<b>11 (139)</b>
	<b>3.9%</b>	<b>3.8%</b>	<b>7.9%</b>

Changes were observed also in a qualitative sense. If during the last elections, women withdrew from the majoritarian system at the rate of the 2012 elections, 6 out of 11 women nominated would have later withdrawn; however, only one candidate withdrew.<sup>75</sup> In the 2012 majoritarian system elections, the number of self-withdrawals among male candidates was 40.

Most nominations in the majoritarian constituencies take place by party initiatives, and this trend is growing from election to election. Among 11 women who were voted on in the 2012 elections, 6 were non-partisan, and only 2 of them (Violeta Petrosyan and Gayane Arustamyan) were nominated with party support. For comparison, in 2007 all female candidates were non-partisan and were nominated by initiative of parties.

The following women were nominated under the majoritarian system:

- **Gayane Arustamyan**, journalist, self-nominated with “Armenian National Congress” support in the 1<sup>st</sup> territory of the capital (Yerevan, Nor Nork) was running against 3 candidates.
- **Zaruhi Postanjyan**, the National Assembly deputy from the “Heritage” party and **Satik Seyranyan**, editor of “168 hours” weekly, non-partisan, self-nominated in the 4<sup>th</sup> territory (Yerevan, Arabkir), were running against 5 candidates.
- **Heghine Bisharyan**, the National Assembly deputy from the Rule of Law Party, self-nominated in the 11<sup>th</sup> territory (Yerevan, Shengavit), was running against 4 candidates.

<sup>75</sup> Susanna Abrahamyan filed an application on self-withdrawal in No. 40 electoral territory in Tavush region, who was nominated to ensure alternative for Marine Marabyan, and took out her candidacy, when another candidate appeared in that electoral territory.

- **Anahit Bakhshyan**, the National Assembly deputy from the “Heritage” party and **Gohar Veziryan**, journalist “Chorrord Ishkhanutyun” newspaper, self-nominated in the 12<sup>th</sup> territory (Yerevan, Shengavit), were running against 6 candidates.
- **Violeta Petrosyan**, non-partisan, self-nominated with the ANC’s support in the 13<sup>th</sup> territory (Yerevan, Erebuni), was running against 2 candidates.
- **Karine Poghosyan**, candidate of the Republican Party of Armenia, principal of Artashat No.1 school, in the 17<sup>th</sup> territory (Artashat), was running against 4 candidates.
- **Ophelia Vaganian**, non-partisan, self-nominated in the 32<sup>nd</sup> territory (Lori), was running against 5 candidates.
- **Narine Movsisyan**, self-nominated, director of Kapan Educational Center of Yerevan Agricultural University, in the 38<sup>th</sup> territory (Syunik region), was running against 4 candidates.
- **Marine Marabyan**, “International Masis Tobacco”, Executive Director, self-nominated with the support of the Republican Party of Armenia, in the 40<sup>th</sup> territory (Tavush region), was running against 2 candidates.

Marine Marabyan (Executive Director of “International Masis Tobacco”, 25400 votes) and Karine Poghosyan (principal of Artashat No.1 school, 26435 votes)<sup>76</sup>, who were elected with the support of the Republican party, have been elected.

Marine Marabyan received 79% of votes in her territory and Karine Poghosyan, 68%. In the case of Karine Poghosyan, support of the ruling party played a decisive role, and Marine Marabyan is obliged for her victory to the “International Masis Tobacco” company for supporting her, of which she is the executive director. The head of the company, the former deputy Michael Vardanyan, worked seriously in this electoral territory, and during past elections, by supporting populations in the social field and in job-creation endeavors. During Marine Marabyan’s election campaign, Michael Vardanyan defended her candidacy by assuring voters that if she was elected, these policies would continue. In essence, the votes for Marine Marabyan in this electoral territory were the result of her active campaign activities. The candidate, in her turn, was presented as “a domestic producer’s advocate.”

In fact, women had rather high ratings in all constituencies. The majority of women reached the second or third places. And in fact, *women have lost only to the representatives of large enterprises everywhere whose organizational and financial resources were significantly larger.*

<sup>76</sup> The election results of No. 17 electoral territory were disputed at the Constitutional Court, Gagik Nersisyan who received the least votes (2087) in the electoral territory sued the case.

Heghine Bisharyan and Violeta Petrosyan each received 34% of votes in their constituencies.

Zaruhi Postanjyan, in the 4<sup>th</sup> electoral territory, received 20% of the votes, while Aram Manukyan, the president of the Armenian National Movement, received only 16.7% in this constituency. Satik Seyranyan received 11% of the votes in the same constituency.

Gayane Arustamyan received 15% of the votes, Anahit Bakhshyan received 12.7%, and Gohar Veziryan, her opponent in the same constituency, received only 2% of the votes.

Anahit Bakhshyan, in her pre-election interview, mentioned that the only candidate who worked against her during the pre-election campaign was Gohar Veziryan. The conflict between Anahit Bakhshyan and Gohar Veziryan was observed also during the pre-election public debates. Even their pre-election slogans contained opposing approaches. Anahit Bakhshyan, having many years of experience in the field of education, reformulated her party's slogan to read, **“I am coming for quality education”**. Mrs. Veziryan's campaign, based on her experience in journalistic activities, proclaimed for **“Dictate your will, you are the power”**.

*“There was no woman vs. man campaign, it was the issue of personalities, and in this regard my woman opponent “hit” me more than men. I did not hear any phrase or expression addressed to me from men. But, unfortunately, my journalist partner representing opposition “worked” against me more than others, especially by her imaginary news published in the “Chorrord Ishkhanutyun” newspaper that stated I distributed election bribes to my voters in the form of second-hand products. That step just shortened my tongue, as immediately after that, I received a call from the Prosecutor's office and was asked, whether it is true or not, and when I replied that of course the news is not true, I was countered, you see, if yours is a lie, then your warnings about election bribes are also lies. And still it is very interesting to me what the newspaper won out of it, moreover, it did not have any impact on her share of the votes ...”<sup>77</sup>.*

Mrs. Bakhshyan, answering the question of what she sees as the hopes of voters, mentioned that her voters are those parents who care about their children's education. Mrs. Veziryan was actively meeting with voters, but she was not building her campaign positively or on promises, but focused instead on criticizing her opponents. In media relations, she was presented ambitiously as “a future president of Armenia”.

The nomination of two women in the same electoral territory is considered by some political experts as an inappropriate step because the chances of a woman being

<sup>77</sup> From an interview with Anahit Bakhshyan.

elected are divided. There were two electoral territories in the 2012 elections with two women running, both in the capital. This was clearly seen in the results of the 4<sup>th</sup> territory elections, where Satik Seyranyan and Zaruhi Postanjyan were nominated. The selection of the electoral territory was based on the place of residence of the two candidates, and they indicated in their interviews that were crucial. Both of them were introduced as alternatives of pro-government voters (i.e. they acted in the same political arena for the same voters).

Satik Seyranyan emphasized two aspects in her campaign: her profession as a journalist, which focuses on civil action, and motherhood, i.e. “the mother who wants good future for her son”. Seyranyan’s pre-election slogan was presented with a professional approach **“Let’s edit the National Assembly together”**.

Zaruhi Postanjyan was introduced as a lawyer and mother of four children, although the emphasis on motherhood was neutral in her campaign. Zaruhi Postanjyan, as well as the “Heritage” party, which she represents, was running a campaign with **“I am coming for justice”** slogan.

Both of them were running competent and professional campaigns and were very active in social networks, which is a new technology for this election. Both of them actively communicated with media, without escaping from public debates. At some point, negative campaigning was used against Satik Seyranyan. Attempts to discredit her were noticed in certain networks, where she was introduced as a successor of her husband, Hovhannes Shahinyan<sup>78</sup>, the former district head of the same electoral territory. Mrs. Seyranyan kept herself away from the ruling party during the campaign, emphasizing her appearance as a non-partisan candidate.

*“Unfortunately, in the current political system of Armenia, a person, an individual is not important but small groups and interests of those groups. By my nomination, first and foremost I am fighting against this mentality, and believe me, I shall break this stereotype. Besides, as a non-partisan candidate elected under the majoritarian system, later I shall not be constrained in the National Assembly in joining or criticizing any particular issue”<sup>79</sup>.*

During the campaign, the oppositional party, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, stated that they supported Satik Seyranyan in that electoral territory due to her high professional qualities.

Overall, the 4<sup>th</sup> electoral territory was the most interesting in terms of distribution of votes. The three oppositional candidates Zaruhi Postanjyan (6827 votes), Satik

<sup>78</sup> During the election campaign, Hovhannes Shahinyan filed an application on leaving the Republican Party of Armenia surprisingly.

<sup>79</sup> From an interview with Satik Seyranyan.

Seyranyan (3661 votes) and Aram Manukyan (5453 votes) together received less votes than Artak Sargsyan, the elected large-scale entrepreneur in the constituency (15896 votes). Thus, the votes were distributed not only between women, but also between the two poles of the political spectrum. Oppositional candidates complained that voters tend to select based on bribes or promises on the social nature of a “rich” candidate. Distribution of the votes of the 4<sup>th</sup> electoral territory showed that in case of having a unified oppositional candidate, voters of the opposition could have won, and the winner could have been a woman.

The least number of votes among the majoritarian candidates was received by non-partisan candidate Ophelia Vahanyan (the 32<sup>nd</sup> territory). This candidate was striking by her income declaration, which had not a single line, indicating that she had received no income for a year. A similar hyphen was also placed in front of the work section. In the report submitted to the CEC, a hyphen was also placed in front of the costs of the pre-election campaign. However, her pre-election slogan was “Let’s live in a decent way.” The candidate received 179 votes. The nomination of candidates, like Ophelia Vahanyan’s, raises more questions among society than answers. The problem is that, in the case of men, all shortcomings are ascribed to a candidate’s personality, while in the case of women, general conclusions like “what else can be expected of women” are unavoidable.

Uncertainty of a candidate’s actions or behavior leave negative impressions on voters. The peculiarity of the present campaign was that the electoral lists of both political parties and majoritarian candidates were submitted to the CEC and were published at the very last moment prescribed by law, which raised assumptions about backdoor deals. If we take into account that the correct selection of the electoral territory for candidates of the majoritarian system greatly conditions the success according to assessments of political technologists, then in case of women - this aspect should be contemplated well in advance. Therefore, a negative impression was left by the fact that three days before the deadline, Gohar Veziryan stated in the press that she has not yet decided in which constituency she was going to run<sup>80</sup>.

Another peculiarity of the current election was the case of open sexism towards a female candidate. A candidate of the 1<sup>st</sup> constituency, Ruben Hayrapetyan, in response to the invitation to a debate made by his opponent, Gayane Arustamyan, said that he would not debate with her because “she is a woman.” It is noteworthy that Ruben Hayrapetyan’s male partners, instead of contradicting this unacceptable behavior, rushed to offer their candidacy to debate with Mr. Hayrapetyan for “man’s

<sup>80</sup> According to 127 Article, 5 provision of the Electoral Code, the registration of documents of candidates for a National Assembly deputy under the proportional electoral system shall be submitted to the Central Electoral Commission by 18:00 hours no earlier than 55 and no later than 45 days prior to the voting day: 12.03.2012 – 22.03.2012.

talk”. Female candidates responded to Hayrapetyan’s attack quite interestingly<sup>81</sup>, the majority of which condemned the deputy, but there were also attempts to justify him, that in reality “he said that in a good sense...”. ***Such an approach can be viewed as more proof that women themselves do not always realize discriminatory practices.***

The candidate, Gayane Arustamyan, stated in the press that women’s organizations did not respond to manifestation of sexism, and it surprised her<sup>82</sup>.

It should be noted that this was not the only demand of women running under the majoritarian system with women’s non-governmental organizations. Anahit Bakhshyan stated in the press that not a single women’s organization supported her candidacy during elections. This situation, of course, requires a separate analysis. On the one hand, unsuccessful outcomes and liabilities towards female candidates are seen as issues for the public sector. On the other hand, the existence of such a demand is evidence that cooperation mechanisms between women’s organizations and female candidates before and during elections were not formed, and that there is a misunderstanding in expectations of both sides. Discussions of this issue during the focus groups noted that the cooperation desire of female candidates very often is confronted by inability of admitting women’s public sector.

#### **4. The Age and Careers of Female Candidates for the Parliament**

The candidates’ lists for the 2012 parliament were analyzed for age composition and employment sectors of the elected women and to compare with the data of the study conducted during the 2007 elections.

Thus, analysis of age data of the elected candidates under the proportional system for the Parliament (see diagram) shows that the most representative age group is above 40 (72%). The same pattern was noticed during the 2007 elections, when 72.8% of female candidates were in age group over 40. The modern women’s political leadership are based on those formed during the Soviet times, and older women with more experience working in the executive, legislative and local government structures are more politically active.

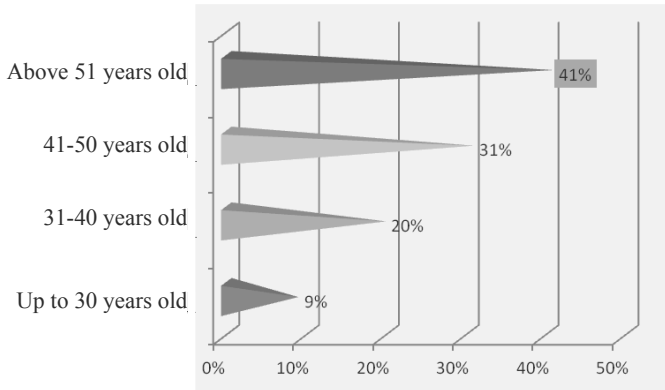
As previously, the smallest ratio in the lists make women up to 30 years old. In the 2012 elections, youth consisted of 9% and of 7% in 2007. The 30-40 age group comprised 20% in the 2012 elections and 19.4% in 2007.

81 According to debate materials, organized during the pre-election period by the Women Leaders Fora by the NDI support.

82 From an interview with Gayane Arustamyan.



### The Age Distribution of Female Candidates



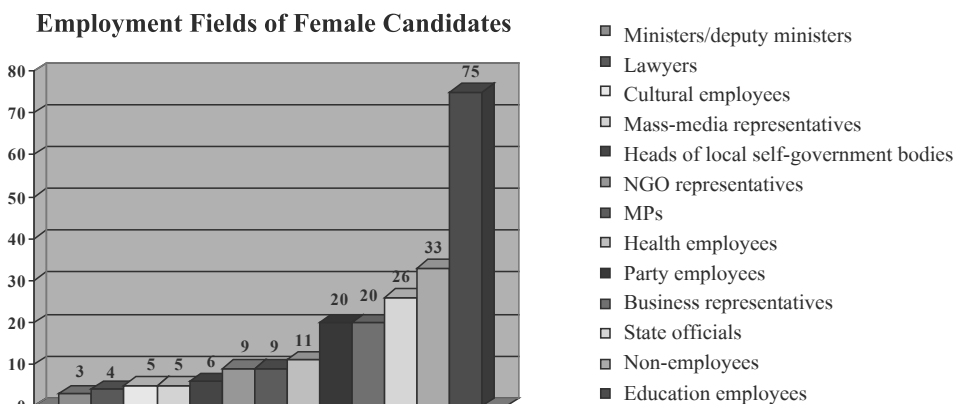
The existence of experience, certainly, is the key factor of age distribution of both politically active women and men; however, in the case of women, it is not the only reason.

In politics, there are fewer women represented from reproductive age, i.e. below 40 when children are small and young families face difficulties. This pushes young women's political careers to the second stage, and often leads to specialization as well. Women themselves mention this, as recorded by surveys conducted in Armenia as well as in other countries. However, there is no increasing dynamic within the group up to 30 years old, which is the group of young women who grew up during independence, often received good education abroad, and experienced progress according to Western standards. Among the elected deputies only one belongs to this age group; 4 of them are in the 30 to 40 years old group, and the rest are over the age of 40.

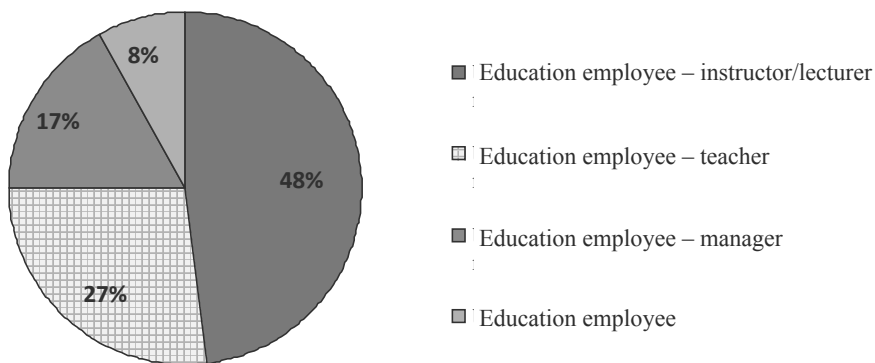
For women over 40 years old, their children are generally mature; family life has a regular order, and, according to assessments by women, this is an important factor, due to which they have an opportunity to realize their potential both in career and in politics. Also, during recent years, stereotypes are being broken, and more women with young children are politically and professionally active. This is largely due to improved living conditions and well-paying jobs that enable women to reduce the time and physical workload related to childcare and to deal with professional promotion and political activities. In fact, among female deputies there are two mothers of multiple children, and except for two that are unmarried, the rest have one or two children.

However, all of the women surveyed during this research highlighted that a necessary and obligatory condition for political activism is understanding and support from family and friends, be they spouse or parents. This idea was supported in the previous survey as well.

Analysis of professional employment of the elected women shows that the most representative sector is education (33%), which was smaller (25%) in 2007. The group is not homogeneous; the majority are heads of educational institutions: schools, colleges, university principals, and a small amount are state officials of the educational sector.



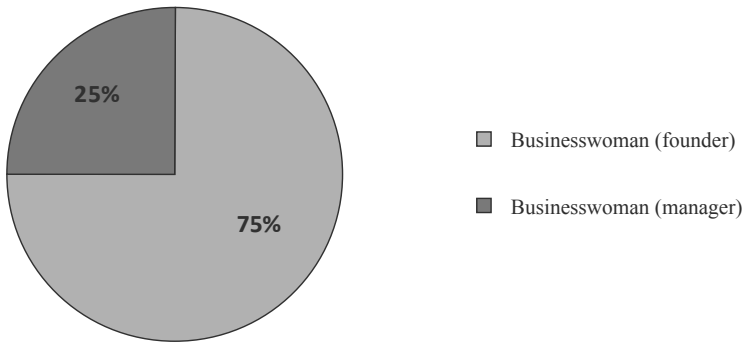
Temporarily unemployed candidates are in the second place with 15%. In 2007, this group was the largest and consisted of 25%. As surveys in the focus groups have shown, such candidates are less competitive in the eyes of both partners and voters.



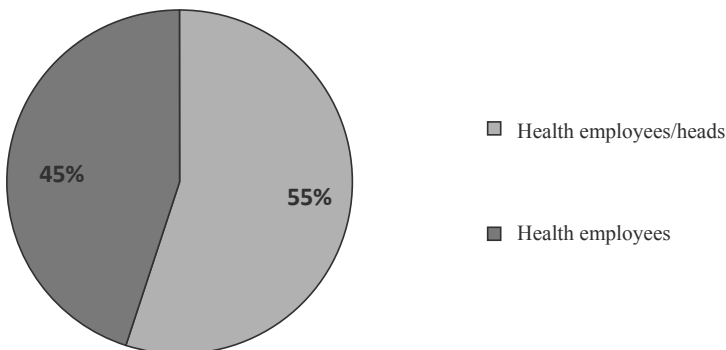
The next largest group make state officials, servants of various state agencies and structures, at 11%, which is comparable to the 10% representation from the 2007 elections. Women in political and discretionary positions, ministers and deputy ministers, which comprised 1%, were represented in the list of the ruling party. However, all of them removed themselves from the mandates in favor of their

positions. The involvement of officials of upper echelons on party lists who later withdraw their candidacy or resign deputy mandates are explained by political parties that this group of women are representatives of a party team.

The next groups, which are equally represented, are party workers at different levels (i.e. those who mention party structures as their workplace, 13.2% in 2012 and 9% in 2007) and businesswomen (9%). This group is also heterogeneous; 25% are company founders and owners and 75% are business company managers. The ratio from 2007 was almost the same. Employees of business structures comprised 7%, and private entrepreneurs or business managers made up 2.4%.

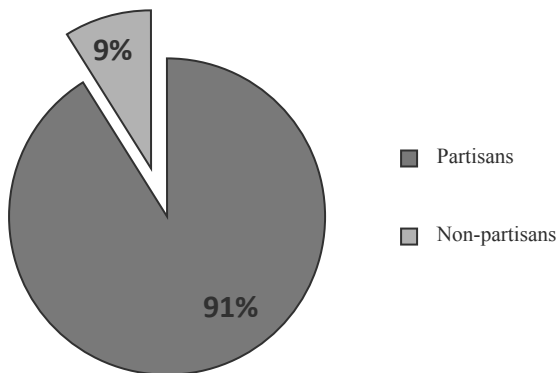


About 4% of female candidates, as in case of the 2007 elections, came into politics from the public sector. A common practice by parties is accepting male and female leaders and activists of public sector into their ranks to use their organizational potential and reputation. With the same motivation, famous figures of culture and arts are being included on party lists, moreover, in passing places. One recent innovation was the involvement of a television star. In general, cultural employees comprise 2% in the lists.



Health care workers make up 5%, and half of those women hold senior positions. In comparison with the 2007 elections, the number of journalists increased by 2%. Heads of local authorities comprise 3%. Legislative authorities and acting lawyers make up 2% of the lists. Acting deputies are 4%. However, “women’s composition” of the National Assembly was renewed by two-thirds.

The number of non-partisan women in party lists decreased to 9% from 12% in 2007. Political parties involve non-partisan women when they are already well-established in their careers or other fields or when they gained public recognition by demonstrating success in the public sector. However, unlike in 2007, none of the non-partisan women entered into the Parliament. Even the women, who previously entered into the parliament as non-partisans, were reelected as a member of a party (by the way, in passing places). One of the non-partisans became a party member immediately before the elections. Men also take such an approach in both compiling lists and appointments; therefore, the number of non-partisans in the lists should have a decreasing tendency.



### 5. Gender Quota de Jure and de Facto in the 5<sup>th</sup> Convocation of the National Assembly: Post-election Withdrawals as a Mechanism for Neutralizing Quotas

Women’s representation in the 5<sup>th</sup> Convocation of the National Assembly is 10.67%. The political parties represented in the 4<sup>th</sup> Convocation increased the Electoral Code gender quota to 20%, and 22.8% of their proportional electoral lists were women. Therefore, a result of the elections, the de facto parliamentary representation from these lists is less than half of women that had been included on the lists.

During the 2007 parliamentary elections, under the 15% quota condition, 12 women (9.16%) were elected as deputies from party lists, and none were elected from the majoritarian constituencies. In 2012, 2 out of 14 women were elected under the

majoritarian system; it is obvious that parliamentary parties had no progress in electing women. Moreover, the 20% quota in the Electoral Code of Armenia, which was designed to ensure women's appropriate participation, was ineffective to some extent.

In fact, the mechanism for promoting women in the National Assembly, which was foreseen by the legislation, did not work due to "changes of places" of inner party withdrawals, the motivations of which largely remained unclear to the general public. In assessments of civil society institutions, and especially of women's NGOs (and the focus groups and roundtable discussions), hidden discrimination against women is very clearly observed. Moreover, from the democratic perspective, the "usage" of women's names for circumventing the law is immoral and leads to ignoring legislation and the legal grounds of civil society.

Time is needed for a more detailed analysis of the causes and consequences; however, the total picture of the women who were elected to the National Assembly gives us grounds for making some conclusions about their representation in parties.

In the "**Republican Party of Armenia**" parliamentary faction, 9 out of 69 deputies (13%) are women, while in the pre-election list the percentage of women was 21.3%.

In the composition of the "**Prosperous Armenia**" parliamentary faction, only 2 out of 37 deputies are women (5.4%), while in the pre-election list, women comprised 21.8%.

Among 7 deputies of the "**Armenian National Congress**" faction, there is one woman (14%). Women comprised 20.3% of the pre-election list of the ANC.

In the composition of the "**Rule of Law**" party faction, only one is a woman out of 6 deputies (16%), while the percentage of women in the party's pre-election list was 20.2%.

The "**Heritage**" faction has only one woman (20%), and women comprised 24.6% in the pre-election list.

In the "**Armenian Revolutionary Federation**" parliamentary faction, there are no women among 5 deputies, and women comprised 32% of the electoral list.

The comparative analysis of the factions of current and previous convocations shows that:

- In the faction of the "**Republican Party**", the number of women increased significantly from 3.1% up to 13%.
- In the "**Prosperous Armenia**" party, women comprised 12% in the previous Convocation, and this has been reduced to 5%. The number of the faction grew to 12 people, while the number of women decreased.
- Significant change is represented in the "**Armenian Revolutionary**

**Federation"** faction in terms of women's representation. This faction had 18.7% women's representation in the fourth Convocation of the National Assembly, and as a result of these elections, does not contain a single woman.

- There is also no progress in the **"Rule of Law"** party, as in both the previous and the current convocation; there is only one woman of its faction.
- In the faction of the **"Heritage"** party, women now comprise 24.6% though they had comprised 42.8% in the fourth Convocation of the Parliament.

The main reason the gender quota did not work was post-election withdrawals. According to the data of the Central Election Commission, 102 candidates submitted a request for self-withdrawals, and 26 (25%) were women.

What are the reasons for refusing deputy mandates? The analysis of the post-election withdrawals enables us to reveal some common patterns.

A large portion of self-withdrawals was explained as being related to the careers of political and industrial executives. However, for men, the percentage of this type of withdrawal from the mandate comprised about 80%, but for women, the percentage is only 30%. For the remainder, the reasons for withdrawals remain undisclosed to the general public, as the majority of women did not want to comment on their withdrawals.

The fact that a candidate does not convincingly justify her withdrawal decision prompts the assumption that it may be a consequence of party's dictatorship. If we do assume that the decision is made by the political party, it could be based on the belief that women are not as worthy to become a deputy as men. This raises the question of why women, being aware of such a prospect, would give their consent to be included on the list at the beginning only to become discredited and hindering the implementation of the gender quota mechanism stipulated by law.

In many cases, the real reasons for resigning of parliamentary mandates cannot be logically explained, at least by analysing the lists of female candidates who submitted resigning applications.

Note that 24 withdrawals were submitted by the parties that ended up obtaining the highest and second highest numbers of seats. Note that in the Republican Party of Armenia list, only one out of 14 women who submitted withdrawals was in a passing place, while the others ranked after number 46, but in the case of the "Prosperous Armenia" party, 3 of the 10 women who submitted withdrawals were in passing places (i.e. before the 28<sup>th</sup> place).

The gender situation in the Armenian Revolutionary Federation was surprising. As indicated above, the names of experienced and active deputies from the 4<sup>th</sup> Convocation (Lilit Galstyan and Ruzanna Arakelyan) were included on the list after

the 10<sup>th</sup> place. It is likely that the party expected to win more seats, in which case Lilit Galstyan and Ruzanna Arakelyan would have been reelected. However, for a party that is a member of Socialist International and was actively pushing for a 30% quota to be introduced in the Electoral Code, it is hard to explain both the placement of women on the list and their further actions. After Artyusha Shahbazyan, who was ranked third, withdrew from the list, Karine Harutyunyan would have entered the top 5 of candidates. However, due to her withdrawal, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, which included 32% women's representation in the proportional list, entered into the National Assembly exclusively with men.

Thus, the analysis of withdrawals allows us to conclude that it is necessary to introduce a mechanism in the Electoral Code that will prevent quota violation on behalf of political parties and **will not allow men to have the seats in the parliament set aside for women by quota.**

**Participants of the focus group discussions expressed the opinion that the main problem is a gap in the law regarding the formulation of the gender quota provision in the Electoral Code. Focus group participants suggested solving the problem in the following two ways:**

- **Either stipulate a provision that women should comprise 20% not of the lists, but of the received mandates**
- **Or stipulate a provision, according to which, if a woman withdraws her mandate, the next woman from the list should occupy her place<sup>83</sup>.**

According to representatives of women's organizations, these means would promote the formation of party lists in a more responsible way and would prevent the so-called "random" exclusion of women's involvement.

**It should be noted that the behavior of withdrawing from the mandates can negate the use of any quota, thus all proposals at this stage are aimed at neutralizing this very problem. Some newly-elected female deputies also support this view.**

*"In my opinion, the problem is that the law requires that the number of women be high in the list submitted by party, but not in the National Assembly. Thus, in case of withdrawal from the list, there is no requirement that instead of a woman withdrawer, next woman candidate will replace and not a next man. I think that the gap of the law is just that, and particularly it is the reason that in the National Assembly, unlike in the lists with quotas, women's presence is not so high. While looking at lists, they are compiled ideally, but ..."*<sup>84</sup>.

The second reason for the quota misuse and the only 10% of women's presence in the National Assembly, according to the participants of the focus groups, is the

83 From the focus group materials.

84 From an interview with Naira Karapetyan (the Republican Party of Armenia).

deficit of political will within parties. A third reason is that the involvement criteria in the lists needs to be changed.

*“If the criteria are not specialization or moral values of a human being, but money, possessions and position, it is hard to find a place for women, as there are no women oligarchs among us. It is clearly visible in the majoritarian elections when women lost to rich competitors. It is possible that if there were no quotas for women’s representation not a single woman at all would have been in the parliament”<sup>85</sup>.*

**The idea is that, in the absence of quota, the situation could have been even worse was shown in the process of the 2007 Parliamentary elections. This fact proves that it is necessary not only to improve the quota, but also to raise it. Some say that a radical rise of the quota will contribute to the elimination of negative practices hampering its implementation.**

The necessity of using a quota for women’s promotion is proved by the dynamics of women’s representation in parliament within country in the last 10 years.

Convocation Year	Representation of Female Deputies
1985 Armenian SSR Supreme Council	35.6%
1990 RA Supreme Council	3.5%
1995 RA National Assembly	6.3 %
1999 RA National Assembly	3.1 %
2003 RA National Assembly	5.3 %
2007 RA National Assembly	9.2 %
2012 RA National Assembly	10.7 %

For comparison, note that in the 1985 Supreme Council of the Soviet Armenia women made up 35.6%.

In the 1990 Supreme Council of Armenia, formed by the majoritarian system, only 9 out of 260 MPs (3.5%) were women.

In 1995 Armenia’s National Assembly, in the composition of the 1<sup>st</sup> Convocation, women received 12 mandates, or 6.3% of 190 seats. 8 of them were elected by the “Shamiram” list, and the remaining 4 were passed under the majoritarian system.

<sup>85</sup> From Dustrik Mkhitarian’s opinion, a chair of the Board of Women Leaders Forum at a focus group.



Female MPs were the least represented in 1999 in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Convocation of the National Assembly. Only 4 out of 131 members were women, which was 3% of the total seats. 2 of them were elected under the majoritarian system.

In 2003, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Convocation of the National Assembly, the number of female deputies reached 7 (5.3%) out of 131. In fact, a quota of 5%, stipulated by the Electoral Code, was enacted due to unprecedented discrimination. Just one woman was elected by the majoritarian system.

In 2007, a 15% quota had already been enacted by the 4<sup>th</sup> Convocation of the Parliament, and 12 women (9.2%) received mandates. Not a single woman passed to the parliament under the majoritarian system.

During the 2012 elections, the gender quota had been increased to 20%, and as a result, 14 women (10.7%) are represented in the 5<sup>th</sup> Convocation of the National Assembly. Two of them were elected under the majoritarian system.

Thus, during the past 20 years, the number of women in the Armenian parliament increased by only 7%, and even this slight increase was ensured through the use of a gender quota in the proportional system. Taking into account these dynamics, it could be predicted that, at this pace, at least 25 more years will be necessary to achieve the 20% quota. As a comparison, the number of women in parliaments around the world has an average of 19.5%; the lowest rate of women's representation in legislative bodies was registered in Arab countries, at only 11.3%.

Opponents of quotas, as shown in the research of focus groups, bring two arguments. **First**, they say “there is no need to rush,” and the quota should be increased gradually. In the context of development processes of the society, which is directly linked to women's political participation in modern world, this resolution does not justify itself. **Second**, they say “milkmaids can also appear in the parliament by using quotas.” During election debates<sup>86</sup> with participation of women from different political parties, the second question was asked, and Lilit Makunts, the ANC's youth representative answered: “What's worse if milkmaids would also be presented in the parliament?” If we consider that the audience received this response with applause, then we can talk about some progress of public opinion. Also, opponents of the quota cannot find agreement from young women, who embrace democratic values in a different way from senior generation.

<sup>86</sup> Election debates in “Only Women Debate” format were organized by Women Leaders Conference during election campaign by NDI support.

## 6. Scenarios of Women Entering into the Parliament

The analysis of biographies of women elected for the Parliament and female MPs of the National Assembly show that they are largely consistent with scenarios typical for entry into post-Soviet parliaments. However, some changes and trends were observed within election dynamics.

### 6.1 Politics as a continuation of professional advancement

In the 2012 elections, the most common scenario describing women's entrance into the parliament was "Politics as a continuation of professional advancement". This is typical for women who, before entering parliament, had a successful professional career, whether in public service, business, or another field. It is not necessary that they see their professional career as beginning with a political platform. The following variations of this scenario are possible.

#### 6.1.1 *To politics from a managerial position in a professional career*

The number of women coming from managerial positions in professional careers was high in the ruling Republican Party; however, these individuals were not initially intended to become MPs. As explained by parties, their role was to ensure representativeness of party lists and to present "team members" to the voters. Women in leading positions within the educational field are mostly school principals. Of the many candidates from leadership positions in the educational field, only two entered into the parliament: Ruzanna Muradyan, from the Republican Party, who was both a school principal and a member of the party council, and Karine Poghosyan, Artashat school principal from the Republican party elected under the majoritarian system.

#### 6.1.2 *To politics from a successful professional career*

*In this case, two variations are most common; a career as a political journalist and a career as a lawyer. In both cases, the transition into politics is not a radical change; it can be seen as a logical step in a career path.*

Naira Zohrabyan, from the Prosperous Armenia party, and Margaret Yesayan, from the Republican party, entered into the parliament from political journalism, and Satik Seyranyan, editor-in-chief of "168 Hours" newspaper; Gohar Veziryan, reporter of the "Chorrord Ishkhanutyun" newspaper; and Gayane Arustamyan, journalist of the A1+ website, were nominated under the majoritarian system, and Julieta Martirosyan, editor of "Avangard" newspaper, was nominated by the electoral list of the Democratic Party of Armenia.

Such a “flow” of women journalists into politics is symbolized by the successful example of Naira Zohrabyan, who has been elected a chair of the National Assembly Standing Committee on European Integration, and in the past five years has developed as an MP.

All journalists nominated for the parliament had sufficient political knowledge; were well aware of inner political, including the “behind closed doors” processes; and understood social problems well. Additionally, due to professional knowledge, they knew to present themselves positively, had knowledge of PR technologies, and had no problems in regard to self-esteem. Those candidates convincingly justify their entry into politics and with almost the same approach.

*“Over two decades I worked in the media and for the last 8 years, as an editor-in-chief of the “168 Hours” newspaper. This means, unwillingly, I am in politics and deal with politics, in fact, on daily basis. And in this term, my participation in the parliamentary elections is only a matter of a change in format and an MP mandate is a change of a political tool”<sup>87</sup>.*

*“There is this tendency all over the world, when long-time reporters decide to become news makers instead of covering and obtaining news. I have been working as a journalist for a very long time and at one point in my life, I decided not to run after the news, but to participate in the creation of those, become a participant of a policy instead of covering that policy, why not, one of its creators. And I am just glad that I was given that opportunity”<sup>88</sup>.*

*“There is nothing surprising in my running as a candidate, last time I did not run only because of my age. I was engaged in public work for 10 years. I was different from many of my colleagues by the factor that often I made citizen’s problem my personal problem and I have done everything possible to solve that problem, and more often, relevant levels - state officials for forcing solutions. I think I earned the right to run under the majoritarian system. I was given this power from the society, and in this respect I am only accountable to the public. One can say, I am the joint candidate of the society...”<sup>89</sup>.*

The study shows that a legal education and a career as an advocate also make a good platform for women to enter into politics. The representatives of the “United Armenians”<sup>90</sup> party, in whose lists women made up 38%, announced during the pre-election campaign that 70% of the party members are lawyers.

87 From an interview with Satik Seyranyan.

88 From an interview with Margaret Yesayan.

89 From an interview of Gohar Veziryan given to Slaq.am.

90 From an interview of Gayane Arustamyan given to WomenNet.am web-site.

The National Assembly deputy Zaruhi Postanjyan's example is very vivid; she entered into politics as a well-established lawyer. Two more lawyers who have a legal education, Arpine Hovhannesyan from the Republican Party of Armenia, and Elinar Vardanyan, from the Prosperous Armenia party, were elected to the National Assembly. The start of Arpine Hovhannesyan's legal career is connected with government agencies; she worked in the staff of the Ministry of Justice, in the President's staff, and in the National Assembly as an advisor to the President. Additionally, she has received a PhD degree. Given her age (under 30 years old), her career can be considered rapid. If we also take into account her participation in the courses of the Gender School of the Association of Women with University Education, one could describe this as the ideal scenario a woman entering into the parliament.

*"I've graduated from one of the Jemma Hasratyan's gender schools. In my opinion, the role of gender schools is very important: they enable us not only to obtain additional knowledge on gender issues, but also help to better understand gender relations in the society, as well as provides an opportunity to observe any issue from this perspective"<sup>91</sup>.*

Elinar Vardanyan combined work as an advocate with social activities, so her entry into politics can be seen as a combination of two scenarios: her profession and the public sector. This is a common scenario for parties that include women who were established in the public sector or recognized as public figures. A vivid example of such a scenario in the last Convocation of the National Assembly was Larisa Alaverdyan. On one hand, such experience speaks in favor of public sector, which gives women an opportunity to demonstrate their skills, but on the other hand, it may confirm the attitude toward NGOs of some in political parties that cooperation is limited to the inclusion of leaders from that sector onto their lists.

### **6.1.3 To advance professional interests**

The women that can be attributed to this group entered politics from the business sector and evidently act to support business interests. Marine Marabyan is an example; she was voted in the majoritarian constituency with the support of the "International Masis Tobacco" company, and her nomination was supported by the Republican party. During her election campaign, Marine Marabyan promised to protect the interests of domestic producers. This scenario is not new and was successful in the 2003 elections, when two representatives from business management entered into the Parliament: Armine Hovhannesyan, from the Armenian Revolutionary

<sup>91</sup> From an interview with Arpine Hovhannesyan.

Federation, and Hripsime Avetisyan, from the “Labor Party of Armenia.” The latter was nominated by the Prosperous Armenia party list in the 2012 elections, but she resigned. Gohar Yenokyan was an example of this scenario in the previous Parliament. Hermine Naghdalyan, being the president of the Union of Entrepreneurs in Armenia, entered into politics in a timely manner, and she later continued her career in the Republican party and in the parliament. She currently leads Women’s Council in the party and she was elected a vice-speaker of the 5<sup>th</sup> Convocation of the National Assembly.

## 6.2 Politics as a Profession

The “**Politics as a profession**” scenario is typical for women who have been active since childhood, received party education, and had demonstrated leadership qualities.

### 6.2.1 *Women who were active during Soviet times in Young Communist League, trade unions, and parties*

This scenario was typical of early convocations of the National Assembly; however, there are no such female representatives in the new parliament, despite the fact that these women were included in the lists. Women who made a political career on the wave of independence and were elected in previous convocations, Lyudmila Harutyunyan, Karine Danielyan, and Hranush Kharatyan have also quitted politics. However, they are all still active in the public sector.

Many women announced their leaving politics to enter the public sector by filing self-withdrawals for a variety of reasons (e.g. Karine Hakobyan and Larisa Alaverdyan of the Heritage Party and Susanna Abrahamyan of the Rule of Law party, etc.). It shows that these women have a potential and career goals in public sector, whether in politics or in social activities.

### 6.2.2 *Women who started their careers during the last ten years*

The entry into politics of women who started careers during the last ten years was typical for the current convocation. Lyudmila Sargsyan, leader of the Social-Democratic Hnchak party; Heghine Bisharyan, vice-president of the Rule of Law party; and Naira Karapetyan, occupying a leadership position in the United Liberal National Party (MIAK) who entered into parliament by the Republican Party of Armenia list, are all examples of this scenario.

*«I am a member of a leading body of the MIAK for almost four years, which is distinguished in the political arena by its exclusive proposal of political generation change, which is included in the election platform of the RA President and is actively*

*carried out by him. One of the features of our party is that MIAK is a strong human resource, has rather serious young professionals from various fields, and our today's mission of MIAK delegates in the Republican Party is bringing in the opinions and attitudes of our party in the Republican Party's parliamentary faction*"<sup>92</sup>.

*"By nature I am a social-democrat, and the Social-Democratic Hnchak party was the most cordial for me. I entered the ranks of the party in 2003, and in seven months became an assessor. It was a very difficult period. It is not easy for men to accept activities and existence of women leaders. At the initial period, the Board by whose proposal I became a leader, were people who had seen my work and found out that I am the person who can take on these responsibilities.*

*At that time, somehow I was not ready to enter into politics because the duration of the advancement within party was very short. But I was chosen; probably I was the most suitable for the moment. I was learning a lot of things in parallel to work*"<sup>93</sup>.

Including young, well-educated women in party ranks, which is common abroad, occurred in the previous elections and was typical for the 2012 elections. The path of such women into politics passes through parties' youth associations. Many parties are pleased to include them on their election lists. However, it is difficult to fully explain their reasons for making a political career; their membership in parties could be a part of searching for their life path or attempts to establish themselves in public policy. Among them, purposeful young women who had received gender education and highlighted their ideas on these issues, stood out positively.

From this point of view, Nvard Minasyan's example is impressive; she was the 6<sup>th</sup> on the Armenian Revolutionary Federation list, though she was not elected to the Parliament. During the study, she was the only candidate who did not hesitate to use the word "feminism" and to consider herself among the supporters of feminist movement. The position of the candidate was formed based on socialist ideology of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation and her personal knowledge of gender issues.

*"In 1990-1995 I studied at the State Engineering University of Armenia, in the Cybernetics Faculty. I continued my master studies in the political science department of the American University of Armenia, and then I've got my second master's degree at the U.S. Cincinnati University, School of Planning specializing in the fields of public policy and economic development. Since 2000 I have worked as a senior specialist at the Ministry of Education and Science, then as an assistant to the minister; and then I worked at the World Bank as a consultant for educational projects. Later I returned to the Ministry of Education and Science and worked as an adviser to the minister.*

<sup>92</sup> From an interview with Naira Karapetyan.

<sup>93</sup> From an interview with Lyudmila Sargsyan.

*Since 2007 I have taught at the Yerevan State Linguistic University and currently manage works of the Center for Ensuring Quality of the University. Since 2009 I have been a member of Experts Group on Higher Education Reform of the European Commission within the framework of the Tempus project. In addition, I teach at the Yerevan Economic University.*

*The main directions of lecturing are education policy and gender issues in policy. These are not just women's issues, but all the deviations, stereotypical-behavioral schemes that lead to restrictions. For example, how can we correct these problems in policy, which lead to unequal economic conditions, unequal opportunities of realization of those rights, etc. These are very important issues for those professionals who will take over the management of this field”.*

### **6.3 Politics as a Consequence**

#### **6.3.1 As a result of the quota**

Some women entered into politics as a result of the quota (i.e. when the nomination is included to fulfil the mandatory quota of women in party lists). Unfortunately, this scenario is typical for women whose activism is dictated by men. These women agree to withdraw, and in that sense, one can speak with great reservations about such women's entry into politics. Such women ensure obedience to political parties; they do not have goals to advance in politics, and they are always ready to accept the decisions of the leadership of their party. Such a situation is a result of the existing discriminatory practices in the society, which women themselves may not understand.

#### **6.3.2 Women with recognition**

Two new scenarios emerged in the 2012 elections, which, if we consider entirely, are the same as the type listed above. The nomination of a blogger, Isabella Abgaryan, in the Heritage list and of a singer, Shushan Petrosyan, in the Republican Party list, are examples. In both cases, a candidate's recognition benefited party interests in some way.

Of course, the engagement of a creative intellectual in electoral lists is not a new scenario. In the case of Shushan Petrosyan, the news for the Armenian reality was just the involvement of a representative of a domestic show business as well as some shock accompanying this process. In that regard, the attention raised in the media, which was focused on finding out whether other show business representatives also wanted to become deputies, is noteworthy.

As for Isabella Abgaryan, her reputation was limited to social networks and her involvement in party lists can be viewed as an attempt to gain support from social

networks. This struggle is typical for modern elections elsewhere and we can assume that it is likely to become stronger in the future.

## 7. Women's Motivation for Entry into Politics

At least three interrelated questions were proposed for the research of motivations of women seeking entry into parliament:

- Has the encouragement of female deputies of the 4th Convocation of the National Assembly influenced public opinion in terms of understanding women's political activities?
- Why should women be represented in politics? (this question has not been asked explicitly, but participants of the focus groups and interviewees discussed this question on their initiative during the study).
- What motives guide women while running for the Parliament and are there differences from men's motivations?

If we compare the answers of these questions with the results of the 2007 research, nothing new has been said. Participants conceptualized classical arguments justifying the necessity of women's presence in the legislative assembly. Also, the responses of both candidates and voters to this question were virtually the same. In both cases, the emphasis was that women's inclusion brings some positive changes: improving the atmosphere in the parliament, the most prudent decisions, justice and attention to social problems.

The analysis of the responses shows that the arguments, which were only cited by women's organizations actively for many years, are now reflected in society and understood by women who are in politics or seek to enter politics.

*"I am for having a large number of women in the National Assembly, because female politicians are missing in our country, there are issues in society that will get more rational response by women. And, finally, I think that Armenian women are more hard-working and honest than men, especially in our National Assembly."*

*"Especially women are able to eliminate conflicts, introducing a healthy dose of reason when men pass the measure, and the argument seems unsolvable".*

*"I do not underestimate a man, but a woman is more balanced, more relaxed, more patient. These are important features. If many women would be in parliament, the 'face' of the parliament will be more beautiful".*

*"I am, of course, for women should be, but not in a large number. Women's thinking, perception and emotional landscape is different; therefore, given this, they would look differently to a particular question or problem. Beside that, our Parliament*



*needs change and innovation, and male deputies, especially, of that quality, are unlikely to make correct and healthy decisions”.*

*“I think the National Assembly will also become active, there will be debates, the responsibility will increase...”<sup>94</sup>.*

The answers of female candidates were similar:

*“The role of women in politics is high and important, because a woman is much more tolerant, she has a much more flexible way of thinking and is resolving various issues, she can quickly be oriented”<sup>95</sup>.*

*“Women will bring social justice, balance, variety, conflict of aspects into the political arena. 50% of the public do not take part in discussions and decision-making. We are poor by 50%. We sterilized 50%, we said go to the kitchen, die in the bedroom, you have no life after 40. Why are we surprised that we found us among the poorest nations. Women will bring wealth, justice, because the perspective of one side cannot always be right”<sup>96</sup>.*

*“I came into politics, because I want it to be more moral. I wish to live in a country where the constitution is law for everyone, the country where the law will protect a person. I want a citizen to be demanding and consistent in his/her demands that he/she understands each person has greater value than coming and going governments”<sup>97</sup>.*

Sociological experts agree:

*“Women must be more involved in parliament, because they bring more positive energy. Men have more aggressive posture, often combative; in this sense women may have a mitigating role not only in the National Assembly, but also in general in political life and processes”<sup>98</sup>.*

One very common argument justifying women's presence in politics is a comparison with their role in the family. This, in fact, is an attempt to use stereotypical perceptions of women's role in favor of their political activism. This argument appealed to both voters and candidates.

*“Of course, it would be nice if a lot of women are in the National Assembly, women's role is big everywhere. Women's role is invaluable especially in family, starting from family formation, child's birth until upbringing, education, and ... The state is also a large family, and I am sure women have a lot to do there”.*

94 From the opinions of the focus group participants.

95 From an interview with Elinar Vardanyan (Prosperous Armenia Party).

96 From an interview with Nvard Manasyan (Armenian Revolutionary Federation).

97 From an interview with Lyudmila Sargsyan (Armenian National Congress).

98 From an interview of Gevorg Poghosyan given to WomenNet.am web-site.

*“Armenia is a large family. I get such an impression from it that a mother, a wife is missing, a father is busy with his works, and is very little at home, the result is that our big house is very dirty, big and naughty children took away bread from young children and walk fortunate and fat, while young children are looking around by crying. This is how our Armenian family looks like. If a woman comes to Parliament, she must start from purity; it is only possible by making laws. Many people have been in Europe, and look with envy at the cleanliness of those cities. If I appear in the parliament, the law on city purity will enter into force. Women have a lot to do, and women’s participation is very important”<sup>99</sup>.*

*“Women are very organized in politics. Let’s compare with family - from morning till night a woman takes responsibility and consistency in every family issue, is able to find the golden mean, to build solidarity, to distribute the budget correctly and so on”<sup>100</sup>.*

The comparison of men’s and women’s motivations highlights some differences in approaches and assessments: unlike women, men are more often attributed to using a greedy approach. The desire of power itself is not seen as a negative factor. The participants of the study emphasized that it is manifested when men’s entry into Parliament is considered as a “patronage for business”, and the MP mandate gives “immunity” guarantees. In this context, proposals were made to eliminate the immunity status as well as of creating an institute for calling back the MPs.

In general, when comparing motives of female candidates and oligarchs desiring entry into Parliament, the sympathy of focus group participants was for women. Nevertheless, in reality, people vote with different principles. This was particularly manifested in the majoritarian constituencies where female candidates often complained that voters expect promises from them like “to make asphalt” or repair elevators, or much worse, wait obviously for election bribes.

*“Unfortunately, people are in such social conditions, that some of them take that money as well”<sup>101</sup>.*

*“As for the money, this factor was also in our electoral territory. Whatever electoral territory you enter, residents are already registered, one was promised a pavilion, another – a football field, I was asked for asphalt”<sup>102</sup>.*

Nevertheless, there is always a spectrum of the public with the opinion that no matter what gender a candidate is, the issue is “what kind of a woman this is or what kind of a man this is.” One could agree with this opinion except that the problem can be

99 From an interview of Zhasmena Ghevondyan given to WomenNet.am web-site.

100 From an interview of Karine Harutyunyan given to WomenNet.am web-site.

101 From an interview with Satik Seyranyan.

102 From an interview of Gohar Veziryan given to WomenNet.am web-site (No. 12 electoral territory).

transferred to another level; it turns out that there is no issue of removing women from politics; the only issue is qualities of candidates.

*“Sex is not important, but the professionalism of the NA members, that is how seriously they approach to their work, to what degree of responsibility. And I do not agree that it is difficult to buy female MPs. Simply men are more into corruption, because the leading positions are mainly concentrated in their hands, and women often are more greedy and venal”.*

*“Everything depends on the factor what kind of women will appear in the parliament”.*

In similar context, the former MP Larisa Alaverdyan's opinion is noteworthy:

*“It is expected that the country will change, we'll have equal opportunities, and only then women enter actively into politics. Only with women's access the country will be changed”.*

It should be noted that many female candidates in the pre-election speeches explain their entry into politics with the desire to achieve changes.

*“I made the decision to enter into Parliament from compassion. It is not important to lead, it is important to start something, to change. There are stereotypes, those need to be broken, they must be changed. I have a fight, and the best way of fighting is being in the legislative branch. I wish to have thinking, disagreeing, disputing National Assembly...”<sup>103</sup>.*

*“Working in the media field, I wanted to change societal life, I work believing and will continue the same in the politics”<sup>104</sup>.*

Interestingly, the word “change” was being emphasized in the ruling party's motto and was widely used during the pre-election campaign by other parties as well. In the context of women's participation, the word “change” had special significance. To the question whether women's involvement in the previous parliament influenced on public opinion, opinions are divided. If we speak about experts' opinion, then this matter is unconditional: MPs are in front of everyone's eyes, and how women behave themselves in the Parliament will shape public opinion about women in politics in general.

*“A simple comparison of thinking ten years ago and today allows stating that society's attitude towards women is changing, people are starting to trust women more than ever. It is especially favored by lively activities of some female MPs in*

103 From an interview of Shusan Petrosyan given to WomenNet.am web-site (Republican Party of Armenia).

104 From an interview with Margaret Yesayan (Republican Party of Armenia).

*favor of public interest. Changes are in favor of women; just these changes are very slow*"<sup>105</sup>.

*"Women have been put in certain horizontals in the lists of some political forces, because there is requirement of the law. The law is being followed; women are not at large in places which are out of the law requirement. However, even in case of being forced, I consider this step positive as by getting opportunity women become inspired and they act. Women's activities in the Parliament and in politics in general are successful. We have examples with the "Heritage" faction*"<sup>106</sup>.

Opinions concerning this were divergent in the focus groups: some participants assessed female MPs' activism exclusively positive and underlined that their examples show what a real deputy should be. Others were expressing pessimism, that not all manifestations of women's activities are acceptable for people. In case of this opinion, it appears that stereotypes play some role.

*"I think that public opinion has changed significantly in terms of women's participation: people are ready to see a woman as a minister and as an MP, in general at all levels of decision-making in any position. I say this not because of involvement of MPs, but I participated in the 2007 campaign and now as well I am participating. There is an obvious difference. When we should be organizing a meeting of voters, with community representatives of Anahit Bakhshyan, then it was very difficult to gather an audience, to focus public's attention when a woman candidate had a meeting. And if a man had a meeting, it was much easier to ensure audience. But it is significantly different now"*.

The study of motivations of women's entry into politics shows that these motivation and expectations of candidates generally coincide.

*"I do not think that there is a need for motivation for dealing with politics. I've never considered myself being out of the political processes as I was always concerned with what is happening in the country. And naturally, these concerns made me to decide to just be a citizen who is in the status of an observer or a citizen who wants to have opportunity to influence on processes and take part in a reform process in this country. Each of us is doing all this for children, generation and if it falls short of or indifferent to the issue, then it's indifference towards one's own country, people, own child. And if you are not indifferent, you participate in all political processes whether one likes it or not"*<sup>107</sup>.

"I want to live in my country" is the most common formulation of the motives by which some candidates decided to run. The second, also common formulation is

105 From an interview of Gevorg Poghosyan given to WomenNet.am web-site.

106 From an interview of Tigran Hakobyan, political technologist, given to WomenNet.am web-site

107 From an interview with Lyudmila Sargsyan (Armenian National Congress).

“I want my children to live in a decent country.” If we compare with the previous elections, the wording of the motives by which women decided to go into politics became better and more literate.

*“I’ll present interests of both oppositional and pro-governmental citizens in the National Assembly. I assure you, our interests are common. We all want to live in Armenia and we can impose our will on all political forces both in power and in opposition. It is time for society itself to impose its rules and become a real factor and not continue to remain a marginal mass of the head of which they are playing what game they want”<sup>108</sup>.*

*“For a long time, I feel a huge pain both psychological and physical, when I saw sessions of the NA passing in empty or half-empty hall or a sleeping deputy. I felt huge pain when there was no one to raise my concerns, concerns and problems of my people and mainly this was one of the reasons that I decided to run my candidacy”<sup>109</sup>.*

*“I should support, if possible, the reforms of educational field. I, as a young mother, a teacher and an expert in the field, know well what obstacles are concerning the quality of education, further progress, work-related”<sup>110</sup>.*

*“I want to say my word in politics as an expert opinion, I would like the knowledge that I’ve acquired and still will acquire, to use for the sake of the people of the RA. I approach any activity with great devotion, even the smallest problem I attempt to solve as if it is my last issue”<sup>111</sup>.*

Formulations of gender approaches are a new theme in women’s pre-election campaigns. Of course, not all female candidates appealed to the topic. But if we compare with the previous elections, then in 2007 female candidates did not touch the topic due to the fear of being unclear. And the fact that the gender topic was voiced, provides evidence of some changes happening in MP candidates and in perceptions of society regarding women’s political participation and regarding men’s and women’s equality issues.

*“You know, I would rather wear a hijab than realize that I internally wear that invisible hijab. Maybe if I would have worn a hijab I would understand earlier that I am unequal and every day would fight for correcting this imbalance. It seems to me that if I wear an open or short dress, if I come out to the street in the evening, then I am free. But in reality I am not free; in the most important places my freedom is limited at once. When I marry, my husband and mother-in-law can control my destiny, limit visits to my parents’ home, decide instead of myself to work or not, have children or not, how many, which sex and how to bringing them up”<sup>112</sup>.*

108 From an interview of Gohar Veziryan given to WomenNet.am web-site (No. 12 electoral territory).

109 From an interview of Narine Movsisyan given to WomenNet.am web-site (No. 38 electoral territory).

110 From an interview of Karine Harutyunyan given to WomenNet.am web-site.

111 From an interview with Arpine Hovhannesian (Republican Party of Armenia).

112 From an interview with Nvard Manasyan (Armenian Revolutionary Federation).

*“Women have always been free in Armenia and took part equally with men in solutions of vital problems, but it does not refer to women’s political involvement. The Republic of Armenia could not provide equal representation of sexes in the political arena and by realizing that in the foreseeable future will not be able to accomplish this equality, adopted a protective attitude towards women. During the last 20 years, the country was in a state of crisis and that had its appropriate impact on women’s issues as well, which were pushed to the second stage. The areas where women were involved in education, culture, health, and women’s salary do not meet the insurance of minimum vital issues. For this reason, feminization of poverty is visible in Armenia. Based on these facts, a woman, more than ever, needs to be involved in politics and it is not only on paper but also in practice”<sup>113</sup>.*

*“A woman is used as a tool for inappropriate actions by men. The major frauds, election fraud are done by women’s hands, which is a painful topic for me. Violations of the constitution also were committed by women’s hands, and I would very much appreciate that we do appreciate us more and make others to respect us and thereby increase women’s role more in public and political life”<sup>114</sup>.*

*“During my entire functioning, be it in the social or political field, I have always been an advocate of women’s active participation. As I am new in the National Assembly, time is needed to understand in which Standing Committee I will be involved and specifically in which area I will be most actively represented, it is now difficult to highlight specific directions for future work. But I hope that every place, where I see cases of women’s rights violation I’ll be one of the first responders”<sup>115</sup>.*

*“Although the rules of the game are defined by men and it’s a little hard for women to play by these rules, however the women who try “to get out of their kitchens” and to go forward purposefully achieve a lot of things”<sup>116</sup>.*

*“During Soviet times, women were holding state positions and were leading various areas and had contribution in the country’s governance. Women manifested themselves equally with men. Today woman is ignored. Although we have women who have their input into today’s power, they make minor percentage. Now people do not trust women. Why? one cannot understand. The discrimination is huge. There are problems that a woman can solve better than a man, but confidence is low”<sup>117</sup>.*

*“The problem is really in how we bring our children up, especially girls. Mainly in educational programs, girls are prepared to become a mother, a woman. I do not*

113 From an interview of Sima Iskandaryan given to WomenNet.am web-site (United Armenians party).

114 From an interview with Lilit Makunts (Armenian National Congress).

115 From an interview with Naira Karapetyan (Republican Party of Armenia/MIAK).

116 From an interview with Lyudmila Sargsyan (Armenian National Congress).

117 From an interview of Donara Nalbandyan given to WomenNet.am web-site (Republican Party of Armenia).

*remember an educational program where women would be prepared for social and political life. A woman should be submissive, a mother. And will take part in public and political life so far as her time allows, as family members allow. Perhaps the only exception in books is about Aytsemnik's story, where a woman was a role of a militant. We have an issue of stereotypical thinking. And not only men should be criticized, by saying that they do not allow us to work, to act. How well a woman is ready today and wants to participate in political life. "We should work towards changing the mentality"<sup>118</sup>.*

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118 From an interview with Elinar Vardanyan (Prosperous Armenia).

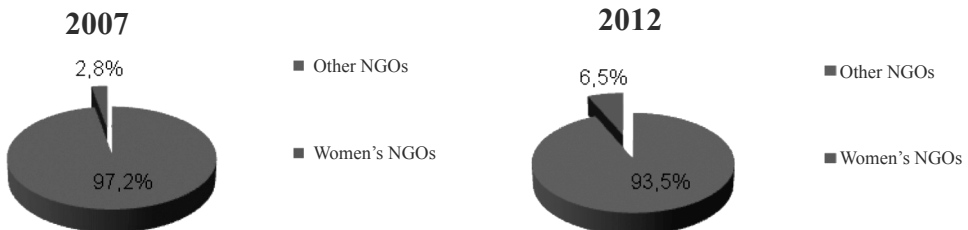
## CHAPTER 4

### WOMEN'S NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN ELECTORAL PROCESSES AND SUPPORT TO WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

#### 1. Women's Non-Governmental Organizations as Institutes of Sociol-Political Socialization

Women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as civil society organizations, play a more important role in Armenia's democratic processes. According to results of the survey on state of civil society, which was conducted in 2010 in the framework of the "CIVICUS Civil Society Index" project supported by Counterpart International, Armenia is estimated "to be a stable developing country, where public sector organizations continue to move forward with big steps".

During the last 5 years, more than 1,000 new NGOs have appeared in the Republic. According to data of the National Statistical Service, the number of legal entities that were registered in the state register of the Ministry of Justice increased from 2,726 in 2007 to 3,900 on May 1, 2012; this is an increase of 43%. In the same period, the number of women's NGOs grew from 76 to 250, thus the number increased by more than 3 times. In 2007, women's organizations made up 2.8% of all NGOs and in 2012, they comprise 6.5%.





However, the analysis of employment statistics, based on an integrated study of the living conditions of households, revealed that both women and men's employment in public sector has had a downward trend, at the expense of employment within the cities. However, employment in NGOs in rural areas went against this trend growing from 500 people in 2009 to 700 people in 2011.

#### Number of employed people in the public sector, 1000 people<sup>119</sup>

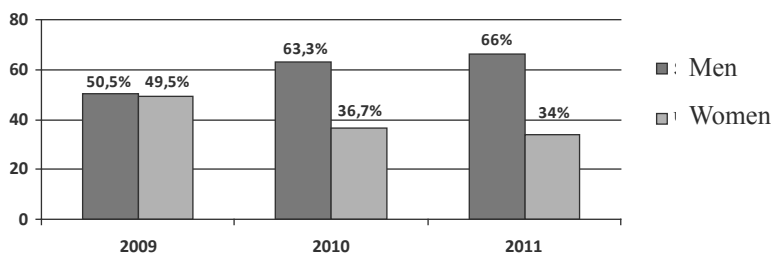
	2009	2010	2011
<b>Total</b>	<b>10.5</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>6.5</b>
<b>Men</b>	5.3	3.5	4.3
<b>Women</b>	5.2	2.0	2.2
<b>City</b>	10.0	5.1	5.8
<b>Village</b>	0.5	0.5	0.7

The gender analysis of NGO employment data indicates that in addition to the overall decrease in employment rates, the decrease of women's employment was greater than the decrease for men.

#### The Ratio of Women's and Men's Employment in NGOs

	2009	2010	2011
Men	50.5%	63.3%	66%
Women	49.5%	36.7%	34%

#### Employment in NGOs



<sup>119</sup> Main findings of the 2009-2011 integrated study of the living conditions of households.

The table of employment in NGOs shows that the gender ratio in the public sector has changed in favor of men. In 2009, men and women were almost equally represented in public sector, and in 2011, men comprised 66% of those employed by NGOs which is contrary to the opinion that the public sector is a field for women's activities. The change of employment in the public sector highlights the trend that where there is a paid job, women are gradually being forced out.

By analyzing this data, one can conclude that despite the increase in number of NGOs, including women's NGOs, the decrease of employment shows a decrease in activity and financial stability. The public sector of Armenia is decreasing due to lower levels of external funding and less external donors.

The NGO leaders talked about this during roundtables discussions, focus group discussions, and interviews. As Nona Margaryan, president of "Professionals for Civil Society" NGO, mentioned:

*"Many NGOs that have grown up like mushrooms are now, figuratively speaking, dying out. In my opinion, the fact of decreasing of grants and donors leaving the country leads to this. Now there are many registered, but inactive NGOs in almost all areas"*<sup>120</sup>.

At the same time the survey participants mentioned that not only financial factors hinder empowerment and development of public sector, but there are other obstacles, such as:

- Non-complete use of democratic management principles by NGOs.
- Competition for leadership and lack of mutual trust and respect based on the ambitions of organizations' leaders.
- Imperfect dialogue between civil society and the state, as well as active state policy.

Nevertheless, the study shows that despite the low level of representation women's NGOs are playing a more significant role in civil society formation in Armenia. The areas of NGO activities are expanding, and although not all women's organizations are prioritizing women's promotion in politics, they are accomplishing many of the same functions by having a tangible effect on the Government's actions, adoption of necessary normative acts, and formation and implementation of effective social policy.

Markedly, the professionalism of active NGOs have increased, and their cooperation with state structures is strengthening. In the ministries, especially those that are active in the social sphere, such as the Ministry of Labor and Social Issues, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Education and Science, close partnerships have been

<sup>120</sup> From an interview with Nonna Margaryan.

established with NGOs that are invited to participate in the development, discussion, and evaluation of the documents and programs and in their implementation. Being a connecting link between citizens and government, NGOs are able to solve many problems that arise during the implementation of projects, to make appropriate changes and additions into them, and to act by legislative initiatives. Active cooperation is developing between the public sector and executive bodies on regional and local self-government levels, where the allocation of grants greatly contributes to regional community and economic development in the Republic.

By estimations of NGO activists, “NGOs are becoming more prepared, better understand their role, and are changing in terms of functionality by becoming stronger in lobbying and defense areas”.

During the last 5 years, the Armenian public sector has become more unified. NGO leaders understand the need for unified efforts to increase effectiveness of influence on government. According to the findings of “CIVITAS Civil Society Index” survey, cooperation and information exchange have reached significant levels. During the 3 months preceding the survey, 71% of organizations surveyed had meetings with other organizations dealing with similar issues, and 64% of them exchanged information. The number of associations of NGOs is growing. In the 2007 electoral processes, 8 associations were formed during implementation of grant programs on advocacy and raising public awareness, 3 of them later became permanently operating networks. The environmental alliance is actively functioning; it unites 35 NGOs dealing with environmental issues. In 2010, a network of more than 100 NGOs cooperated with the National Assembly to form an Alliance on Maternal and Child Health, which includes 48 women’s organizations.

Since 2009, the graduates of the Women’s Leadership School offered by the Association of Women with University Education NGO participated in small grants competition under the framework of the project “Women’s Movement in Millennium Intersection: New Challenges and Strategies.” One of the goals is strengthening and fostering cooperation between NGOs and creation of a network of NGOs. In 2009, the “Agreement” network of NGOs was formed, in which a number of NGOs are included from Yerevan and the regions.

With the purpose of further developing civil society, steps were taken for the formation of essential civil society institutions and for increasing women’s role in society.

The Public Council under the President was created in 2008, the activities of which are directed at:

- Presenting interests of citizens and NGOs in developing and implementing state policy;
- Formation of traditions promoting development of civil society;
- Support to implementation of civil initiatives aimed at advocacy and protecting rights and freedoms of NGOs and citizens of the Republic.

It is very important that, among 12 committees of the Public Council, committees on civil society development and demographic and gender issues are operating.

Since 2009, the Women's Council under the Prime Minister, established in 2000, has become active in adoption of the Gender Policy in 2010 and the 2011-2015 Gender Policy Strategies by the Government of the Republic of Armenia.

The National Assembly accepted by the 1<sup>st</sup> hearing the law on “Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities of Men and Women.”

An Inter-Agency Committee Against Gender-Based Violence was established under the Ministry of Labor and Social Issues.

In 2011, the Government of RA adopted a National Action Plan against Gender-Based Violence and 2011-2015 Gender-Based Violence Strategy.

The study showed that NGOs play an important role in promoting women's political participation. By opinion of leaders of the public movement, the public sector is the main institution for women's initial political socialization. Activities of NGOs help develop women's potential, form civil positions, increase women's role in society contribute to heightened women's political involvement, and overcome gender stereotypes in society. The developing cooperation with legislative and executive authorities and local self-government bodies promotes attainment of practical skills for organizing social and political activities and the formation of leadership qualities. Educational programs of women's NGOs include different populations in all regions of the Republic by transferring knowledge from broad fields, including legal and socio-political. According to Gohar Shahnazaryan, co-chair of the Women's Resource Center:

*“Today, NGOs are preparing women for political activities. Our organization does not work specifically on women's political leadership issues or women's involvement; however, educational programs of our organization are aimed at developing women's potential and fulfilment of their role, and most importantly, during trainings we*

*put emphasis on increasing girls and women's self-esteem. Women's low political activism is in reality not due to insufficient knowledge rather it is due to social and psychological problems, low self-esteem, and self-perception. There are NGOs, which are engaged especially in women's political involvement, such as the Association of Women with University Education, which organizes Women's Leadership Schools. In regard to cooperation with NGOs dealing with women's political involvement, it mainly takes place in frameworks of different coalitions. For example, with the Association of Women with University Education, we are involved in Gender Theme Group, we are also a member of the Inter-Agency Committee on Combating Gender-Based Violence. Collaboration of NGOs with government agencies was expanded, which is progress, as it is the basis of women's political initiation"<sup>121</sup>.*

*"As Natalia Martirosyan, a chair of the Armenian Committee of Helsinki Citizens' Assembly mentions: "The NGO field is softer, and it replaces a cavity for preparing women for most unusual politician, women realize their opportunities that they are not always able to realize, for example, in professional field. NGO is such a field, where women are able not only to demonstrate their potential, abilities and skills, but can also learn. Somehow NGOs teach them the rules of fighting, which we have to be faced with for us unusual political activities. NGOs are a path for realizing one's own strength and abilities and obtaining the skills which are necessary for a political figure. In the past five years, significant progress has been observed, and this is especially true for those women who do not live in Yerevan, but in more remote regions, who in fact, do not fall behind the women of Yerevan, but surpass them in many ways – they are more active, knowledgeable, and purposeful women. And the fact that they are more socially active gives hope that at least initially they will be included in local systems"<sup>122</sup>.*

The Association of Women with University Education continues to have specific contributions in the initiation of women's political participation. Events, programs, civic initiatives, the Center for Gender Studies, which has operated for more than 10 years, and the Women's Leadership School play important roles in the formation of politically active women. Today the majority of women who are visible in the political field are graduates of the Women's Leadership School. The schools are necessary and function with affiliated Association branches in the regions. During the last 3 to 4 years in Gyumri, Vanadzor and Artashat, 7 series of classes of Women's Leadership School were organized in each location. Schools were also organized in Dilijan, Stepanavan, Spitak, Nor Hachn, Abovyan, Ashtarak, Sevan, Charentsavan, Yeghvard, and Echmiadzin.

121 From an interview with Gohar Shahnazaryan.

122 From an interview with Natalia Martirosyan.

## 2. The Role of Political Parties as Institutions for Women's Political Socialization according to Assessments of Activists and Leaders of NGOs

Assessments of activists and leaders of various NGOs were collected on what changes have taken place since the 2007 elections in terms of women's political participation, whether motivations have increased for women's advancement, and what influence women's councils of political parties have on increasing women's role in political parties.

Surveys conducted in focus groups indicated that political parties in Armenia are closed systems with corporate interests. Consequently, very little of the activities of these parties, especially in the pre-election period, is known even to the most active NGO leaders and activists. More than half of the focus group participants in Gyumri and Yeghegnadzor did not have any information and knew nothing about activities of women's councils of parties. In Yerevan, Vanadzor, and Ashtarak, NGO activists assumed that nothing is being done towards increasing women's role in parties and encouraging them politically. Only representatives of the Armenian Relief Society (ARS) who were present during all the focus groups mentioned that such work is being carried out by the Federation Party, though not on a desired level.

The participants of the focus groups in Yerevan were most critical; the majority of these groups expressed opinions that "parties are not interested to promote women", "women inside the parties are interested only in their own interests and are not motivated to raise, expand, strengthen the impact on women's involvement or raise women's interest in actively participating in political processes;" "they only contribute to their group interests or just pursue narrow partisan goals;" "women are only beautiful decorations in promotional campaigns;" and "women show activism only in implementation of charitable and social programs, mainly in pre-election stages".

Assessments by experts of public movement were more prudent and optimistic. According to their observations, under the influence of the requirements of international organizations and due to the introduction of gender quotas in the legislation, political parties attitude towards women's political participation begins to change, and an interest to have literate female politicians among them arose. Natalia Martirosyan, chair of the Armenian Committee of Helsinki Citizens' Assembly, shares such opinion:

*"The necessity of women's inclusion in electoral lists leads to the fact that the parties are beginning to seriously think that there should be not only women among them, but literate women, who know and are able to work, that is, such understanding is crystallizing that a woman should be included in MP lists of candidates not only as a*

woman, she should present party's interests at high levels, and that, in addition to the requirements of the law, should lead to the fact that the works re women's role and place within political parties should be involved only in the pre-election period, but parties should have permanent long-term strategy for preparation of serious human resources, including women. A large number of young women appear in parties who work much better than young men. And I see a good trend in this and I hope that from now on it will be the same, too"<sup>123</sup>.

At the same time, an opinion was also voiced that a lot of parties and their women's councils, as previously, do not work on encouragement of women's political participation. For example, according to Gohar Shahnazaryan, a co-chair of the Women's Resource Center: *"meetings with women of political parties showed that there are still parties that traditionally continue to emphasize a role of an Armenian woman as a wife, a mother; a home guard ... A gender policy of parties - only in health and education fields, is based on this approach. At the same time there are parties which are genuinely concerned with women's issues. For example, female representatives of the Federation Party were pleasantly surprised by those who were not afraid to say the word "feminism" and were mentioning that they were feminists and were trying to change society's attitude towards this notion. They are raising many issues in party that are discussed and adopted; their opinion is taken into account"*.

4 Many participants of the roundtable discussions and focus groups pointed out that **"today's women's councils do not prepare female politicians. Maybe something will change in the future"**. Many leaders of NGOs have ambiguous attitudes in connection with purposefulness of a special separate structure for women within parties. According to their opinion, women's councils not only do not promote women's political socialization, but also restrict their chances in taking part in general decision-making of a party and development of inner-party democracy by narrowing their interests to just solving women's and social problems. One participant explained that, "they do not deal with serious political work, including both political practices and analysis of gender ideas." This opinion also applies to youth structures established within parties.

### 3. NGO Participation in Elections

Activities of NGOs in the 2012 electoral processes, as in 2007, focused on ensuring free and fair elections. Numerous educational programs were implemented with the purpose to raise awareness of different population groups of elections, changes in legislation, citizens' rights, and civic liability.

<sup>123</sup> From an interview with Natalia Martirosyan.

“The Holy Land” environmental organization in Gyumri implemented an educational program among students and high school pupils, for first-time voters with the support of the U.S. Embassy.

“Harmony” NGO held workshops in 7 communities of Ararat and Aragatsotn regions for young people, in which participants presented their projects, organized pre-election debates, and role-playing games imitating elections.

28 NGOs were involved in the implementation of election-related platforms with the support of the Counterpart International organization.

The “Voter’s Guidebook” was published in the framework of the project “Civic and Social Development Foundation” in which goals and activities of all political parties participating in the elections were summarized. The guidebook was an impartial information source that assisted voters in making the right choice.

The “Medium and Small Business Fund” carried out a project that examined and assessed parties’ approaches to solving socio-economic issues and held debates with participation of party leaders, entrepreneurs, and public sector representatives.

The “Professionals for Civil Society” NGO conducted a study of platforms of political parties, regarding contributions to the development of civil society and promotion of cooperation of civil society organizations, government agencies, and local authorities. The study results were published and presented at a roundtable discussion.

On the initiative of NGOs, meetings were held with MP candidates of different parties. The Association of Women with University Education generalized the results of the discussions, which were held in different regions by its branches, and developed “Women’s Political Agenda of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia in the 2012 Elections,” which was discussed during the meeting with leaders of NGOs and candidates of leading political parties and was presented to all political parties.

The Alliance of Maternal and Child Health conducted a meeting with candidates, where the candidates presented party positions in relation to solutions of health problems.

“The Center of Socio-Economic and Legal Reforms” organized a meeting of voters and candidates of the majoritarian election system in Vanadzor.

All these meetings, roundtable discussions, which were held with initiatives of NGOs, gave an opportunity to voice issues in front of future legislators who are of public concern and to introduce different groups of voters that are affected by the



parties' positions on various issues and the means to solve them foreseen in their platforms.

Some women's NGOs that participated in the organizational works of the preparation of elections included: Women's Rights Center, "Safe Childhood", and "Golden Mean," which participated in works of correcting voter lists in Vanadzor.

By the assessments of almost all the leaders and activists who participated in the roundtable discussions and focus groups, the activities of women's NGOs in the 2012 elections compared to the 2007 elections has not increased and may have decreased.

*Nevertheless, the study showed that very few women's NGOs were directly involved in the implementation of projects related to electoral processes.* Only one (an environmental organization) out of 55 NGOs that participated in focus groups and roundtable discussions conducted in Yerevan, Gyumri, Vanadzor, Ashtarak, and Yeghegnadzor implemented an educational program among youth in Gyumri.

The "Armenian Relief Association" participated in a project "Refugees without Passport" in Ashtarak.

Women's organizations, following the letter of the law, did not conduct support campaigns of female candidates in the elections.

As in the 2007 elections, women's NGOs did not participate in activism related to public control over the election processes. Only 3 out of 53 registered local NGOs in the Central Election Commission were women's organizations. It should be noted that a significant number of women that are on lists of other NGOs participated in elections as local observers.

Meanwhile, many activists of women's NGOs were involved in the electoral committees. Within the composition of the governing body of the electoral commissions, 37% of presidents and secretaries were women.

#### **4. Election Results - Issue of Gender Equality Assessed by Women's NGOs**

By the assessments of social movement leaders, women's political and civic activism in the 2012 elections declined from the levels in the 2007 elections in some ways: "General apathy regarding political electoral processes of the public is obvious, and this is extended also to the women's sector".

The study of expectations of election results during the pre-election period of female leaders and activists of NGOs indicated that their predictions were quite pessimistic regarding the possibility of increasing women's political representation. The

approach of political parties to the issue of making candidate lists and the qualitative composition of female candidates included in lists raised distrust for many people regarding the motivation of political parties taking women into parliament and feared that the 2007 scenario would be repeated, when women in passing places of the electoral lists of the political parties withdrew their candidacies. The overwhelming majority of the participants of the survey expressed the opinion that in the best scenario a slight increase in the number of women in the National Assembly would be recorded in 2012.

Although not a single participant involved in the focus groups and roundtable discussions doubted the need for women's political involvement, moreover, in men's comments in Vanadzor and Gyumri, it was noted that women have a huge potential to contribute to the realization of the principles of social justice. However, NGO leaders believed that ***“As long as women do not realize the importance of their role in the political sector, in particular, the need for conscious participation in electoral processes, it is hardly possible to achieve real change”***. By assessments of NGO representatives, the socio-economic situation has some influence on women's political activism. Aghavni Karakhanyan, a president of the “Institute for Civil Society and Regional Development” considers that:

*“Socio-economic problems very negatively impact women's political motivation and political activism. For instance, feminist movements featured high-class women. They were educated, financially secure, economically independent, they were not busy with household affairs, had no problem finding a piece of bread. The suffragist movement, as they say, came from good life, and in our case women's movement occurred from poor life. The woman who can defend her rights, must be active, motivated, well prepared. The hands of our women do not reach to politics, as they just do not have time and in general wish to be engaged in politics. Therefore, qualitative and quantitative indicators of women's movement have socio-economic basis”<sup>124</sup>.*

An opinion was expressed in the roundtable and focus group discussions in Vanadzor and Ashtarak that the social and economic instability and high level of unemployment have been fertile ground for buying voters' votes, which experienced an unprecedented rise in the 2012 elections. Elections were distinguished by the improved methods of election frauds and by cynical methods of pressuring the voters. The following examples were given: “open voting” in some villages, non-payment of benefits with the purpose of pressuring voters to vote for a particular candidate, the use of specific pens, notes in some corners for the approval of a particular candidate, etc. Analyzing participation of women's NGOs in electoral processes, the participants pointed out that it is necessary not only to work more actively with the electorate, especially in

<sup>124</sup> From an interview with Aghavni Karakhanyan.

rural areas, but also to purposefully consolidate and participate in the nomination and support of female candidates.

In the assessments of women's NGOs, compared with 2007, no significant changes were noticed in relation to encouragement of participation of female candidates in the pre-election campaign processes. While candidates of political parties Heghine Bisharyan, Tamara Poghosyan, Zaruhi Postanjyan, Naira Zurabyan and Anahit Bakhshyan took part in meetings of their parties with voters, candidates running under the majoritarian electoral system generally were not visible. NGO representatives expressed regret that very active candidates with professional skills and work experience did not enter the National Assembly because they were not located in passing places. According to NGO activists, "The 2012 election campaign was a campaign of only party leaders, in which there was no place for women and their issues".

Positive changes were especially noted in media work, which in 2012 provided unbiased, objective coverage of the campaign during the entire pre-election period and equal conditions for air time for all political parties.

#### **5. Expectations to Achieve a Gender Balanced Representation in the National Assembly after Increasing Gender Quota in Election related Legislation**

The study showed that, from the beginning, NGO leaders had no particular hopes regarding the gender quota increase in the legislation on elections of the RA because the 2007 elections demonstrated that the requirement of 15% women's representation in party lists did not ensure adequate representation in the National Assembly. NGO leaders considered inclusion of one female candidate in each group of five candidates starting from the 6th place as discrimination against women. An opinion was expressed that without quotas the number of women in Parliament would have been much smaller. The study showed that such consciousness is strengthened in the public sector and that it is necessary not only to keep gender quotas, but to increase them gradually in the National Assembly and in local self-government bodies and to provide mechanisms for ensuring appropriate gender balance at all levels of the executive branch.

In the opinion of many representatives of women's NGOs, the legal requirement to increase the number of women on political party lists makes party leaders consider including literate, qualified women and will lead increased women's political participation outside of the pre-electoral phase.

## 6. Societal Attitude towards Women's Political Participation

By estimations of NGO activists, public opinion towards women's political participation in the last 5 years has become more positive. "Society is more favorable towards women;" "Listening and watching women in the National Assembly sessions and in events of political parties became common;" "Citizens do not look anymore at this fact with rounded-eyes, on the contrary, they are somewhat proud that women succeed in particular areas".

Changes in youth were also noted. Young girls are becoming more active every year; gradually the stereotypical perceptions of women's role in society are being broken.

The election of female parliamentarians in the last 5 years certainly had a positive impact on society's perception of women's political participation. However, assessments of the level and quality of their activities were contradictory. Some people think that women are more active than many men, and others were critical and noted the passiveness of some female MPs.

Nevertheless, the opinion was expressed that in different layers of society, stereotypical perceptions about women's role in politics and women's civic and political participation are still preserved. Thus, Yelena Vardanyan, a chair of the Committee on Demography and Gender Issues of the Public Council, stated:

*"... Society is democratizing, but stereotypes are strengthening more. Especially, negative attitudes with regard to women's political participation are expressed not in the middle or lower classes, but in the upper class. The people who actively participate in discussions and sign international obligations are the same people who say, as their personal opinion, that a woman's place, is out of politics"<sup>125</sup>.*

To the questions of whether public opinion promotes women's political participation and what hinders the advancement of women in politics, the majority of participants of the focus groups responded that public opinion has a great influence on women's behavior in that a friendly attitude of the society supports women's political activism and promotes their more confident activities. However, several activists from Gyumri said that "public opinion is controllable phenomenon, which can be ignored;" "Public opinion does not have influence, especially on female MPs;" and "If a woman puts a goal in front of her, she will reach it, and public opinion in this case may have no significance".

By generalizing opinions of participants of the focus groups, roundtable discussions and interviews, one can identify the most often mentioned factors that impede women's political participation:

- Political system that makes it more difficult for female leaders to be involved in politics because the existing mechanisms are not applicable to women.

<sup>125</sup> From an interview with Yelena Vardanyan.

- Lack of political will to support women's political growth by power structures.
- Lack of financial and social capital among women. This is not only financial resources, but also social relations, which often have a greater impact than money. Being out of these relationships is an obstacle, since it's prohibited for many women to enter into purely "masculine" game.
- Insufficient political culture, patriarchal thinking, and difficulty overcoming gender stereotypes.
- Women's low self-esteem and mistrust towards their own opportunities.
- Women's double workload, heavy burden of household responsibilities, inability to combine professional work with social-political activities.

## 7. Access to Politics - Gender Aspects of Motivation

In 2007, NGO activists unanimously believed that the motivation to enter politics for both women and men are purely private interests and career; however, this opinion has undergone some changes with different opinions being expressed, which were certainly influenced by the active functioning of female MPs of the previous National Assembly.

Despite the fact that a large number of respondents believed that women's motivations differ from men's, the motivations they emphasized were based on personal values, not the sex of the MP, such as; "for self-promotion, professional advancement;" "for being close to some management resources and making utmost use of them;" "for having a roof for own business or for starting a new business;" "acquiring immunity;" and "for improving material well-being."

*"Men's and women's motivations are the same. Each individual approaches with his/her way of thinking, with his/her ideas. I would not say that all men are going for a job or a business. They are also thinking of changing the ranking of the country, the same is for women. According to thinking and ideas of an individual".*

*"I am far from the idea that all women are very good and all men are bad. No doubt, as a rule, the reasons are same for men or women, but criteria can vary. If N percentage of men is going to become an MP in order to gain immunity, it is likely that among women, that N percentage can be smaller. It is not the same in terms of proportionality. There are people in both groups who are guided by pure ideas of altruism, by wish being useful for their country, for their family and so on, but of course, there are also people who are guided by purely pragmatic ideas"<sup>126</sup>.*

126 From speeches of the focus group participants.

Both among women and men, but to a lesser degree, “there are such people who seek to enter Parliament not only for their interest but also for the benefit of the country, for changing the situation.” At the same time, according to the observations of focus group participants, female MPs are more active and more responsible towards their obligations. *“All 12 women of the 4<sup>th</sup> Convocation of the National Assembly actively participated in all discussions, raised contemporary issues, defended their position, as a result of which all citizens recognize all of them by faces, which can not be said about many male MPs.”*

*“Being involved in politics in the country is more a way of earning or to ensure earnings than is a way to serve. But if we evaluate the behavior of female and male MPs, then I can see a major difference here. First, the levels of interests are different, if we take the material opportunities of women and men. Thus, it would not be fair to blame women that they are going into politics for interest, too, in any case the differences in the behavior of women in the National Assembly are visible, they are more active, more responsible, and they justify their salary by their presence, express themselves by their opinions and participation in each step of programs development. All the women of the National Assembly in general are in a higher category by their activities than all men”<sup>127</sup>.*

An opinion was expressed that women’s motivation to enter politics is radically different from the motivation of men, that *“men are likely to acquire more power; they are going to use the power; it is not even a matter of money. Whereas, women, perhaps most of them, but not taking into account the separate cases, think more about social change than men;”* *“if for a man the purpose is mainly business development and earning of money, then women are more concerned about their family, about the future of children. And a woman is not only limited to family, she is also thinking about others - even friends, people;”* *“women go to parliament as party members, for ideological reasons, while men mostly are oligarchs, business people who want to secure their position, to be appreciated, to have big rights;”* and *“goals of women and men in the Parliament are very different. There are women who, by their example, want to change the existing stereotypes that politics is mere men’s activity”<sup>128</sup>.*

It is characteristic that the majority of participants of the focus groups, and some experts of social movements in Yeghegnadzor and Vayk, are in favor of such opinion.

127 From speeches of the focus group participants.

128 From speeches of the focus group participants.

## 8. Cooperation of Women's NGOs and Political Parties as a Factor of Democratization

The study of cooperative dynamics among women's NGOs and political parties and women's councils shows that in recent years the forms and scope of interaction have significantly expanded. Women's NGOs have initiated a number of meetings, joint seminars, roundtable discussions and conferences that promote setting up connections and exchanging information and ways to search for and solve different problems. NGOs provide services to increase the level of education of female members of political parties by distributing literature and results of ongoing surveys and by conducting special trainings for activists and others.

The study showed that NGOs show a deep understanding and realize the cooperative role between those institutions for the development of civil society and advancement of democratic processes. Women from political parties are more often involved in joint discussions of current issues, especially discussions of initiatives aimed at improving the regulatory framework (e.g., discussions on changes in the Electoral Code and on draft law on "Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities of Women and Men").

NGO leaders estimated that these measures are "useful for women in political parties, they start to realize that they can get a large amount of information from NGOs - statistical information, research conducted by NGOs, cases, i.e. all the things they do not have and have no resources or opportunities to obtain." Political parties actively use opportunities of NGOs as a campaign platform in the pre-election campaign. However, a majority of NGO activists state that there are no grounds to qualify this process as cooperation because "there is no movement of people in the opposite direction - from parties to the NGO sector."

Leaders of public movements strongly believe that the development of true partnerships between these two parts of civil society is only possible when they can unite on common goals and strategies.

## 9. Obstacles of Cooperation between Women's NGOs and Political Parties

Despite the growing cooperation, the existing distrust between political parties and NGOs has not yet been overcome. The underestimation of the role and significance of NGOs as a civil society institute on behalf of parties still remains, "*an understanding of the relationship between public and the highest and the not-highest power is not displayed; there is no understanding that political party relies on public opinion. This connection, as a rule, is either carried out by one channel or is not sufficiently substantiated*"<sup>129</sup>.

<sup>129</sup> From speeches of the focus group participants.

Women's NGOs have expressed a concern that parties may use it for their own political benefit to solve party problems rather than the problems and mandate for which they were created.

## 10. Position of NGOs in Supporting Female Candidates

The survey showed that in the matter of nomination and support of female candidates in the National Assembly of the RA women's organizations see their mandate not in directly supporting women in electoral processes but in constant, consistent, and targeted work in the pre-election period aimed at empowering women's political participation and in the creation of favorable social and legal conditions that ensure equal opportunities for men's and women's advancement. While they did not exclude the theoretical possibility of supporting certain female candidates under certain conditions, but they were ambiguous about what would be the correct and appropriate approach. The majority of leaders and activists considered the main function of NGOs as being to support the insurance of free, fair, and honest elections.

Thus, Aida Topuzyan, the president of Women's Republican Council notes that *"Women's Republican Council has never supported anyone and is not going to support. We are for fair and transparent electoral processes. Our organization controls the process and wishes elections to be fair and transparent. We support neither parties nor separate individuals"*<sup>130</sup>.

According to Gohar Shahnazaryan, the co-president of the Women's Resource Center *"Our organization could have organized a PR campaign using our resources, if the approaches of a female candidate would have been consistent with our approach and such support could have been correct from a strategic aspect. Naturally, if it was possible to create an NGO coalition for supporting female candidates, the outcome would have been much more effective"*<sup>131</sup>.

*"I am not sure that women should vote for women"* says Natalia Martirosyan: *"I do not want to say that women's NGOs are not campaigning, on the contrary, they contribute to women to go forward, that women are not only running, but also are elected. So I think in this terms, support is tangible and should be. This is necessary, because strategic objectives of female candidates and women's organizations should coincide. If we want women's serious representation in the parliament, then it implies also support from women's organizations, in order it would be able to demand from female MPs. Support forms may be different: presence of proxies, work in local elections offices of female candidates running under the majoritarian electoral system"*<sup>132</sup>.

130 From an interview with Aida Topuzyan.

131 From an interview with Gohar Shahnazaryan.

132 From Natalia Martirosyan's speech at a focus group in Yerevan.



*“I do not know certain examples of nomination and support of their candidates by women’s organizations; said Aghavni Karakhanyan: “Many women’s organizations, like the Association of Women with University Education, suggested that candidates were nominated from women’s structures. Public figures, naturally, would not enter the majoritarian lists and become a member of party because being in the party list for the future is not such a good “idea”. It turns out that we are dealing with both ends of wood. It turns out that the field of activities is very small. I do not think that it would be full-fledged political participation”<sup>133</sup>.*

*“Definitely, I do not agree that an NGO should be by political parties’ side and moreover support candidates. I, as a president of an NGO, do not see any point of contact. Moreover, I think that, they, politicians should be by NGOs side”<sup>134</sup>; - emphasizes Nona Margaryan.*

## **11. Gender Policy Concept Paper and Strategy in Ensuring Balanced Participation of Women and Men**

The study results showed that it is too early to speak about the impact of “Gender Policy Concept Paper” and “2011-2015 Gender Policy Strategy of the RA” adopted by the RA Government on women’s and men’s balanced participation in public life. The implementation of the strategy has not started everywhere. The works of awareness-raising of gender equality issues planned for three marzes has started only in Vayots Dzor. By the active participation of the deputy governor and community leaders, a series of seminars were held for various groups of the population, including youth and schoolchildren. NGO leaders in Yerevan and Gyumri were not aware of any steps in this direction that have taken place; in fact, out of 21 participants of the Gyumri focus group, only 2 knew about the adopted concept paper and strategy. Therefore, one can conclude that the responsible people for project implementation within each region have not performed their duties. Only leaders of NGOs operating in Yerevan knew about the draft law on “Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities of Men and Women” which passed already the first reading, and very few of them were aware of the content.

Focus group participants in Yerevan and in the regions were concerned that these documents may have the same destiny as previous documents on improving women’s status, which have remained on paper. Recommendations were raised in this regard about the necessity to conduct public monitoring over the implementation of the Gender Strategy and for governor offices and municipalities to appoint responsible persons for the implementation of gender policy and to allocate financial resources for the implementation of the strategy.

133 From Aghavni Karakhanyan’s speech at a focus group in Yerevan.

134 From an interview with Nonna Margaryan.

## CONCLUSIONS ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE 2012 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA AND RECCOMENDATIONS AIMED AT INCREASING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The 2012 parliamentary elections of the RoA took place after amendments in the Electoral Code increased the gender quota from 15% to 20% and women were required to be included in each group of 5 candidates of party lists starting from the 6th place, with the proportion of each gender to not exceed the 80% of in each integer group of 5.

5 parties passed to the parliament by the election results: the Republican Party of Armenia - 44.1%, "Prosperous Armenia" - 30.2%, "The Heritage" - 5.8%, "Armenian Revolutionary Federation"- 5.7%, "The Rule of Law" - 5.5% and one alliance of parties "Armenian National Congress" - 7.1%.

Women's representation in the 5th Convocation of the Parliament comprises 10.67% as compared to 9.2% in the 2007 elections, so the quota increase ensured just a slight progress.

In the Republican Party of Armenia faction, which got the majority of seats at the RA parliament, among 69 MPs there are only 9 women (13%).

In the "Prosperous Armenia", which is the second largest faction, there are only 2 women among 37 MPs (5.4%) though in the same party, women had comprised 12% in the 4th Convocation of the Parliament.

Among 7 MPs in the "Armenian National Congress" faction, there is only 1 woman (14%).

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation faction passed to the Parliament without women. In the 2007 elections, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation was one of the two parties which exceeded the 15% quota stipulated by law by including women's representation at 18.7%.

Only 2 factions among the 6 factions of the 5th Convocation of the Parliament achieved 20% representation by women: “the Heritage” and “The Rule of Law” parties each included 1 woman in a faction consisted of 5 MPs.

On average, political parties included women at 22.8% of their proportional electoral lists, so as a result of the elections, the representation percentage was cut in half.

Since only 2 out of 14 women were elected under the majoritarian electoral system, the parliamentarian parties did not have any progress in ensuring gender quota stipulated by law.

Moreover, the 20% quota, which was stipulated in the Electoral Code to ensure women's appropriate representation, was devalued. The mechanism for promoting the increase of the number of female representatives did not work due to inter-party reshuffling and self-withdrawals.

The research on the changing numbers of women elected as MPs under the majoritarian electoral system revealed a decreasing tendency starting from 1995. This is explained by severe fighting and commercialization of the elections under the majoritarian electoral system, by using negative campaigning, and partially by a decreasing number of single-mandate constituencies. As a result of the amendments of the Electoral Code, the number of single-mandate constituencies decreased twice from the 2nd Convocation of the Parliament (1999) to the 4th Convocation (2007), and the number of women nominated under the majoritarian electoral system decreased 10 times.

However, it's worth comparing the encouragement of women's participation under the majoritarian electoral system to the 2007 elections. While in 2007, 6 out of 11 women announced self-withdrawals without participating later in election competition, in the 2012 elections there was only one self-withdrawal as opposed to 40 male candidates under the majoritarian electoral system. The number of votes for women under the majoritarian system running by self-nomination principle increased. In 2007, all 5 women were nominated by their party's initiative, and in the 2012 elections, 6 out of 11 women were non-partisan, and only 2 were nominated by parties.

Women's low representation in the Parliament is the consequence of the situation that in the 2012 as well as in 2007 elections the post-election self-withdrawal practice was maintained. According to the data of the Central Election Commission, 102 candidates submitted self-withdrawal applications, including 26 women candidates comprising 25%. Moreover, 24 of those represented parties that, according to the election results, gained the 1st and the 2nd places by MP. If in case of the Republican Party of Armenia only one out of 14 self-withdrawn women was on the passing place

of the list with the remaining ones being nominated starting from the 46th place, then 3 out of 10 women from Prosperous Armenia that have abandoned their mandate were included before the 28th place, therefore were on passing places.

Thus, the 20% quota introduced in legislation and the requirement of involving women in each group of 5 candidates in political party lists starting from the 6th place did not ensure real enhancement of women's representation. The gender composition of the newly elected parliament continues to be gender-imbalanced. Women comprise only 10.67% in the RoA Parliament, which is significantly lower than the international average of 19.6%.

Some positive changes took place in leadership and in Standing Committees of the RoA Parliament. Hermine Naghdalyan was elected a vice-speaker of the Parliament; Naira Zohrabyan was elected a chair of the Standing Committee on European Integration, and Elinar Vardanyan was elected a chair of the Standing Committee on Protection of Human Rights and Public Affairs.

The review and assessment of women's political participation in the 2012 parliamentary elections gave us an opportunity to raise reasons of women's low competitiveness in elections and those factors that prevent women's political careers:

- the lack of a system developing female candidates and lack of reserve for nominating female candidates on a state level;
- limited representation of women in those areas of society and in governing levels where women can pass political preparation courses and afterwards be entered into politics;
- slowness of steps of the state gender policy directed at advancing women and overcoming gender imbalances in decision-making levels;
- underestimation by political parties of the necessity to develop measures for increasing women's representation in the parliament as in an organ of representational democracy;
- deficit of inter-party democracy, lack of mechanisms for encouraging women in public and political fields, and lack of women's political socialization;
- imperfectness of electoral processes, severity of political struggles, criminalization of political struggles, and high level of commercialization of elections;
- weakness of democratic institutions, NGOs, and mostly of women's organizations and the lack of a women's movement;
- absence of political experience among women and an absence of mastering of new campaign management technologies among female candidates;

- insufficient level of society's political culture and lack of a system for preparing and developing female leaders;
- distrust towards female candidates based on misperceptions and discriminatory actions within society from both men and women,
- women's low self-esteem and inner psychological barriers as consequence of lack of a systematic political socialisation of women within parties and in society;
- prevalence of patriarchal values in society and of gender stereotypes, and overall lack of promotion of women's political participation,
- stereotypes of women's participation in the political life of society spread through mass-media.

## Recommendations

The review and assessment of women's political participation in the 2012 parliamentary elections provided an opportunity to come up with several recommendations:

*on implementing recommendations of the UN Convention on Political Rights of Women, of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on 2002-2007 Country Report of Armenia, and in the area of improving Armenian legislation with the goal of achieving gender equality:*

### ▪ To the RoA Government

- To ensure the implementation of international obligations, particularly Actions of Eastern Partnership, achieving gender equality and women's involvement in political activities.
- To take measures towards increasing the effectiveness of the state gender policy implementation and to ensure widespread control of implementation of international obligations related to advancement of women in decision-making levels by ministries and local authorities.
- To examine the experience of European countries and the possibility of incorporating methods into state actions for achieving gender equality in all areas of civil and political life,
- To finance the activities of political parties that take into account gender policy implementation and ensure the advancement of women's political participation.

**▪ To the RoA Parliament**

- To quicken the adoption process of the draft law on “Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men” which contains tools for achieving gender equality in all areas of civil and political life.
- Corresponding to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommendations, to discuss the issue of amending women’s representation quota in party lists to at least 25% in the RoA Electoral Code; to fix in the legislation that at least one representative of different sex must be represented in each group of five candidates of the list, and in the case that a woman withdraws herself, the next woman from the list must replace her.

**▪ To Political Parties**

- To develop and implement actions to integrate a gender component in the platforms and practice of political parties and to raise awareness of party members.
- To examine the experience of achieving gender equality of European political parties and the possibility of using positive discriminatory methods.
- To promote training for women in political parties and to form women’s advancement mechanisms in the governing structures of parties.
- To improve cooperation between women’s councils of political parties and NGOs in regard to women’s political advancement issues.

**▪ To Non-Governmental Organizations**

- To support the organization of women’s leadership schools in the capital and in the regions using the principle of identifying the most competitive women leaders.
- To develop modules and programs for women to take part in election campaigns, including enhancing their political, legal and economic knowledge; knowledge of electoral campaign technologies; skills for working with, the media; and psychological trainings on leadership.

▪ **To Society, in General:**

- To expand inclusion of gender education at schools and universities,
- To conduct educational programs raising gender awareness within the public at-large through all types and means of mass media.
- To conduct special educational courses for journalists to fairly represent female leaders; and to promote the inclusion of PR campaigns in the media on overcoming gender stereotypes and on women's advancement, especially during the election period.

**Female Members of the Fifth Convocation of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia**

**“Republican Party of Armenia” Faction – 9 women**

1. HermineNaghalyan, deputy of the previous convocation of the National Assembly, member of the executive body of the Republican Party of Armenia, president of women’s council of the Republican Party of Armenia, PhD in Economic Sciences
2. ShushanPetrosyan, soloist of Armenian State Philharmonic Orchestra, honoured artist of the Republic of Armenia, member of the Republican Party of Armenia, painter and graphic artist
3. KarineAtshemyan, deputy of the previous convocation of the National Assembly, member of women’s council of the Republican Party of Armenia, actress
4. Ruzanna Muradyan, director of the Gr. Zohrab School # 43, member of women’s council of the Republican Party of Armenia, physicist, Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences
5. MargaritYesayan, journalist(“Aravot” daily), member of the Republican Party of Armenia, specialist of Armenian language and literature
6. Naira Karapetyan, PR responsible for Road Safety National Council Secretariat of the Republic of Armenia, member of the United Liberal National Party (ULNP), orientalist
7. Arpine Hovhannisyan, lecturer in the Civil Law Department of Yerevan State University, member of the Republican Party of Armenia, lawyer
8. KarinePoghosyan, elected deputy of the National Assembly from electoral district #017, director of Artashat secondary school #1, member of the Republican Party of Armenia, physicist-teacher
9. Marine Marabyan, elected deputy of the National Assembly from the electoral district #40, executive director of “International MasisTabak” LLC, orientalist-philologist



**"Prosperous Armenia" Faction – 2 women**

10. Naira Zohrabyan, deputy of the previous convocation of the National Assembly, drama studies
11. Elinar Vardanyan, member of the RA Chamber of Advocates, lawyer-consultant at "First Mortgage Company", lawyer-expert

**"Armenian National Congress" Faction – 1 woman**

12. Lyudmila Sargsyan, chairperson of the Social Democrat Hunchakian Party, mathematician-programmer

**"Rule of Law" Faction – 1 woman**

13. Heghine Bisharyan, deputy head of the Rule of Law party, deputy of the previous convocation of the National Assembly, teacher of Armenian language and literature, Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences

**"Heritage" Faction – 1 woman**

14. Zaruhi Postanjyan, deputy of the previous convocation of the National Assembly, lawyer-jurist

### **Women in the Leading Positions of the Fifth Convocation of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia**

#### **4 Women were elected in the leading positions of the National Assembly:**

Hermine Naghdalyan, vice president of the National Assembly, "Republican" (RPA) Faction, president of women's council of the Republican party of Armenia;

Naira Zohrabyan, chair of the Standing Committee on European Integration of the National Assembly, "Prosperous Armenia" Faction;

ElinarVardanyan, chair of the Standing Committee on Protection of Human Rights and Public Affairs, "Prosperous Armenia" Faction; and

Heghine Bisharyanis the only female head of the parliamentary factions - the "Rule of Law" Faction.

### **Women's Representation in the Standing Committees of the National Assembly**

5 women are represented in the Standing Committee on Science, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport.

3 women deputies - HeghineBisharyan, ZaruhiPostanjyan and Lyudmila Sarg-syan are represented in 2 committees at the same time.

#### **Women aren't represented in 4 out of 12 committees:**

- In the Standing Committee on Foreign Relations;
- In the Standing Committee on Territorial Management and Local Self-Government;
- In the Standing Committee on Defence, National Security and Internal Affairs;
- In the Standing Committee on Financial-Credit and Budgetary Affairs.

## *Annex 2*

### **Data on local and international observers**

31451 observers, 54 non-governmental organizations took part as local observers in elections.

647 observers, 11 organization took part as international observers.

### **International observers about women's participation in the elections**

Radmila Sekerinska, head of the Election Observation Mission of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights for the 2012 National Assembly elections of the Republic of Armenia, presenting the interim report, assessed women's representation in the electoral lists of political parties positive.

"It is noteworthy that quota on increasing women's participation in political processes was foreseen in the new electoral code. The meaning and implementation of the quota were significant and had positive influence; although there are also some concerns related to this issue. Women included in the lists of the political parties, after being elected, often submit applications for their withdrawals and in that case the meaning of quota is being smoothened", - stated Sekerinska, also mentioning that 32% of the heads of the electoral commissions and 44% of the members were women.

"It means that ... gender quota was maintained during organization of the elections. Non-governmental organizations dealing with protection of women's rights were also very active, majority of local observers were women which is only praiseworthy", mentioned Radmila Sekerinska<sup>135</sup>.

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135 From Radmila Sekerinska's speech.

### **Gender Composition of the Election Commissions**

3 out of 7 members of the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Armenia are women; one of them is a deputy chairman of the CEC.

Women's representation composed 30.5% in the 41 Territorial Election Commissions, including in Yerevan Territorial Election Commissions 34%, in regional Territorial Election Commissions 28%.

Only 16% are women in the leading composition of the Territorial Election Commissions, only 3 of them are chairs, 8 women are deputies and 9 women are secretaries.

Women composed 44% in 1982 Precinct Election Commissions, 1/3 of all chairs of Precinct Election Commissions are women.

**ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN WITH UNIVERSITY EDUCATION  
GENDER STUDIES CENTER**

**WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION  
IN THE 2012 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF  
ARMENIA**

Analytical Overview

**Jemma Hasratyan**

*Director of the Gender Studies Center*

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