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ARMENIA'S 1996 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION COVERAGE IN THE MEDIA

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Political Forces in Armenia Before the Elections

Seven candidates were registered for the presidential race: Lanser Agalovyan, Paruir Airikyan, Sergei Badalyan, Vazgen Manukyan, Ashot Manucharyan, Aram Sarkisyan and Levon Ter-Petrosyan.

Of the seven presidential contenders, three - Vazgen Manukyan, Ashot Manucharyan and Levon Ter-Petrosyan - were in the past members of the Karabakh Committee. Their ways parted, however, shortly after Armenia gained independence.

Vazgen Manukyan was the first Chairman and author of the ideological principles and the first programme of the Armenian All-National Movement; he was Prime-Minister of Armenia between August, 1990 and September, 1991. Toward the end of 1991, Manukyan initiated the creation of the radical opposition National Democratic Union, bringing together co-thinkers and former members of the Armenian All-National Movement. Between 1992 and 1993, Vazgen Manukyan was Minister of Defence of the Republic of Armenia.

Ashot Manucharyan, President's Advisor on the issues of national security and the second most influential person in the country before February 1994, had temporarily stepped aside from political activities. He was nominated as a presidential candidate by the Scientific-Industrial and Civil (Civic) Union, professing social-democratic views.

Levon Ter-Petrosyan, President of Armenia, is backed by the ruling

Armenian All-National Movement and is its uncontested (unilateral) leader. At the time of the elections the Armenian All-National Movement has a parliamentary majority of 90% of the Members of Parliament.

Sergei Badalyan is First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia.

Aram Sarkisyan was the last First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia before the Soviet Union disintegrated. Later, however, he abandoned communist ideas and became leader of Armenia's Democratic Party, whose platform can be described as social-democratic.

Lanser Agalovyan is a prominent scientist, academician, and Director of the Institute of Mechanics of the Academy of Sciences. In 1991, a public-political organisation Artsakh-Armenia (registered in 1992) was founded at his initiative, whose aim was to achieve a just and peaceful settlement of the Karabakh issue.

Paruir Airikyan is a well-known human rights activist who spent a total of 18 years in Soviet prisons, camps and in exile. With around 15% of the vote, he rated second after Levon Ter-Petrosyan in the presidential election in 1991.

Armenia's political spectrum embraces more than 50 political parties and public-political associations, most of them created on the eve or in the early days of Armenia's independence. Along with these, the three so-called "traditional national parties" exist and function: the Armenian Revolutionary Federation Dashnaksutiun, the Ramkavar- Azataken Party of Armenia and the Gnchak party. The Ramkavar- Azataken Party of Armenia is an alliance of two parties and is somewhat "younger" than the other two (each more than a hundred-year-old) parties.

Essentially, the programmes of the parties differ in their treatment of two problems. First, their approach to the concept of national ideology and its main constituent Ai Dat (the Armenian issue). Political orientations of the parties in this regard range from the most irreconcilable - "Dashnaksutiun" and the National Democratic Union - to the most "tolerant" - the Armenian All-National Movement whose current programme, for instance, acknowledges the 1915 genocide of the Armenian people purely for moral purposes and regards the existence of a national ideology as a fascist anachronism.

Second, economic policy. The differences in this regard are somewhat smooth though, as all, even the radical left-wing Communist Party of Armenia, admit the necessity of private property and acknowledge that the methods of the ongoing privatisation had been incorrect.

The formation of party blocs shortly before the presidential elections demonstrated that the division of parties into the left-wing and the right-wing is meaningless in Armenia, since parties close in terms of their political orientation were united in opposite blocks with their former, seemingly irreconcilable, rivals.

An important indicator of the political reality was the Presidential decree

of December, 1994 banning the Dashnak party. The decree was later endorsed by the January 13, 1995 Decision of the Supreme Court of Armenia. Not only were all party publications shut down, but also those publications suspected of being affiliated with the Dashnaktsutiun. The Information Agency "Ailura" and the "Mikael Varandyan" publishing house were also closed. Afterwards the party leadership was arrested. Despite the ban, however, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation Dashnaktsutiun remains among the most influential political forces in Armenia. In the presidential elections Dashnaktsutiun supported Vazgen Manukyan. The Dashnak party leader Vaan Oganesyanyan was detained facing charges of treason and of masterminding a coup conspiracy.

An opinion poll conducted in May 1996, three months prior to the elections, showed that 51.9% of the Yerevan residents supported Levon Ter-Petrosyan's re-election, 33.8% were against, while 14.3% were undecided. At the same time, 68.9% of those living in the capital had no clear preferences for any of the parties, 11.5% supported the Armenian All-Union Movement, 10.9% - the Communist Party, 0.8% - the National Democratic Union, 4.2% - the Armenian Revolutionary Federation Dashnaktsutiun.

These findings demonstrate the influence of the Russian media on the Armenian voters. The opinion polls were conducted at the time of Russia's presidential elections in which the ruling party defeated the Communist Party. As will be seen later in the article, these findings played their part in Ter-Petrosyan's election campaign.

The presidential campaign was launched 30 days before the election day. On September 10, 1996 three opposition candidates Paruir Airikyan, Lenser Agalovyan and Aram Sarkisyan announced their decision to withdraw from the race and gave their support to Vazgen Manukyan. Formally the announcement was made on September 17, 1996. During that week they used the free air time allotted to them on television to promote Vazgen Manukyan's bid for the presidency. This caused protest on the part of Petrosyan's electoral headquarters. However, the Central Election Commission did not deem the behaviour to be unlawful.

The Armenian Media Before the Elections

The current (1995-1996) stage of development of the Armenian Media is characterised by the high degree of involvement of the print media in the election campaigns - the 1995 parliamentary and the 1996 presidential campaigns (2).

However, a certain instability in the press needs to be mentioned. Demand remains low. Newspaper publishing in Armenia is a loss-making business: the prices are too high for most of the potential readers. The high paper cost and the relatively small demand (and consequently low circulation) deprive the newspaper publishing houses of any hope of profit-making. Hence, newspapers are closely tied to the sources of funding (sponsors, maecenas, founders) without whom they are doomed to bankruptcy.

The local press too is unstable. Along with the change in the

administrative-territorial division of Armenia and the disbanding of regional administrations (October 1995 - March 1996), most local newspapers also ceased to exist. Only a few of them became organs of local (provincial) administrations. The structural and organisational changes entailed by these processes were completed by May, 1996.

When describing the state of the media in Armenia, it must be noted that the system of party (partisan) press is already established. Yet, although there are more than 50 political organisations in the country, the number of party publications is only a little over 20.

Seven of these are published by the Association of National Self-Determination (ANSD), including one magazine *Airenik* and six newspapers, of which two, the Armenian Language *Ankakhutiun* and the Russian *Svoboda*, are republican and four, *Sisian*, *Masis*, *Talin*, and *Vanadzor*, are local. However, in 1996 the ANSD newspapers did not come out and, therefore, the Association did not participate in the election campaign.

The Armenian All-National Movement publishes five newspapers, of which one, *Aik*, is national and four, *Charentsavan*, *Artashat*, *Martuni* and *Kapan*, are local.

Only six party newspapers are published on a regular basis. The rest come out at long intervals.

Governmental structures are also active in publication activities. For instance, the former legislative body, the Supreme Council, founded the *Aiastani Antrapetutiun* newspaper and co-founded the newspaper *Republic of Armenia*; the status of these newspapers is still to be determined, since they are subsidised by the Government, and the National Assembly still has no newspapers of its own. The Municipality of Yerevan, local administrations, executive committees of town (city) and village councils also publish their newspapers. The Ministries of Defence, Internal Affairs, Information, Education, Agriculture and Purchasing, and Social Security also have their own newspapers, journals, brochures and TV programmes, while the Vanadzor garrison of the Ministry of Defence is even a founder of a local press-centre and a TV channel.

The national television in Armenia is run by the state. Currently there is no independent TV company that could successfully compete with the state television. With a degree of success, however, small local stations with relatively well-developed networks try to do this.

The national radio in Armenia is also run by the state. In Yerevan two stations broadcast on ultra-short waves - HiFM (or HaiFM) and Lasto. According to the polls, however, they are not serious competitors of the state-run radio (3).

Pre-Election Campaign Coverage in the Media

STATE - RUN MEDIA

Television

The state-run television broadcasts on two channels. Founded in 1956, the nation-wide Channel 1 usually broadcasts six hours a day from 18:00 to 00:00. Channel 2, called Studio Nork since 1995, was introduced in 1978 and has a management of its own. Transmission of Channel 2 programs to the Ararat Valley and the foothill areas is fairly reliable. In the more remote regions, however, there are problems with reception.

Timä surveys in Yerevan indicate that television is the major source of information for 81.4% of the capital's adult population (4). About 30% of the residents of Yerevan and many in rural areas have access to cable TV or local TV stations. About 98% of households in Yerevan own a TV set. Nationwide this figure amounts to 94% (5).

The Law on Presidential Elections in the Republic of Armenia provides that each contender gets 90 minutes of free air time on Channel 1, which, on the whole, the candidates used.

The timetable of the free broadcast times was made known on October 30, 1996, a week after the presidential campaign was launched. However, appearances of the opposition candidates were often broadcast 10-15 minutes earlier than the announced time. As a result the population did not always have an opportunity to watch them in full.

The national television was also responsible for giving 180 minutes paid air time to all the candidates (charging USD20 per minute). On September 19 two candidates, Ashot Manucharyan and Vazgen Manukyan, were denied access on the grounds of the failure by the candidates to observe the application submission procedure. This explanation was endorsed by the Chairman of the Central Electoral Committee Khachatur Besirjyan in his live appearance on September 19. The representative of the Scientific- Industrial and Civil Union, however, denied the allegation and presented the documents proving that all relevant procedures had been duly observed.

It can be argued that Channel 1 of the state television was used by Ter-Petrosyan's electoral headquarters as the principal means of propaganda, for in addition to the time that the candidates were entitled to, Ter-Petrosyan was allotted as much as 1,628:30 minutes, and the rest of the contenders were given a total of 193:35 minutes. Vazgen Manukyan, Ter-Petrosyan's major challenger, only got 72:10 minutes, a large proportion of which was negative coverage.

Lraber (Herald), *Jamanakachan* (Metronome), *Dem Ar Dem* (Face to Face), *Orenk Ev Ishkhanutiun* (The Law and the Power) and *Es Entrum* (I Vote) (the latter specially timed for the presidential elections) are the main political programs on Channel 1.

All these programs in fact were unanimous in praising Ter-Petrosyan. The opposition candidates were either ignored altogether or subjected to harsh criticism. Symptomatically, on September 18, 1996 the first edition of *Lraber* lasting 13.5 minutes was entirely devoted to Ter-Petrosyan. *Jamanakachan*, too, loyally parroted the official line. *Orenk Ev*

Ishkhanutiun was devoted exclusively to Ter-Petrosyan meetings with the intelligentsia (September 13), with the leaders of the parties of the "Republic" bloc (September 16), and with Vano Siradegyan, Minister of Internal Affairs (September 17). The total duration of these programs was 2 hours and 45 minutes.

Es Entrum (I vote) was poorly disguised pre-election propaganda for Levon Ter-Petrosyan. It was broadcast during the last two weeks of the election campaign. The ten-minute programme was a blitz-inquiry of people in the street. Passers-by were asked who they were going to vote for. The selection of the material raises some questions: on average, Ter-Petrosyan was mentioned 35-40 times during the last days of the race, Manukyan 6-10 times, Badalyan 4-8 times. Interestingly, the elections in Yerevan were won by Manukyan.

One instance of Manukyan's disguised propaganda was noticed in the musical programme "Alis-A". The programme was as a result banned. Ter-Petrosyan's covert and overt propaganda is virtually ubiquitous in all programmes, including one on a report of an upcoming exhibition of dogs.

Senior political figures in Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Karabakh, also the Armenian Prime-Minister, the Ministers of Defence and Interior of Armenia and other official figures also talked in support of the incumbent president. It is difficult to judge whether appearances by Vazgen Sarkisyan, Minister of Defence and Vano Siradegyan, Minister of the Interior in Ter-Petrosyan's favour can be qualified as violation of Article 19 of the Law on Presidential Elections in the Republic of Armenia forbidding law-enforcement authorities from engaging in propaganda in favour of or against any of the candidates, since these are important political figures.

Compared to Channel 1, Channel 2 of the Armenian state television was considerably more reserved. The presidential campaign was given a total of 7.5 hours. For comparison, the total duration of programmes devoted to Ter-Petrosyan on Channel 1 amounted to approximately 30 hours.

Materials directly or indirectly related to the elections were broadcast on Channel 2 primarily in the news programme *Lurer*. Campaign ads were also broadcast reflecting various events in support of Ter-Petrosyan.

During the last week of the campaign, re-runs of different programmes from Channel 1 were shown. With the exception of reports in the news programmes, Channel 2 produced no programmes of its own. *Orenk Iv Ishkhanutiun* of September 17, 1996 with Vano Siradegyan and a film about Levon Ter-Petrosyan shown by Russia's RTR Channel accompanied by an interview with the President by the Russian journalist who had made the film were shown. It must be noted that Russian television is extremely popular in Armenia. According to the poll conducted shortly after the elections, 42.3% of the respondents trusted Armenian TV, while 55.2% trusted Russian TV. At the same time, 45.7% of the respondents expressed satisfaction with Armenian TV and 66.2% with Russian TV.

A considerable disproportion was observed in the air time allotted to

different presidential candidates on Channel 2. Ter-Petrosyan was given 225 minutes, while all the rest received a total of 69:10 minutes. However, although air time allotted to the opposition candidates on Channel 1 and Channel 2 is comparable, the fact that compared to Channel 1, Channel 2 gave considerably less time to Ter-Petrosyan demonstrates that his electoral headquarters paid less attention to this channel, apparently regarding it as less effective.

Radio

By decision of the Central Electoral Committee, each presidential candidate got 120 minutes of free air time on Channel 1 of Armenian radio. The time was set between 11:00 and 12:00 a.m. In Armenia this time slot is considered to be the prime time for radio. The schedule of the appearances was not announced.

A disproportion in favour of Ter-Petrosyan was also observed in radio coverage of the presidential campaign. It is estimated that the coverage of the incumbent president was three times more than the combined coverage of the rest of the candidates. This was basically due to the news reports, where Ter-Petrosyan's (as the Head of State's) activities, pre-election trips and appearances, as well as the activities of the First Lady during the election race were extensively reported.

Essentially the same information was broadcast five times a week in the review of that day's issue of the official paper *Aiastani Anrapetutiun*.

Newspapers

The Armenian language *Aiastani Anrapetutiun* (the Republic of Armenia, according to the newspaper, its total circulation over the campaign period was 220.000) and the Russian language *Republic of Armenia* are national newspapers (a total circulation of 105.000).

The three national newspapers accounting for the largest share of total circulation of Armenian newspapers will not be analysed here. These are *Efir*, publishing television and radio timetables and *Vozni* (hedgehog) satirical humour weekly and *02 - Vostikanakan Lratu* (02- Police herald). The latter, as an organ of the Ministry of Internal Affairs did not have the right to participate in the election campaign.

Under the electoral law, all presidential contenders were entitled to use a free 0.25 printed page for campaign purposes. Only two of the candidates used this right: Ashot Manucharyan who published daily announcements of his upcoming meetings with the voters, and Ter-Petrosyan, who published his campaign programme. The rest of the candidates did not use this right of their own free will.

The national papers openly supported the President and tried to turn public opinion in his favour. This similarity with national television was evident in the content and critical coverage of the opposition candidates (propaganda and counter-propaganda will be discussed later in the article). The figures are similar too. For example, Ter-Petrosyan accounted for 84.4% of the election coverage on Channel 1 and 81.6% in

the *Aiastani Anrapetutiun* newspaper, more than in the party newspaper *Aik* where the figure is 80.7%. Interestingly, for TV Channel 2, radio and the *Republic of Armenia* newspaper these figures are lower -51.3%,48.0% and 75.2% respectively.

The picture is largely the same as regards the number and nature of mentions of the candidates. On TV Channel 1, for instance, Ter-Petrosyan was mentioned 1,662 times, or 54.0% of the total number of mentions of all presidential contenders, while for the *Aiastani Anrapetutiun* this figure is 638 (58.2%). Besides, on Channel 1 Ter-Petrosyan's name was mentioned positively in 62.1% of cases, and 67.0% in the *Aiastani Anrapetutiun*. Naturally, the figure is higher for the newspaper *Aik*.

It should be noted that despite critical remarks by the opposition candidates on TV, the president was mentioned in a negative context only in 5% of cases. 1.4% of critical mentions were noted in the newspaper *Aiastani Anrapetutiun*, and these occurred primarily in the first ten days of the campaign. In the *Republic of Armenia* and *Aik* newspapers no critical mentions of Ter-Petrosyan were observed.

As a rule, information about Ter-Petrosyan in official newspapers was provided on the front page while the opposition candidates got the inside pages.

The tone of criticism of the opposition candidates was on the whole inoffensive, with the exception, perhaps, of publication by both papers of the transcript of Ter-Petrosyan's televised speech, where he called Manukyan a fascist and warned of the grave consequences that his election would invariably entail (undermining of relations with Russia, including defence co-operation, weakening of the army, imperilling of the independence of Karabakh, discontinuation of gas supplies from Turkmenistan, etc.). Several offensive remarks appeared in *the Republic of Armenia* newspaper. For example, in the September 28, 1996 issue Sergei Badalyan, the Communist Party candidate, was referred to as "the head of the co-operative by the name of "Armenia's Communist Party" selling "abominably rotten goods" and engaged in a "fraudulent business". The article was signed with the initials K.D.

In the September 18, 1996 issue Ashot Manucharyan's picture was placed so that an impression was created that he was staring at a nude film actress standing with her back to him. The deputy editor-in-chief responsible for the last page where the photos were printed claimed that there were no indecent implications.

Thus, the political administration of the coverage of the presidential race in the media and the ruling party newspaper was exercised from one source, namely Ter-Petrosyan's electoral headquarters. News programs extensively reporting on the activities of the incumbent president were an important instrument of propaganda.

INDEPENDENT MEDIA

Radio and Television

Two Russian television channels, ORT and RTR, are broadcast in

Armenia. In addition to several independent broadcasting stations in Yerevan, such as A1+, Mair Airenik (motherland), Baiani (broadcasting on the same frequency as the Nork Studio before and after the programmes of the latter), local cable and transmission TV stations operate in many towns and villages. As a rule, they show feature films; however, many also broadcast 10 to 20 minute news programmes.

An independent broadcasting network linking the stations from Ashtarak, Armevir, Vanadzor, Goris, Giumi, Nor-Adjna, Echmiadzin and Yerevan help local TV studios to broadcast.

Almost all the small independent studios toed the President's line. These materials, however, were not lengthy or comprehensive in content. The opposition candidates rarely applied to these stations.

Two independent radio stations - Hi-FM and Lasto - function in Yerevan. During the campaign they broadcast on FM waves. In fact, neither of these stations participated in the election campaign. So far they have not offered any serious competition to the state-run radio. Only 38% of the residents of Yerevan had a chance to receive their programs during the campaign.

Newspapers

Newspapers which are published neither by state structures nor by political parties fall under this category. These are *Aravat* (Morning - with a total circulation of 44,000 during the campaign), *Lragir* (Herald -66,000), *Molorak* (Planet - 66,000), *Golos Armenii* (the Voice of Armenia -67,600), and *Vremia* (Time - 40,000).

The independent newspapers did not hide their preferences.

Aravat

With the former Press-Secretary of the President as editor-in-chief, *Aravat* openly maintained a pro-presidential position, evidenced by the fact that in 53.6% of cases Ter-Petrosyan was mentioned in a positive, sympathetic context and was criticised only 4 times.

Providing plenty of space for information on the elections, the voting procedure, and the activities of the Central Electoral Committee, *Aravat* displayed strong sympathy for Ter-Petrosyan. The treatment of the opposition candidates was generally ironic (see the issues of August 29, 30; September 6,14,17 and 19). All leaders dealing with the opposition were accompanied by caricatures, while those focusing on Ter-Petrosyan were accompanied by photos.

Lragir

On the whole *Lragir* too supported Ter-Petrosyan. Yet the newspaper, especially in the first few weeks of the election race, sought to be neutral, or to be more accurate, was somewhat undecided about its political preferences. For example, between August 23-31 the newspaper was most critical of Sergei Badalyan (72% of the total number of remarks about him) and Ter-Petrosyan (42.1%), while only Ashot Manucharyan

(50%) and Ter-Petrosyan (30%) were mentioned in a positive light. As of September 3-7 sympathies swayed in favour of the incumbent president - and only he was mentioned in a positive context. Later, support for Ter-Petrosyan continued to grow and mostly campaign outsiders were subjected to criticism.

More than a fifth of the campaign coverage was a comparative analysis of the candidate's campaign platforms.

It must be noted though that while sympathising with Ter-Petrosyan, *Lragir* tried to maintain a balance in covering the election race, which it did not always succeed in doing.

Molorak

The newspaper was on the whole pro-opposition. However, page 5 was given over to the pro-presidential Union of Lawyers and Politologists whose articles provided a balance in the propaganda. As a result, Ter-Petrosyan received roughly the same amount of favourable and critical treatment (29.0% and 31.1% respectively). The other candidates, (with the exception of Aram Sarkisyan) were mentioned either in a neutral way or negatively. This prompts us to conclude that the newspaper was rather against all the candidates than in favour of any of them. Materials devoted to the elections were occasionally accompanied by caricatures, representing Ter-Petrosyan more often than any of his contenders.

Given the fact that the lion's share of the newspaper space (17,840 square centimetres, 40.9%) was allotted to information about Ter-Petrosyan, *Molorak* regarded him as the main presidential candidate..

Golos Armenii

Once the Dashnaktsutiun publications were banned, *Golos Armenii* became the most vociferously pro-opposition of the independent newspapers. *Golos Armenii* was the only opposition newspaper coming out three times a week and also the only one in the Russian language. The newspaper focused on social issues and social policy, Karabakh, issues relating to the activities of parties and public organisations, and foreign policy (6).

These topics dominated the campaign agenda since it was around these issues that the opposition pursued its criticism of the authorities (for more detail see Propaganda and Counter-Propaganda in the Media).

It is interesting to observe some of the headlines of the leading articles published during the campaign. This, we feel, will give a good impression of the position of the newspaper and the nature of the criticism of the authorities. August 24: "Knowledge is Power, especially for the President" (about the President reading only pro-governmental newspapers), 29 August: "The Action Plan of the Republic Block in Action!" (criticising the government's social policy), 31 August: "A Man with a Gun in the Street" (the ubiquity of armed people generates a feeling of insecurity and fear), 3 September: "For Whom the Prison Clock Tolls" (about those arrested in connection with the Dro case involving the Dashnaktsutiun), 5 September: "Shall we Build a House on

Sand?ä (comments on the President's speech about private construction in Armenia), 7 September: "There is no Method against a Crow-bar" (about the President's pre-election trips, the policies of the ruling party and the possibility of a single opposition candidate), 7 September: "Should one Invest in Armenia's Economy?" (conversation with a foreign businessman who thinks it is too early to invest because of the inadequate tax and customs systems), 14 September: "We Can No Longer Live Like This" (a letter from pensioners), 17 September: "Two Pitiless Figures can be Presented to the President" (figures indicating the number of Armenians living in Karabakh in 1987 and 1997. The latter may prove lower unless the policy regarding Karabakh is changed), 19 September: "The President Must Pay Heed" (a selection of articles claiming that nothing will be changed in Karabakh if the President is re-elected and the military solution of the problem is not put into effect), 21 September: "The President is the Guarantor of our Rights" (also a selection. If Manukyan is elected, he would become the guarantor of national unity, he is taking a risk by challenging Ter-Petrosyan's personal authority).

According to the results of the monitoring conducted by Tim in February-March, 1996, the character and tone of criticism of the authorities in the period of the campaign remained largely unchanged (7). However, the number of articles of a political character went up.

Vremia

The sympathies of the newspaper were with the opposition. Yet the generally calm and reserved tone, and the balanced approach, distinguished it from the publications discussed earlier. For example, *Vremia* published interviews with Ovanes Igityan, director of Ter-Petrosyan's electoral fund, Suren Zolian, leader of the National-Industrial and Civil Union, which had nominated Ashot Manucharyan as a candidate for the Armenian presidency, and Vazgen Manukyan, one of the presidential contenders. The opposition mainly criticised the government's social policy and corruption. Serious political analysis was complemented by colourful satire.

The newspaper published a number of analytical articles comparing the campaign platforms of the candidates and their chances (40.8%). Interestingly, their number roughly corresponded to the number of propaganda materials (47.8%).

Our judgement that *Vremia* was a pro-opposition newspaper is based on the analysis of comments about the candidates. Although Ter-Petrosyan was mentioned more often than his rivals, proportionally Manukyan received the most positive comments (41.3%) and was criticised in 4.3% of cases. The incumbent president was mentioned in a positive context in 20% of cases and negatively in 31%.

PARTY NEWSPAPERS

These are *Aik* ("Armenia", with a total circulation of 56,700 during the election campaign) - the Armenian All-National Movement newspaper, *Azg* ("Nation" - 88,000) of the Ramkavar-Azatakan (liberal-democratic) Party, *Aijm* ("Now" - 8,000) - of the National-Democratic Union, *Aiastani Communist* ("Communist of Armenia" - 54,000) - of the

Communist Party, *Iravunk* (ãRightä -17,000) - of the Constitutional Right Union, which did not have its own presidential candidate.

Azg is worthy of special mention among the other party publications. The Ramkavar -Azatakan Party supported Ter-Petrosyan. Most of the articles about Ter-Petrosyan were written not by the newspaper employees, and moreover some of the articles were written by those living outside Armenia (see the articles "Why I Prefer Levon Ter-Petrosyan?" in the August 28 issue, by Grigor Danielyan from Stepanakekt, the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh; "Crucial Presidential Elections" of August 30, by Arsen Nubar Mamuryan, Canada; "The Symbolic Vote of the Armenian Diaspora to the Worthiest of September 4, by Ogan Bodrumyan from Uruguay; "Let's Stay the Proven Course" of September 19, by Ervand Azatyan from the United States). It must be noted also that these articles appeared on the newspaper's fourth page.

Although the space allotted to Ter-Petrosyan (8,740 square centimetres) is more than the space given to the others (8,395 square centimetres), they still had an opportunity to express their views. The newspaper published their campaign programs, as well as interviews with them. Commentary was not provided. Sources from the newspaper's editorial board revealed that throughout the election race, the editorial board was in fact forced to comply with demands to publish propaganda materials in favour of Ter-Petrosyan. The newspaper's editor-in-chief was at that time on leave.

The newspapers *Aiastani Communist* and *Aijm* ignored all the candidates except the ones their parties had nominated. For example, Sergei Badalyan, the Communist candidate, was given a total space of 23,255 square centimetres, Ter-Petrosyan - 19,155 square centimetres and Vazgen Manukyan - 190 square centimetres. The names of the rest of the candidates only appeared in the Central Electoral Committee reports. The picture is largely the same with *Aijm*: while 10,560 square centimetres are in support of Vazgen Manukyan, 7,825 square centimetres are given to criticism of Ter-Petrosyan. The difference in the figures is explained by the fact that during the campaign the *Aiastani Communist* came out twice a week, while *Aijm* only once a week.

The *Aik* newspaper is the organ of the ruling Armenian All-National Movement. The data regarding this newspaper were provided earlier in the article when these were compared with the state-run media.

The *Iravunk* is the organ of the opposition Constitutional Right Union. The Union, which has traditional links with the Dashnaks, did not nominate a candidate for the elections. It supported Vazgen Manukyan and this support became manifest already after the first week of the campaign when Manukyan received the support of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation Dashnaksutjun and when unification of his fellow opposition candidates around him began.

Propaganda and Counter-Propaganda in the Media

The opposition's propaganda was primarily to be found in the partisan press. State-run and independent media were used by the candidates for publicising their platforms. The authorities were criticised in three areas:

devastation of the economy, corruption and social policy. This, however, does not mean that other spheres of activity were *not* criticised (the government's foreign policy, attitude to the Karabakh issue, and its privatisation policy were all criticised as well). These three areas, however, were the main targets of the opposition's critical arrows.

According to opinion polls the issues of unemployment (44.7%), material well-being and low wages (34.1%), problems of the economy (21.6%) and social problems (20.8%) were among the most relevant. Thus, the opposition wisely chose to touch upon the most sensitive and painful issues for the public.

Criticism of these three areas continued throughout the entire campaign. Simultaneously, publicity for their own policies in the event of an election victory was disseminated. The opposition would first tackle the issues of economic recovery, the curbing of corruption and social problems. The promise to raise salaries in the public sector became central.

It was interesting to observe the government's counter-propaganda. Four periods can be identified here. First, from the beginning of the campaign to the end of August. It was characterised by replicating the "Yeltsin model". In essence the president travelled to different parts of Armenia, meeting with the local authorities and the public. The main criticism was directed against the Communists. However, as early as the end of August it became clear that neither the Communists nor their candidate Badalyan posed a dangerous threat to the president. The "Yeltsin model" therefore did not correspond to the realities of the political forces in the country. The president's trips and their extensive coverage in the state-run press began shortly before the beginning of the campaign.

The second period was September 1-10. It can be considered lost time since due to the trips within the country, repetition and a lack of new ideas was observed, and it was not clear against whom and by what methods counter-propaganda was to be pursued.

Meanwhile, the press reported intensified opposition negotiations on consolidating around one candidate. It was already noticeable then that Aram Sarkisyan did not pursue his own campaign in the media and that he was shifting to the background.

On September 10, a statement was jointly issued by the four opposition candidates on unification which became a milestone in the campaign. The authorities changed the direction of their counter-propaganda. The impossibility of real collaboration among the candidates and the profound ideological differences among them were often cited. These were supported by quotes from the candidates' speeches. Later, violation of the law relating to the use of free air time on TV for advertising and financial fraud were mentioned as well.

On September 17, Lanser Agalovyan, Paruir Airikyan and Aram Sarkisyan formally declared their withdrawal from the race. From this day on until the end of the campaign, the official media presented the views of Ter-Petrosian's electoral headquarters and representatives of the intelligentsia that the three shortcomings of the authorities stressed by the

opposition occurred during Vazgen Manukyan's term as Prime-Minister. According to this logic, it was Manukyan who was responsible for the devastation of the economy, corruption and the failure to make an adequate effort to address the deepening social problems.

Speeches by Siradegyan, Minister of Internal Affairs and President Ter-Petrosyan broadcast on Channel 1 marked the peak of the counter-propaganda.

One can say that Ter-Petrosyan's genuine promotion campaign only began on September 16-17. Its baseline: We achieved victory and peace in the Karabakh, we have a strong army, the truly independent Armenia will soon stand firmly on its feet, many cafes appeared in downtown Yerevan, there are customers - evidence of real recovery. True, problems remain - the economy is ruined, many citizens are socially vulnerable, there is corruption. But all these can be resolved and Ter-Petrosyan will get down to them after his re-election for the second term in office.

Thus, the President practically embraced the opposition's platform - a true feature of the "Yeltsin model".

"Victory, Stability, Progress" became the slogan of Ter-Petrosyan's campaign. It is not difficult to see that these concepts were not among the voters' priorities. Securing peace and stability is only ninth from the top (only 4.9% of respondents regarded it as a number one issue). This indicates that the direction of the election campaign was wrong. Adjustment occurred, however, during the course of the campaign which had led to the loss of the initiative.

According to the opinion poll, Vazgen Manukyan and Ter-Petrosyan's speeches inspired the highest degree of sympathy and trust (22.6% and 22.5% respectively). Paruir Airikyan came next (with 17.7%), supporting Manukyan's candidacy. Here the two major challengers for the presidency seem to be on a par with one another, yet speeches by Vazgen Sarkisyan, Minister of Defence (28.6%), Vano Siradegyan, Minister of Internal Affairs (18.9%) and Ter-Petrosyan himself (15.5%) generated the highest degree of irritation and antipathy. Thus key figures in the campaign of Ter-Petrosyan turned off the voters while his opposition was received positively.

The Media and the Public Opinion

We tried to observe the degree of influence of the media on the voter. Respondents indicated the two sources of information most significant to them during the campaign. Television, as was to be expected, topped the list (81.4%). Conversations, talks with friends, acquaintances and relatives came next (24.7%), radio came third (18.9%) and newspapers were only fourth (16.8%). This once more underscores the importance of television, and at the same time illustrates the influence of conversations on shaping public opinion with less importance given to the press.

13.8% of the respondents regularly read pro-government newspapers, while 10.7% read the opposition press. These figures are interesting in the sense that the total circulation of newspapers supporting Ter-Petrosyan

was almost two and a half times that of the opposition newspapers, where, ironically, objectivity and informativeness were more prevalent. This not only proves the pro-opposition attitudes in Yerevan, but also demonstrates the great popularity of opposition newspapers.

Four newspapers, as was to be expected, were the most popular: two - *Aiastani Antrapatutiun* (28.7% of the respondents were familiar with it) and *Azg* (24.6%) in the Armenian language and two radically opposition the *Golos Armenii* (25.5%) and the official *Respublika Armenia* (19.2%) in the Russian language. Interestingly, the degree of popularity of the newspapers mentioned is not proportional to the regularity of their publication (the *Golos Armenii* comes out three times a week, and the rest are dailies), circulation (the weekly circulation of *Aiastani Antrapatutiun* is three times that of the *Golos Armenii*), or price (the official newspapers are twice as cheap).

One can say that the reputation of the media in Yerevan somewhat suffered as a result of the campaign.

For example, for 71.5% of the respondents, opinion about television remained unchanged, for 6.9% it improved while for 15.9% it worsened. The data on other media are analogous.

Public disappointment with the media during the campaign period was observed. 38.6% were dissatisfied with the job television did, 36.6% were neutral and 17.3% were satisfied. 25.7% were dissatisfied with the programmes of Armenian radio, 28.3% were neutral, 15.6% were satisfied. Regarding newspapers, the respective figures are as follows: 21.9%, 25.5%, 11.9%. One thing must be noted here - the state has a monopoly on television in Armenia, while in Yerevan people have a choice of newspapers. Consequently, about one fifth of the readers were dissatisfied with their newspaper.

Things are similar with respect to trust in the various sources of information. 51.8% of the respondents did not trust television, 42.3% did, while 6.6% were undecided. Taking into account that television was the major source of information for 81.4% of the respondents, one can say that most television viewers did not trust the information. The picture is the same with respect to other media. 44.3% did not trust radio, 19.8% - trusted it, 39.7% did not trust the newspapers, 25.1% trusted them.

Yet the media did play a role in influencing the voters' judgement. 10.0% said that the information received through the media changed their opinion, and 10.6% felt that it clarified things. Various sources of information influenced the choice of one fifth of the voters. It must be mentioned, however, that 28.9% of the respondents named conversations, rallies and meetings with the political figures and their own intuition as the most reliable source of information. This means that the influence of the media as a regulator of public opinion and affecting political processes, was relatively small.

Finally, the majority of the respondents (45.7%) thought the chances of explaining personal positions in the media were not equal for all candidates, while 42.3% thought they were equal. 11.9% expressed no opinion on the matter.

Conclusions

1. The 1996 presidential elections were the second in the history of post-Soviet Armenia and the first truly multi-party one. In the six years following independence, Armenia had experienced a war, economic and energy blockades, and periods of internal instability. Social problems, however, including low wages in the public sector, very small pensions, high unemployment, and the poor living conditions of the residents of the disaster zone continue to plague the country and cause discontent among the largest segment of Armenia's population.

This and also the absence of the "shock-absorber" middle class allows us to conclude that **the overall background against which the 1996 elections were held was a society charged with confrontation.**

2. The campaign platforms of the seven presidential contenders were largely similar. The traditional orthodox position of the Communist Party candidate Sergei Baladyan can be mentioned. The differences between the programmes promoted by the opposition candidates and that of the incumbent President Levon Ter-Petrosyan can be seen only with respect to Ai Dat. Within the opposition camp, differences are observed in the approach to privatisation; however, virtually all insist on the revision of its course, pointing to the injustices in the process.

In this connection, **the unity of the four candidates Lenser Agalovyan, Paruir Airikyan, Aram Sarkisyan and Vazgen Manukyan around the latter is based more on personal relations rather than a commonality of political views and platforms.**

3. Armenia's mass media had had relatively recent experience of covering the parliamentary election campaign and the referendum on the Constitution in 1995.

President Ter-Petrosyan enjoyed the overwhelming support of the media. It is sufficient to note the disproportion in the campaign coverage on Channel 1: more than 1,628 minutes focused on Ter-Petrosyan against 72 minutes given to Vazgen Manukyan. Moreover, most of the reporting on the latter, especially in the last days preceding the polling day, was harshly critical.

The total circulation of the newspapers supporting Ter-Petrosyan in the period of the election campaign was 579,700 while the opposition newspapers totalled 252,600, of which Aiastani Communist (54,000) supported Sergei Badalyan, and the rest (198,600) supported Vazgen Manukyan. Such discrepancy in the media coverage of candidates allows us to state that **the election campaign of Manukyan, who according to the final official results of the elections won 411.29% of the vote, was basically conducted bypassing the media which in most cases backed the incumbent president's bid. This speaks of the fact that the Armenian mass media plays a weak role as a regulator of public opinion and is not adequate for the country's society.**

4. It follows that **the influence of the mass media on the electorate, on the one hand, and the propaganda of Ter-Petrosyan, on the other,**

turned against him alienating with its aggressive nature some of the voters.

5. The analysis of the media coverage of the electoral process in the national media and in the newspaper of the ruling party *Aik* allows us to conclude that **they were governed from the centre, namely Ter-Petrosyanâs electoral headquarters.**

6. As for Ter-Petrosyanâs propaganda and counter-propaganda in the media, **the absence of a consistent programme for the election propaganda through the media was observed, as was the use of the ãYeltsin modelä of propaganda of the incumbent president.**

7. On the whole, all the candidates had free access to the state media and fully used the free air time on television and radio that they were entitled to under the law. **However, two presidential candidates were unlawfully denied the right to buy television time in the last days of the campaign.**

8. **No instances of violation of laws and regulations regarding the activities and rights of journalists was observed.** In Yerevan, representatives of independent and opposition press were not subjected to discrimination. According to the opposition statements, there were cases of threats, including physical abuse of journalists in rural areas.

9. Bias in the treatment of different presidential candidates in the covering of the election campaign on television (especially!) and radio must be considered inadmissible **since they exist and are financed by tax payers and consequently are obligated to provide their audience with balanced and unbiased information.** The programmes Jamanakachan, Lragir and Orenk Ev Ishkhanutiun on Channel 1 were the least impartial.

10. **On the whole, the treatment of all the candidates irrespective of their political affiliation** can be described as inoffensive although individual instances of unethical treatment of political opponents were observed.

Notes:

- **Mark Grigorian** - Director of the ãTeamä Centre for Media Studies.
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group conducting opinion polls in May 1996 and after the elections. The polls were carried out under the aegis of the "Team" Centre for Media Studies.

3. Biulleten Yerevanskogo Press-Cluba. - No 1, September 1996. p. 21-23.
4. Sredstva Massovoi Informatsii Armenii. - Yerevan, 1996, p. 7-10.
5. I bid, p. 86, 93.
6. Sredstva Massovoi Informatsii Armenii. Otsenki i Samootsenki. - Yerevan, 1997, p.21.
7. Sredstva Massovoi Informatsii Armenii. - Yerevan, 1996, p. 36.
8. I bid, p. 15-29, 36-37, 97-98.

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