

Fact sheet

Local Self-Governance Bodies -2016. Success Factor



According to the RA Central Electoral Commission, out of 5706 councilor candidates nominated for the September 18th and October 2nd elections to local self-governance bodies in 690 communities of the republic's ten marzes 674 were women, and 497 of them were elected. Women make up 11.5% of the total number of the elected members of the municipal councils, which is 2% higher than the results of the previous elections. In the 2016 elections, the number of women councilors almost doubled in Ararat and Aragatsotn, but significantly decreased in Gegharkunik, Shirak, and Vayots Dzor.

Today women are heading 17 communities

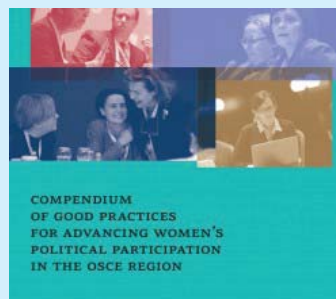


According to the data of the RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development, women are heading the following communities: V.Dvin in Ararat Marz, Arevshat and Artamet in Armavir Marz, Geghaghqar, Tsapatagh, and Shatjrek in Gegharkunik Marz, Bazum, Dashtadem, Seghahovit, and Paghaghbyur in Lori Marz, Nor Yeznka in Kotaik Marz, Akhurik and Amasia in Shirak Marz, and Hatsavan, Shikahogh, Shrevenants, and Torunik in Siunik Marz.

There are no women community heads in three marzes of Armenia: Aragatsotn, Tagus, and Vayots Dzor.

No town in the republic is governed by a woman.

Local Self-Governance Bodies in the OSCE Countries



According to the 2016 data, the average indicator of women's representation in local self-governance bodies of the OSCE countries is 36%. Women make up 5-25% of the total number of community heads, according to the *Compendium of Good Practices for Advancing Women's Political Participation in the OSCE Region*. It should be noted that back in 1999 the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities adopted a resolution, which envisages to provide for a balanced representation of women and men at the level of local decision making.

Woman & politics

November 2016

www.WomenNet.am

Community Consolidation: A new "glass ceiling" for women



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“If not me, then who?”



Pictured are Hermine Mkrtchyan, Armenuhi Vardanyan, and Kristina Mkrtchyan

«Motherland for me is not its mountains and stones, squares and streets, Ararat and Sevan, motherland is that little child, who, holding the hands of his/her parents, is leaving Armenia, and separating from his/her roots... Leaving is the future of all us. I do not want to leave, I want to struggle for the sake of not-yet-emigrated “motherland.” If not me, then who – this is what we had thought prior to making a decision about participation, “says GALA TV company reporter Armenuhi Vardanyan, who, on October 2, together with other like-minded persons, participated in the elections of Gyumri councilors through the GALA party proportional list. By the way, the Gyumri and Vayots Dzor elections of councilors have revealed an interesting regularity: many parties took part in the elections with their young teams, for whom “If not me, then who?” proposition is a lifestyle...

Seven out of 22, i.e. 32% of the candidates included in the electoral list of the newly-formed political force the *Alliance of Like-Minded Liberals*, or GALA, are women. The first ten positions included three women candidates with Kristina Mkrtchyan, editor-in-chief of the website Galatv.am, in the third place, Armenuhi Vardanyan in the fifth place, and Hermine Mkrtchyan in the seventh. All three of them are of Armenia's independence age, journalists, members of the GALA party and the NGO *Team Resource Center for Civic Initiatives*. As noted by Armenuhi Vardanyan in a conversation with us, women's representation in their list is not a tribute to a legal requirement since women are truly quite active in their party and well known in Gyumri thanks to their journalistic and public activities. The people of Gyumri, upon seeing them, often call them the GALA girls.

“And we are proud that this expression is associated with determination, courage, and adherence to principles,” clarified our interlocutor with a smile.

“In our team, women have a special role and importance, and it would not be immodest to say that almost everybody in Gyumri knows the GALA girls. They know because, during different periods, women of our team stood out by being a struggling type of persons and each of our women candidates stands out by her style of conduct,” added Hermine Mkrtchyan. The elections resulted in four mandates for GALA and, according to the list, only the party administration member Kristine Mkrtchyan had the opportunity to become a counselor.

However, today, the GALA party is boycotting the sessions of the Gyumri councilors and will continue doing so till the end of the judicial process, thus protesting against the procedures for

the mandate distribution that took place after the elections. Let us remind that District Electoral Commission # 34 that regulates elections of Gyumri councilors granted two additional bonus mandates, instead of the initial fifteen, to the *Balasanyan Alliance* and by this gave them the right to elect a mayor. In a conversation with us, Kristine Mkrtchyan said that at the moment they did not consider it expedient to accept the mandates due to them and to participate in the sessions of councilors, thus legitimizing what had happened.

To the question as to whether they had no concerns that the electorate, which had given a vote of confidence to GALA and pinned their hopes on them, could be disappointed with their decision not to accept the mandates and not to participate in the sessions of the councilors, Kristine said that they had long thought about this issue.

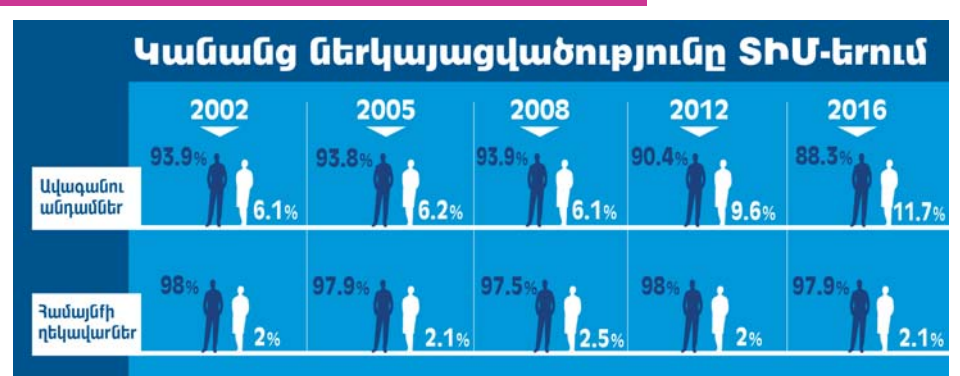
“In reality, we had such a concern,

the party has discussed this issue, there were even some disagreements since we worried whether we were acting correctly. Nevertheless, we believe that our electorate too prioritizes the struggle which we are today waging against the injustice that took place, as a result of which, the mayor was in fact illegally appointed. Our boycott will not last forever, only till the end of the judicial process. During this period, we are working with citizens as members of the municipal council. We receive them, announcements to that effect are periodically made on TV. Every Saturday, from noon till 4:30p.m., citizens visit us at the GALA party office. We are in constant contact with our electorate,” she said, assuring that irrespective of the fact whether they have taken the mandate at the moment or not, they stand by citizens and will follow that the incumbent councilors do not make illegal decisions.

The Local Self-Governance System is 20 Years Old

This year the local self-governance system in Armenia has marked its twentieth anniversary: the first elections of local self-governance bodies were held on November 10, 1996. The system is still in the process of development, there is yet much to accomplish, one of the indicators of the maturity of the system is women's participation in local decision making.

During the 20 years of the existence of local self-governance bodies, women's number among community heads has almost remained unchanged staying within 2% limits over the years. During the same period, women's number among councilors has almost doubled. However, it continues to stay very low making up just 11.7%. According to the data of the RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development, at present 5,368 councilors are working in 793 communities of Armenia and 633 of them are women.



The Voice of Women

“Women public figures themselves should raise the issue of women’s engagement.”


Women unequivocally have a major role in the daily life, but, unfortunately, irrespective of their preparedness, they are not given positions in the governance structures. Meanwhile, having women leaders will have quite a positive impact on the life of the country or a community since women are more principled, stricter, but also fairer. And a country, which is governed by a woman, unequivocally becomes a prosperous one. After all, if in a Muslim country such as Pakistan Benazir Bhutto was able to become President, in Armenia a woman must be and can be...but men are blocking that road. I am confident that having a woman leader could improve this dire situation in the country with more ease.



Aitsemnik Ohanyan

Leader of the Prosperous Armenia Party faction
Of the Vanadzor Councilors,
Physician at the Vanadzor Medical Center

It is necessary to carry out work conducive to women's advancement inside the parties. I am saying this based on my public activity experience. With Vanadzor's example, I realized that parties have a problem with women's involvement in their lists. Actually, they should be concerned about the issue of ensuring established, knowledgeable women's presence among their ranks not only right on the eve of elections, but much earlier. There is no shortage of such women in Armenia and if they are not engaged in the parties, it is the parties' problem.

A portrait of a woman with dark, wavy hair, wearing glasses, a light blue blazer, and a pearl necklace. She is looking slightly to the right of the camera. The background is a blurred indoor setting.

Armenuhi Kyureghyan

Member of the Armenian Revolutionary
Federation faction
Of the Vanadzor Councilors

Candidate of Physico-Mathematical Sciences (Ph.D.),
Head of the Lori Regional Branch of the
Association of Women with University Education

I believe that women public figures sell themselves, and it does not matter whether they represent a political force or not, should raise the issue of women's engagement. Women's potential should be appreciated and regarded as equal. I do not think that today in Armenia women are not ready to be, for example, a minister, a village head or a mayor. They are ready, however, men do not want to admit this. Today, in Armenia, the significant part of working women are earning the living of their families. Our women are educated and can see those problems that require solutions starting from the most apparent household issues. Today, we have economically weak, undeveloped villages, and women's resource should be utilized to rouse and successfully manage them. I think that if there were more women in our parties, the situation would perhaps not be so bad because the woman's mentality is different, she aspires to unity and solidarity, and the risk factor is higher among men. Although at the level of power, corruption risks in reality have no boundaries, be it women or men. Men perform election frauds mostly through women. Nevertheless, the woman's role in solving her community's problems is a necessity.



Karine Ghukasyan

Member of the Bright Armenia Party faction
Of the Vanadzor Councilors,
Physician at the Charitable Clinic Hope for Armenia,
Owner of a dairy production unit

Proportional Electoral System

On how the quota worked

Let us remind that on October 2, in two major towns of the republic – Gyumri and Vanadzor, elections to local self-governance bodies were for the first time held based on a proportional electoral system. And though in case of Gyumri, it is possible to speak only about preliminary results today and in Vanadzor the opposition is still continuing to boycott the sessions of the councilors, both towns have recorded significant increase in women's representation among councilors: from 5% to 24%. If the previous elections resulted in having one woman among 21 councilors in both Gyumri and Vanadzor, this time eight of the thirty-three elected councilors are women.

This became possible thanks to the gender quota defined by the new Electoral Code, according to which, starting from the first place of the electoral list of each of the nominated parties, the number of representatives of each sex should not exceed 75% in any integer group of four (1-4, 1-8, 1-12 and so on till the end of the list).

Having observed how the quota worked in the lists of the nominated parties in Gyumri and Vanadzor, we should note that on average women made up one third of the party lists.

Eleven parties participated in the **elections of the Gyumri councilors** and overall 419 candidates were included in their electoral lists. One hundred twenty-eight or 30.5% of the candidates were women. The minimal representation of women in the lists of the nominated eleven parties stands at 24% (the *Balasanyan Alliance* and *Prosperous Armenia*), and the maximum – 44% (the *Gyumrian Spirit, Businessman*).

The other parties had a 30-33% representation of women in their lists. Moreover, eight out of the eleven parties included the women candidates in the first three places of their lists, and the remaining four –starting from the fourth place.

Only one of the lists was headed by a woman: Yepraksia Mekhakyan (Armenian National Congress). Seven of the parties included three women in the first ten places in their lists.

Eight parties participated in the elec-



tions of the Vanadzor councilors. The total number of 326 candidates were represented in their electoral lists. Ninety-three or 29% of the candidates were women. Women's representation fluctuated from 25% in the case of the governing Republican Party of Armenia, *Prosperous Armenia* and *Bright Armenia* to 33% in the lists of the parties *Consolidation* and the *Armenian Renaissance*. The other parties included 27-32% of women in their lists. Moreover, half of the parties nominated in Vanadzor included women candidates in

the first three places of their lists, and the other half –starting from the fourth place. Only one of the lists was headed by a woman: Ajtsemnik Ohanyan from the *Prosperous Armenia* Party.

So, in the two cases the parties were able to provide for 30/70 proportion of the sexes in their lists, which, as it is well known, is postponed by the new Electoral Code till year 2021. In fact, the past elections have demonstrated that this postponement is not justified, and more so in case of parliamentary elections.

Newly-Elected Municipal Councilors

This time the law was in favor of women

During the formation of factions after the elections in Vanadzor and Gyumri, at least two provisions of the new Electoral Code worked. They regulate the maintenance of the gender quota during distribution of mandates and as a result of their application, even the practice of candidacy withdrawals worked in favor of women.

Thus, as a result of the elections, five parties are represented among the Vanadzor councilors: *Bright Armenia* received 10 mandates, the *Prosperous Armenia* Party - 3 mandates, the *Armenian Renaissance* - 5 mandates, the Republican Party of Armenia - 13 mandates, and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation - 2 mandates.

Out of the 13 members of the Republican Party of Armenia faction three are women (13%): Gayane Qalantaryan, director of the *Lori Regional Neurological Dispensary State CJSC*, Marine Hovhanessyan, organizer of the Lori Territorial Organization of the Republican Party of Armenia and young Sokhak Melkonyan. It is noteworthy that the latter occupied the 24th place in the Republican Party of Armenia list and she was preceded by four women candidates, however, the party made a decision in her favor. Here, the provision of the Electoral Code guaranteeing the maintenance of the quota after elections, in case of refusals to accept the mandates, was applied.

Specifically, when a candidacy withdrawal results in the decrease in the number of representatives of any sex of the given faction and hence, that number will stand at less than 20%, the mandate is given to the next candidate of the less-represented sex in that party electoral list. In essence, this provision ensured that women who had withdrawn their candidacies would be replaced by women candidates, and not men, as it was the case in the past.

Out of the ten members of the *Bright Armenia* faction, two are women (20%): Karine Ghukasyan and Anahit Karapetyan. Let us note that at the faction's session the latter, Anahit Karapetyan, was elected secretary of the faction.

Out of five members of the *Armenian Renaissance* faction, only one is a woman (20%). The mandate fell into Mary Yeghiazaryan's lot, a social worker of the program *Support to Pregnant Women*.

Out of the three members of the *Prosperous Armenia* faction, only one is a woman (33%) – Aitsemnik Ohanyan, who headed the party's electoral list.

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation faction will have only two members among the councilors, one of whom is a woman

« We, the women, should be able to neutralize the activities of the municipal council started with tense relations, I am sure that we will succeed in that. I will input all my capacities as a psychologist. The work should not be adversely affected, I believe, and it will not.

Gayane Qalantaryan

Member of the Republican Party of Armenia faction
Of the Vanadzor Councilors

(50%). By the party's decision, the mandate was given to Armenuhi Kyureghyan, Associate Professor at Vanadzor State University. Initially, Armine Kyureghyan was the third in the party's list, however, the RA new Electoral Code required that the party ensure the participation of representatives of the two sexes in its faction.

Specifically, Point 6 of Article 114 of the new Electoral Code states, “That candidate is

selected from an electoral list whose ordinal number in the electoral list is small or equal to the number of mandates due to the given electoral list. If, as a result of this, all the mandates of the party (party alliance) fall into the lot of representatives of the same sex, the mandate of the candidate elected last in accordance with the order of the list is given to the candidate of the non-represented sex of the list with the least number, if there is such a candidate.”

As it is known, the municipal council in Gyumri is half-formed, the opposition has not accepted the mandates protesting against the decision of the District Electoral Commission, according to which, 17 mandates were given to **the Balasanyan Alliance**, eight mandates to **the Prosperous Armenia** Party, four mandates to **the Armenian Renaissance** Party and four more to **the GALA** Party.

At present the picture in terms of women's representation is clear only in case of the *Bal-sanyan Alliance* faction, which includes today four women: Lolya Khachatryan of the Republican Party of Armenia, non-partisan Lusine Sanoyan and Gayane Sargsyan, and Karine Tataryan, member of Armenia's Christian-Democratic Party Union.

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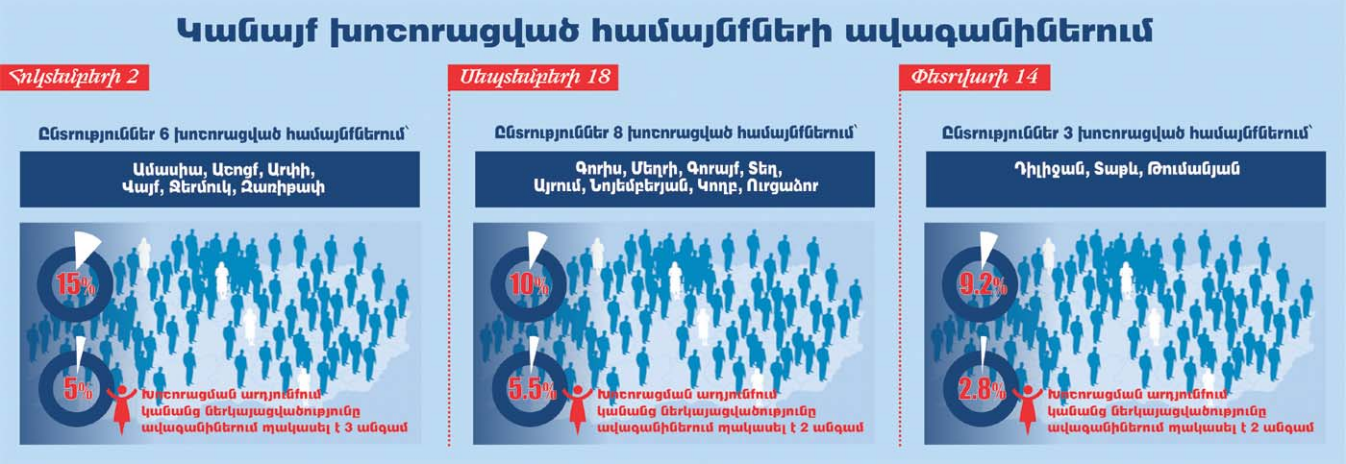
The remaining parties will include a total of four women, according to preliminary results.

The *Prosperous Armenia* Party will have two women among the councilors: Susanna Astoyan and Armenuhi Mkhitarian, members of the *Prosperous Armenia* Party. The *Armenian Renaissance* will have only one woman among the councilors: Hasmik Yeghiazaryan, Rector of the Gyumri Branch of the European Regional Educational Academy. The GALA Party too will have only one woman councilor – Kristine Mkrtchyan.

Community Consolidation

A new “glass ceiling” for women

This year, elections in the consolidated communities of six republic’s marzes: Siunik, Tavush, Shirak, Ararat, Lori, and Vayots Dzor, have been held. They were held on February 14, September 18, and October 2, uniting a total number of 125 communities into 17 clusters. A significant reduction has been recorded in terms of women’s representation among the councilors of all the consolidated communities.



On October 2, as a result of the elections held in six consolidated communities: Amasia, Asotsk, Arpi, Vaiq, Jermuk, and Zaritap, 47 communities united. Women’s representation among the elected councilors decreased threefold: prior to the consolidation, women made up 15% of the total number of the councilors in 51 communities, and after the consolidation -5%.

On September 18, as a result of the elections in eight clusters: Goris, Meghri, Goraik, Tegh, Airum, Noyemberian, Koghb, and Urtsadzor, 56 communities united. Women’s representation among the councilors of the consolidated communities decreased by half: from 10% before the consolidation to 5.5% after the consolidation.

On February 14, as a result of the elections to local self-governance bodies held in three consolidated communities: Dilijan, Tatev, and Tumanian, 21 communities united into three clusters. Women’s representation among the elected councilors decreased three times: prior to the consolidation, women made up 9.2% of the councilors in the 21 united communities, and after the consolidation- 2.8%.

Thus, as a result of the community consolidation, a serious setback has been recorded in terms of women’s representation. As attest our conversations with women, the reasons are different: the rivalry becomes incomparably high, especially, when village communities unite around towns, the recognizibility of women candidates in the adjacent communities is low, and women, as a rule, do not have the means to carry out broad advocacy campaigns; besides, the sum of the electoral deposit increases, which is a serious obstacle for women.

Taking into consideration the condition of intercommunity roads and transportation in the marzes, the distance from the center, around which communities unite, becomes an insurmountable barrier for women. As a result, the number of women candidates in the elections in the consolidated communities was small from the beginning, and women’s representation among the elected councilors two-three times lower than before the consolidation. The only exception is the Tegh community of Siunik Marz. Today, it is the only consolidated community, where women’s number among the councilors has increased after the consolidation.

Whereas, for example, in the community of Arpi of the same marz, which has united ten communities, there are seven councilor members, and only one of them is a woman. Before the consolidation, there were 50 councilor members in these communities, including 17 women. The same situation is in Airum of Tavush Marz, which has consolidated encompassing nine communities. Before the consolidation, three out of the 54 councilor members of these communities were women, and at present, there are eleven elected councilor members in Airum, and none of them is a woman. Out of the 36 candidates nominated here, seven were women, and none of them received enough votes to be elected a councilor, despite the fact that many of them had had a successful experience of working as councilors. The school principal of the Bagratashen community Liana Alaverdyan is one of these women, she was short of only four votes to be elected a councilor. It is her conviction that women’s ability to quickly orient themselves and to make correct and fair decisions is a necessity in the business of managing communities. Of no less significance is the educational level.

“I was once more convinced that elections are proceeding not based on the qualitative criteria of candidates, but in accordance with the principle of nepotism, which is very sad. I

believe that there need to be certain standards, certain requirements. After all, being a councilor or a village head is not such an easy task and you cannot make light of it. One should, as a minimum, have a higher education. If councilors are to discuss budgets or approve of the financial estimates compiled by the village head, they should have some understanding of these estimates,” believes Liana Alaverdyan.

The number of women among the councilors of the consolidated Noyemberian community is also fewer than before the consolidation. Noyemberian has consolidated by encompassing seven more communities. The number of the community councilors is 15, of whom one is a woman, though before this, the united communities had 44 councilors with five of them being women. Out of five women nominated in this community, only the Masis Tobacco company agent Emma

Women’s representation has decreased also in the consolidated Dilijan after the elections held there on February 14. Before the consolidation, the total number of the councilors in Dilijan and six communities united around it was 51, including four women. After the elections, the number of the Dilijan councilor members is 15, and none of them is a woman.

Hovk is one of those six communities, which as a result of the elections held on February 14, have been united with Dilijan. There are many active women in Hovk, who are also ready to take part in the governing of their community. However, they were not even nominated for the consolidated elections. One of them is the president of the women’s agricultural cooperative founded through Oxfam support Alvard Chatyan, who believes that the composition of councilors should necessarily include women. Nevertheless, this year she has not put forth her candidacy, though before the consolidation she was going to do that.

“Because it was too late, besides, there were many candidates from Dilijan itself, we did not even know who they were. Later we learned that the places had already been filled in,” she notes.

After the consolidation, nothing has changed in this community, which has many problems and women believe that their voice is not heard in the consolidated Dilijan.

“We have many problems in our village: problems with our roads, transportation, our children’s problem, we have no kindergarten or medical service. It is a large village. There are many families who have to take a taxi to go to Ijevan or Dilijan when their children get sick. Can you imagine what it means for the village? There are so many children in our village, 23 children have been born this year. Who is going to take care of these problems? When the mayor came, frankly speaking, we raised this issue. We told that that we do not have a kindergarten, have no first-aid post, no transportation. We were promised that the problems would be addressed, that they would help us, but up to date nothing has been done, no progress at all,” tells Alvard Chatyan, noting that already nine months have passed after the elections.

The idea of consolidating communities implies the well-being of communities, realization of new programs, effective solutions to the problems of small communities. However, the fact that women’s engagement as councilors is definitely decreasing can cast a doubt over positive expectations, which underlie the process of consolidation. It is necessary to create new mechanisms, which will allow to engage women’s potential in decision making about their communities.

Participate For Change

Numerous worthy women were defeated in the elections. Defeats were primarily recorded in places where the electoral struggle was extremely tense: consolidated communities, regional towns and especially in contests of candidates for the community head positions. However, all these women are characterized and united by their ability not to lose heart and not to back out of their goals...

Irina Yolyan, “Everything lies ahead...”

After the elections to self-governance bodies held in Goris on September 18, the community of Goris unites 12 residential areas. Instead of the former 62 councilors a 15-member group was formed. Only one of the 26 candidates nominated for councilor positions was a woman – Irina Yolyan, a journalist and a member of the Fund Resource Center for Development of Goris Women.



“I am aiming at being useful to my community and at introducing qualitative changes in the activities of councilors. I want to set an example and demonstrate that a councilor is a person willing to heed citizens’ complaints and problems and consistent in seeking solutions to them,” this was the message with which Irina Yolyan joined the electoral campaign, however, she was defeated in the elections.

“I am receiving hundreds of calls and messages. Yesterday, at a very late hour I learned that I had not garnered the necessary number of votes. Votes garnered in the town of Goris were sufficient, the problem was with village communities. Moreover, I know that in the villages a clear-cut directive had been given to work in support of specific persons and since in our part of the world non-performance of a directive amounts for many to committing suicide, I approach the situation with understanding. But the votes I garnered in Goris allow me to hope that much has changed in the consciousness of the people...As regards my viewpoint that women have no chance in consolidating urban communities, it is truly so. These elections have once again demonstrated that women have almost zero opportunities since those levers, guiding, controlling states that are created are unacceptable and impossible for women. Especially, if you are principled, have your own opinion and are against the mainstream, everything will be done so that you do not become an insider. I should be especially grateful to those that had faith in me, to the people, who were with me, by my side. Everything lies ahead...,” wrote Irina in her Facebook page after the elections.

Srbuhi Grigoryan, “The slogan Towards Changes remains in force.”

Srbuhi Grigoryan, a candidate for Sisian’s mayor position, participated in the elections with the slogan *Towards Changes*. Srbuhi Grigoryan, a journalist, a councilor, executive director of the Sisian Women’s Resource Center, is the head of the local office of the *Bright Armenia* Party and was nominated a community head candidate for the first time. In response to her rivals, who would say that she was smart, but not strong, she would say, “What do you mean by strong? I do not go to a box ring to show muscle strength there. The strength of any community head is their intellectual capacities and diplomatic skills, and, in this sense, I undoubtedly can compete...”



After the elections, she informed her compatriots, who had made donations to collect the sum necessary for her electoral deposit, that she was defeated, but that her team would keep its promise to organize, in the amount equivalent to that sum, training courses for women who were making their first steps in politics. “We will do that on a voluntary basis, I will assume the burden of the necessary expenses. Next year, in Sisian, we are going to have elections to self-governance bodies again, in connection with community consolidation. Our type does not back down. We will be continuing to take steps targeting changes in the country. We will be continuing because we love our country more than ourselves. The slogan *Towards Changes* remains in force...,” she announced.

The Success Formula

Grandmothers always take part in elections

Women of different ages are nominated in elections to local self-governance bodies. However, as demonstrated by our observations, clearly active are, on the one hand, experienced and knowledgeable women, who are known and respected in their communities for their public activities of many years, and on the other hand, young women, who were born and grew up in independent Armenia, have received good education and bring with themselves a new breath and promise of changes. It is difficult to say who is more trusted by the electorate, but probably it is a balance of the experience accumulated over the years and youth maximalism that can ensure the making and development of a municipal council and its effective work. Teresa Gabrielyan, a member of the Kotaik Mars's Garni community council, and Natella Shmavonyan, a four-time winner of the membership in the Nor Geghi community council, share the aspiration to create a better future not only for their, but for all grandchildren.

Natella Shmavonyan

"The electorate knows that I will not back off from my promises"

Four of the ten members of the Nor Geghi municipal council are women. One of them is Natella Shmavonyan, who has become a member of the municipal council for the fourth time. Having worked for many years in the council, she proves at her own example that an advanced age is not an issue in alleviating community problems. Her husband and two children do not try to oppose her firm will, believing that "you do not go against good deeds."

"People give me their votes not without reason," says Madam Natella, "I am known and respected. My electorate knows that I will not back off from my promises and gives me its vote of confidence. And I have tried not to disappoint them. I believe that you need to work well over the years to prove that people's choice was correct."

"For many years I worked as a kindergarten teacher and then as its head because I believed that the cast of mind and fate of tomorrow's citizen depend on the education of younger generations." The respect and trust developed towards her during these very years laid the foundation for her decision to participate in solving the community problems. Working later as an accountant in the financial department of the village municipality helped her to better familiarize with the community problems.



"Since 2004, I have worked in the *Nairi* Company of water users as an accountant and that very year I decided to put forth my candidacy for the municipal council. Back in the Soviet period, I was a Komsomol activist. I was sure that I had retained my love for public activities and I decided to give it a try. I tried and won in the elections. In those years, people were skeptical

about women candidates, but when they saw that I had good understanding of organizational activities, they put up with me and attentively listened to my speeches," tells Madam Natella, noting that the fact that today there are four women involved in the municipal council means that the community has been convinced: women's presence in the business of governing the community is not only desirable, but necessary. Showing motherly compassion, Madam Natella tries to address, with an equal concern, the problems of socially insecure families, kindergarten renovation and transport.

"I wish that not only my five grandchildren, but all children of Nor Geghi live in a bright community, play on clean and well-lit streets, and not know what hunger is. Otherwise, why are we, the grown-ups, living?" says Madam Natella.

She has also infected her pedagogue daughter-in-law with her activism and is encouraging and supportive of the latter's wish to engage in public and political activities. Moreover, Madam Natella herself compels her daughter-in-law to participate in discussions and training courses organized in the community. She says, "She is an educated and active girl. Why should she stay at home? Let her work, socialize with people and be useful to them."

Teresa Gabrielyan

"As compared to other grandmothers, I am aspiring to engage in public-benefit activities"

The only woman councilor of the Kotaik Mars's Garni community Teresa Gabrielyan notes with unconcealed pride that being a mother of four children and grandmother of ten grandchildren she is continuing to invest her strength, energy and time in the development of her own community.

She was first nominated as a candidate for the municipal council in 2004, however, she was not elected because she had neither experience, nor proxies. However, she did not give way to despair. She always remained aware of the community problems and tried to assist neighbors and friends, and all those who needed help, driven by the desire to be useful to the community. The community residents loved and appreciated her commitment. So, during the next elections to local self-governance bodies, they elect her as a councilor. This time the people of Garni gave her their vote of confidence, although she had 23 competitors, including one woman.

"Without a husband (he is dead), it is truly difficult. However, my household burden is not heavy since my children have grown up, all of

them have their families and I have to deal only with my grandchildren. But, as compared to other grandmothers, I am aspiring to engage in public-benefit activities as well and do something good for the community," says Teresa.

In her work, she deals with all the residents of the community since all of them have passport issues for various reasons from time to time. She willingly attends to the needs of socially insecure families –members of the Paros system, she appeals to the community head with a request to provide the children of these families with stationery and school uniforms. Upon her urging, the community head provided free transportation to the community boys subject to conscription to go to a school of the Voluntary Society for Assistance to Army, Aviation, and the Navy. Also, drinking and irrigation water problems were addressed through joint efforts, and the kindergarten and school were renovated.

"I familiarize with issues to be raised at the municipal council sessions ahead of time. Sometimes, a need arises to object to something or to come up with another option. In such



cases, my opinion is taken into consideration. I am the only woman councilor among the eleven men councilors, so, they respect me," says Teresa.

In her words, the village women have sometimes tried to keep her away from public work, saying that she is a woman and should mind her own business, and that men know what to do. However, Teresa thinks differently.

"The presence of women in the ranks of councilors is not only possible, but also necessary. After all, it is time to break the patriarchal tradition in politics and elected bodies. And there is one more thing that I am sure of: women can change a lot in the community governing process," concludes Teresa Gabrielyan.

The Voice of the Many

Only one out of ten Armenian nationals are satisfied with the work of local self-governance bodies. This is attested by the data of the report on *Public Participation in Local Self-Governance 2016* of the Caucasian Center for Research Resources.



Survey participants were more pleased with maintaining cleanness of the communities by local self-governance bodies and less pleased with their protection of environment and conservation of natural resources, conduct of oversight over the healthcare standards and their work to maintain local roads and bridges.

More than one third of the respondents, 38.1% trusted their community heads without any reservation and about one fourth, 24.4%, trusted members of the municipal councils. Only 13% of the respondents highly estimated the level of transparency in the work of local self-governance bodies. Specifically, the respondents were displeased with the transparency in the financial activities and decision making of local self-governance bodies.

The majority of the surveyed Armenian nationals, 58.6%, were convinced that any problem could be solved with bribes to local self-governance bodies, and 79.6% - through connections. During the six months preceding the survey only 16.5% of the surveyed Armenian nationals applied to their local self-governance bodies to address some issue.

Community residents, as a rule, did not participate in the work of local self-governance bodies. During the six months preceding the survey only 2.4% of the respondents took part in the sessions of their community councilors, and only 1.7% participated in community budget discussions.

The prevailing majority of the survey participants were not privy to the decisions adopted by local self-governance bodies. Thirteen point four per cent of the respondents have noted that they are familiar with the decisions adopted by their local self-governance bodies. Ninety-one per cent of the respondents did not know the 2015 budget amount of their communities.

The prevailing part of the respondents were not aware of the Armenian legislation on local self-governance. Ninety point two per cent of the respondents were not aware of the governance decentralization process in Armenia. The majority of the respondents, 58.9%, were also unaware of the community consolidation process. Nevertheless, their level of participation in the elections to local self-governance bodies was quite high. Three fourths of the respondents participated in the last elections preceding the survey.

Positing Issues

Do women practice candidacy withdrawals more often?



Observations demonstrate that women practice candidacy withdrawals more frequently. Thus, in the September 18th elections, out of 548 citizens registered as candidates for the community head positions, 140 submitted candidacy withdrawal applications, i.e. one fourth. Out of 21 women nominated for

In case of women, the institute of candidacy withdrawal was primarily applied for candidates nominated for the community head positions. According to the data of the Central Electoral Commission, during the elections held on September 18 and October 2, 59 women were initially nominated for the community head positions; after candidacy withdrawals, 26 women remained and only nine were ultimately elected. Moreover, seven of the elected women were reelected.

the community head positions, eleven withdrew their candidacies, i.e. half of all the nominated.

By the way, as a result of candidacy withdrawals, only one candidate was voted for in 125 communities out of the total 237 that were to elect community heads, i.e. it is obvious that at least 125 citizens out of those who practiced candidacy withdrawals were "not real" candidates from the start and were nominated just to ensure the registration of their relative or superior since the law forbids elections with one candidate. By the way, the women candidates who practiced candidacy withdrawals were primarily ordinary workers at village municipalities and

community structures. Similar cases are undoubtedly not conducive to raising the already low political rating of women, once again reinforcing the public opinion that women are not serious competitors and that they are manageable and unable to independently act and make decisions. They are right when they say that women having entered politics begin to assume responsibility not only for their own deeds, but for their entire sex.

We should note that in the cases of candidates for councilor positions, the proportion of women and men who applied candidacy withdrawals was almost the same.

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This issue
has been prepared
with the support
of OSCE office in Yerevan
with the extra
budgetary funding from
German Federal
Government

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