

Voice of America Interview
Anthony Bowyer, IFES Program Manager for Central Asia and Caucasus
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The international press has addressed the results of the Armenian presidential elections through various articles. *The Economist* in its article entitled "Out of Armenia, Something New?" suggests that Serge Sargsyan after acquiring the presidential seat has many things to accomplish and writes, "Small and landlocked, Armenia has been blockaded by Azerbaijan and Turkey since it won a vicious war in 1994 for possession of Nagorno-Karabakh, a province of Soviet Azerbaijan that was mostly populated by Armenians. Russian troops patrol some of its borders and, though economic growth has been fuelled by a building boom and dollops of aid from America and the Armenian diaspora, much of the recent wealth is concentrated in the hands of oligarchs."

The *International Herald Tribune* in an article entitled, "Thousands protest Armenian election result" suggests that the current situation has raised unease among oil-rich Caspian Sea and Southern European countries, since Armenia falls at their crossroads and is of military importance to them. "Yerevan was the scene of weeks-long protests following outgoing President Robert Kocharian's re-election in 2003, which the opposition also called fraudulent. The protests never gained momentum, however, like in neighboring Georgia or Ukraine, where demonstrations brought opposition leaders to power in what became known as the Rose and the Orange revolutions."

The *New York Times* also refers to the protests following to the presidential elections writes, "The protests have so far not turned violent, as political protests have in many former Soviet states, including those in Armenia's neighbors Georgia and Azerbaijan. ... Still, they have cast a shadow over democracy in Armenia, a tiny landlocked country whose governments have tended to be more tolerant of dissent than those in many other post-Soviet states."

Reuters, in its article entitled "Turkey eyes normal ties with Armenia after election" refers to Turkey President Gul's congratulatory note to Serge Sargsyan, which says "For the normalization of relations between Turkish and Armenian peoples...I sincerely wish that ... an atmosphere based on reciprocal trust and cooperation can be established that will contribute to regional peace and prosperity."

OSCE Observer's Mission has announced that the presidential election has mostly been compatible with international standards. Post-election efforts are still taking place in Armenia. Our correspondent, Aram Vanetsyan, talked about the analysis of the post-election efforts in Armenia with IFES in Washington, DC.

Vanetsyan: Which were the major problems of the presidential elections in Armenia and what lessons could the government and people of Armenia take from these elections?

These were the questions that were answered by Anthony Bowyer, Eurasia and Asia Program Manager at IFES, who notes that despite serious frauds taken place in 16 percent of polling stations, serious improvement in the electoral process can be observed compared to previous elections. The analyst related the protests following election day to the lack of full transparency in the electoral process. Related to this is the lack of balanced analysis in the media. But one has to praise that the CEC accepts that frauds have taken place. Furthermore, during this presidential election the rights of the disabled were respected. The disabled had been denied voting opportunity for years previously.

As he said, IFES has played a role in providing them the possibility to vote. In Armenia, nowadays it is very important to change the laws regarding financing of campaigns, which according to Mr. Bowyer is also a problem in the United States and IFES is ready to work on this with different stakeholders in Armenia. In regards to the similarities and differences with the presidential elections in Georgia, Anthony Bowyer said that in both cases there are improvements. The lessons that should be drawn from the Armenian elections are that transparency should be absolute and this does not just concern the voting day, but the period preceding it is much more important.

The IFES program manager of Eurasia and Asia division finds that it is very important to educate people about electoral processes, and emphasizes education of the youth, not only of college students but also of primary and secondary school students. As is clear politics and money have a vital role especially when they work together, and IFES has research on this for a few years already. "In different countries we research to find out the sources of campaign financing. In Armenia, we have brought this project to the attention of government, CEC, political parties and NGOs. And we are trying to initiate the process to have laws, which will overlook the financing of campaigns," he said.

IFES is working with journalists, to teach them how one should investigate and inform people of financial sources to the population. In one month, IFES will publish a report about the financing resources of Armenia's election campaign.