

PARLIAMENT
MONITORING

**MONITORING OF
THE NATIONAL
ASSEMBLY**

7TH CONVOCATION
3RD SESSION | 3RD REPORT





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FOREWORD

Mandate NGO presents the monitoring results of the work in the 3rd session of the National Assembly of the 7th convocation. The summary was prepared by combining the observations of the journalists, expert analytical reviews and data of the statistical application of the parliamentmonitoring.am website.

The focus of the monitoring was the efficiency of the exercise of the new powers of the National Assembly in the parliamentary government system and legislative and oversight functions.

The general trends and indicators of the performance of the parliament of the 7th convocation over the 3rd session were summarized, as well as details on legislative initiatives and engagement of the NA factions were presented.

The NA oversight function and the steps initiated by the legislature to overcome the Constitutional Court crisis were addressed. We reviewed the specific legal regulations in the setup of the Ethics committee in the parliament and organization of parliamentary hearings.



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THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE 7TH CONVOCATION, 3RD SESSION

NA work in numbers

During the 3rd session the National Assembly of the 7th convocation held 5 regular and 3 extraordinary sittings. All the extraordinary ones were initiated by the government.

During the 3rd session the parliament adopted 169 laws, 7 of which are “mother” laws, 22 are laws-agreements and 140 are amendments and additions to the operating laws.

Figure 1

2nd session - 143 laws, 6 of which are “mother” laws, 11 are laws-agreements, 137 are amendments to the operating laws



3rd session - 169 laws, 7 of which are “mother” laws, 22 are laws-agreements and 140 are amendments to the operating laws



53 of the adopted laws were authored by the NA deputies (38 by deputies, 15 by factions) and 116 were initiated by the government.

Figure 2 The NA- Government ratio of authored laws

2nd session – 12 by NA deputies (8 by deputies, 4 by factions), 131 by the government



3rd session – 53 by NA deputies (38 by deputies, 15 by factions), 116 by the government (30%-70%)



My Step faction deputies authored 30 of the laws adopted in full, 15 were the initiatives of Bright Armenia (all of them were submitted by the faction) and 8 were authored by the PAP faction deputies.

Figure 3 Initiatives of the factions by sessions

2nd session:



3rd session:

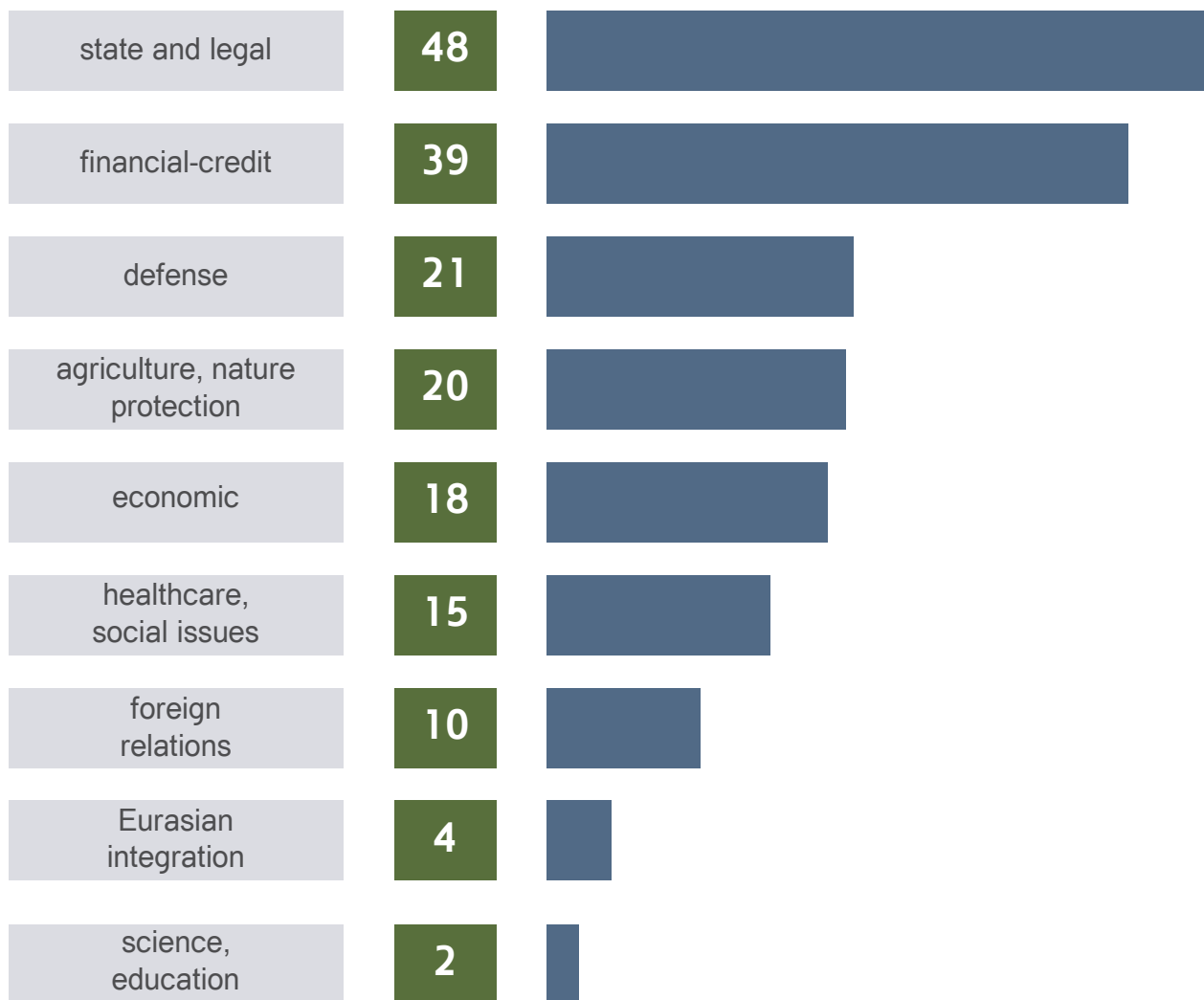


17 drafts laws authored by the deputies and factions passed the first reading and were moved to the agenda of the next session. Nine of them were the initiatives of My Step, 5 of “Bright Armenia” and 3 are PAP’s initiatives.

189 draft laws not included on the session agenda are in circulation, 102 of which were initiatives authored by deputies and factions. My Step deputies put in circulation 59 drafts, BAP and PAP deputies - 18 drafts each. Seven are the independent deputy Arman Babajanyan’s initiatives, the rest are those of the government.

The vast majority of the adopted laws concerned the state-legal and financial-credit sectors.

Figure 4. Adopted laws by sectors



The standing committees on Protection of Human Rights and Eurasian Integration Affairs each acted as a lead committee for one question discussed over the session.

The inclusion of 22 legislative initiatives on the agenda of the 3rd session of the NA of the 7th convocation was declined in a vote. Ten of them were BAP's initiatives, 11 were PAP's and 1 was that of My Step.

Figure 5. Declined drafts broken down by sessions



Eight legislative initiatives were discussed and not adopted. Four of them were drafts authored by the BAP deputies, 3 by PAP and 1 by My Step faction deputies.

One of the drafts by BAP proposed amendments to the law on “Social protection of the disabled” and another to the law on “Compensation for Damages caused to the life and health of the service members during the RA defense”. The draft amendments to the law on Service in the National Security bodies proposing liberalization of the posts of heads of the National Security bodies and police, passed the first reading with no votes against but were declined as a result of 96 votes against in the second reading. The submitted draft decision based on Bright Armenia faction’s interpellation seeking to present to the Prime Minister the question of future tenure of office for the Minister of Environment Erik Grigoryan was also discussed and declined.

During the session three legislative initiatives authored by PAP faction deputies were discussed and declined in a vote. The two drafts proposed amendments to the Tax Code submitted by PAP faction deputy Mikayel Melkumyan and one proposed amendments to the law on the “Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly” by which the faction deputies intended to increase the number of clerical assistants and experts.

The legislative initiatives by a parliamentary majority deputy proposing amendments to the law on the Setup and Work of the Security Council were discussed and declined.

During the session the National Assembly approved the draft state budget for 2020, elected one board member of the Central Bank and appointed 5 members of the first composition of the Corruption Prevention Commission.

Three inquiry committees were set up. One was to look into the organization of ground transfer of passengers and the work of the competent bodies coordinating and overseeing the sector in 2016-2019, the other was to investigate the legal grounds and corruption risks associated with the transfer to Yerevan community of vehicles and other property, the service provider agreements, as well as issuance of non-proprietary rights, building permits and preferences since September 2018 and the third one was to review the legality, validity and trustworthiness of financial and other reports submitted to the competent bodies of the executive and accepted by them in the scope of the investment programs in the metallurgical mining sector.

Noteworthy facts

- 30% of the laws adopted in the 3rd session of the 7th convocation were authored by the parliament and 70% by the government. This is the highest indicator of the proactiveness of the parliament that the NA Monitoring has noted in around ten years of observations. In the 2nd session the NA-government ratio for legislative initiatives was 9/91. The same ratio was seen in the parliament of the 6th convocation.
- The number of laws adopted over extraordinary sittings/sessions has decreased. In the 2nd session 44% of the laws were adopted over extraordinary sittings/sessions (63 out of 143) whereas this figure for the 3rd session was 12% (21 out of 169).
- 21 legislative initiatives by the oppositional factions were declined in a vote or not included on the session agenda (this figure for the previous session was 16). Seven legislative initiatives by the opposition were declined upon discussion. The number of draft laws authored by the opposition factions and adopted has increased nearly 4 times, amounting to 23 as opposed to 6 in the previous 6th session.
- One legislative initiative submitted by the parliamentary majority deputy was not adopted. Interestingly, the declined draft proposed that the NA President be entitled to attend Security Council sittings. BAP voted against, PAP abstained, and only 66 deputies from My Step participated in the vote and voted in favor.

- The parliamentary majority voted in favor of the legislative package authored by the Bright Armenia faction regarding service in the National Security bodies and Police in the first reading but vote against it in the second reading. In the first reading the package was adopted with no votes against and declined in the second reading with 96 votes against.
- No draft by the government was declined during the session, but the parliament adopted drafts, with regard to which the executive had reservations. Specifically, the government did not find the proposal on amendments to the law on “Approving the annual and comprehensive plans of action for recovery, preservation, reproduction and utilization of the Lake Sevan ecosystem” submitted by Varazdat Karapetyan well-founded, but it was adopted without votes against and with 101 votes in favor (it was proposed that the opportunity for additional water abstraction from Lake Sevan be restricted).
- The standing committees on State and legal (48) and Financial-credit and budgetary affairs (39) acted as lead committees the most, and the standing committees on Human Rights Protection and European integration the least. The last two each acted as a lead committee for one question discussed during the session.
- During the 3rd session only 3 out of 11 NA standing committees came up with the initiative to hold parliamentary hearings. The standing committees on Science, Education, Culture, Diaspora, Youth and Sport Affairs, on Defense and Security Affairs and on Financial-credit and Budgetary affairs held one hearing each.
- The standing committee on Eurasian Integration held only 1 sitting during the NA fall session. It was an extraordinary sitting during which it was decided to hold parliamentary hearings dedicated to the RA-EU current relations by the end of the year. The hearings however were not held.
- In the 3rd session of the 7th convocation of the NA the right to hold parliamentary hearings stated in the law on the NA Rules of Procedure was exercised the most by the President of the NA Ararat Mirzoyan. The 3 NA factions did not hold parliamentary hearings. Over the 4 months of the fall session the National Assembly held 5 parliamentary hearings and 9 of them over the past 2019.
- The oversight tool for setup and operation of the inquiry committee was fully employed in the 3 sessions of the 7th convocation of the National Assembly. Five inquiry committees were set up, two of which in the 2nd session and three in the 3rd session.

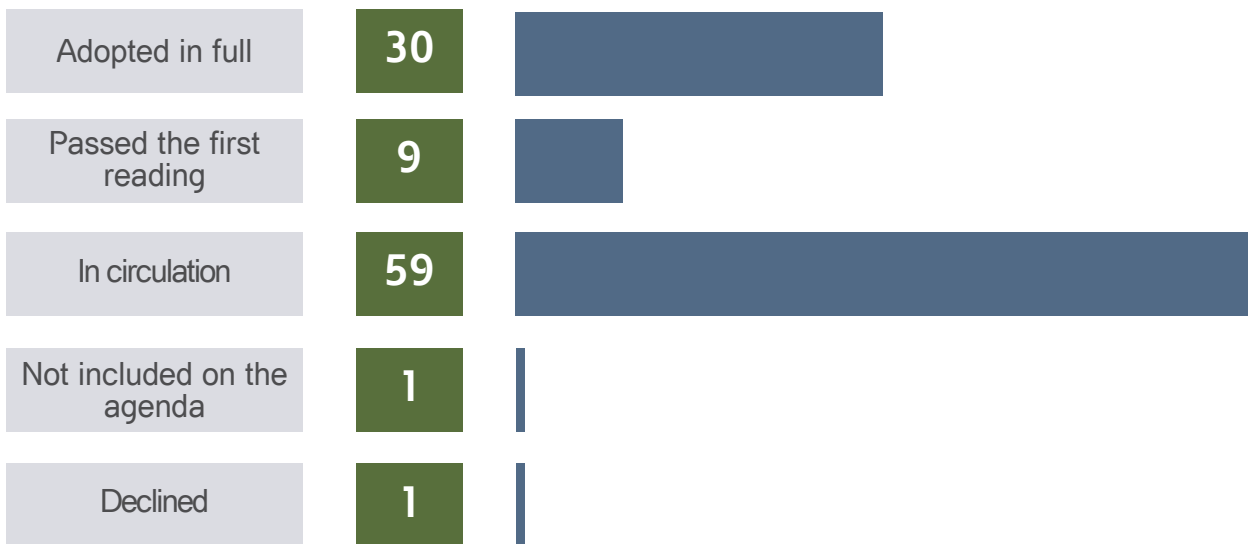
- No ad-hoc committee was set up over the three sessions of the National Assembly of the 7th convocation, including in relation to the issues of deputy ethics and conflict of interest.
- During the 3rd session the deputy who voted in favor the most is Karine Poghosyan from PAP(189), Hayk Sargsyan from My Step voted against the most(30), Taguhi Tovmasyan from My Step abstained the most (18). Arusyak Julhaykan from My Step is the top absentee(132) and Mikayel Melkumyan from PAP has asked questions and made speeches the most(79) .
- During the session My Step faction deputies together asked questions and made speeches 578 times, PAP members-236 times, Bright Armenia- 144 times. Each deputy from My Step faction did it 7 times on average, while PAP and BAP deputies each came up with 8 questions and speeches each.
- Over the session My Step faction deputy Edgar Arakelyan put down his deputy mandate and Artur Manukyan became a deputy. Arman Babajanyan left the Bright Armenia faction becoming the only independent deputy in the parliament.

¹ Parliament monitoring statistics is formed based on the public information of the NA official website. All the data is taken from the official source and processed through a computer application designed specifically for that purpose. The statistics of questions and speeches by deputies is generated based on the discussions and votes on draft laws only. The number of absences of the deputies is general without breakdown by excused and not excused.

PROACTIVENESS, LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

My Stepfaction. During the 3rd session of the 7th convocation 30 of the drafts authored by My Stepfaction deputies were adopted in full, 9 passed the first reading and 59 draft laws are in circulation. One of the draft laws authored by the faction was not included on the agenda as a result of a vote, another was discussed and declined in a vote during the plenary sitting.

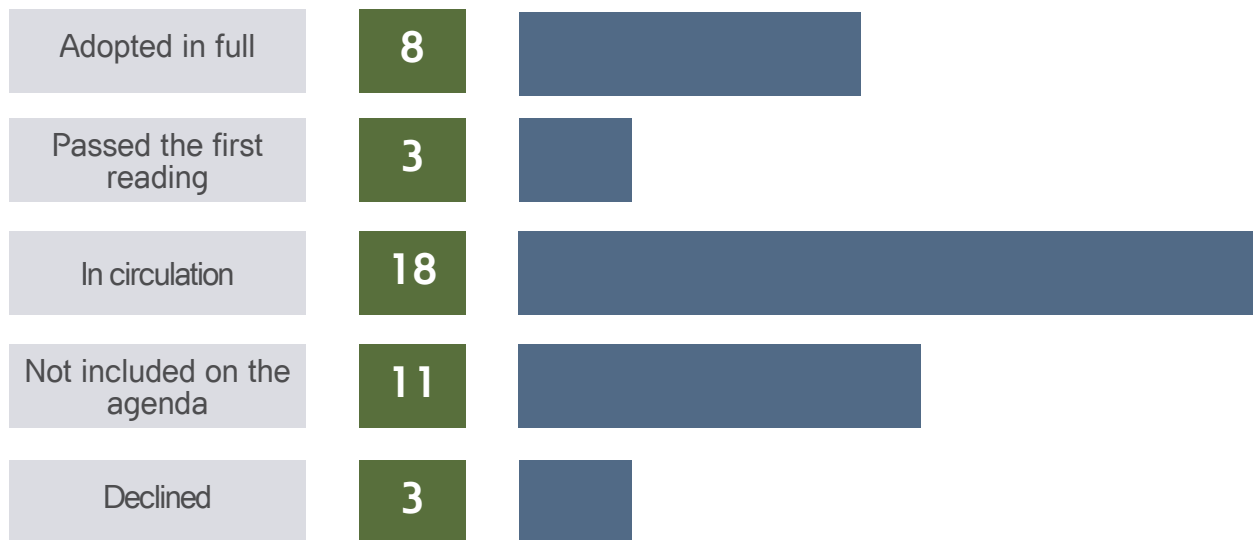
Figure 6. Legislative initiatives of My Stepfaction



According to parliamentmonitoring.am website statistics Artak Manukyan is the deputy from My Step faction with the most questions asked (28) and speeches made (26) over the session. Sergey Atomyan and Aleksey Sandikov voted in favor the most (184), Hayk Sargsyan votes against the most (30), Taguhi Tovmasyan abstained the most (18). Taguhi Tovmasyan is also the faction deputy who has not voted the most (36). Arusyak Julhakyants is the top absentee (132 instances).

Prosperous Armenia faction: During the 3rd session of the 7th convocation 8 of the drafts authored by the Prosperous Armenia faction deputies were adopted in full, 3 passed the first reading and 18 draft laws are in circulation. The inclusion of 11 of the draft laws authored by the faction was declined in a vote and 3 were discussed and declined over a plenary sitting.

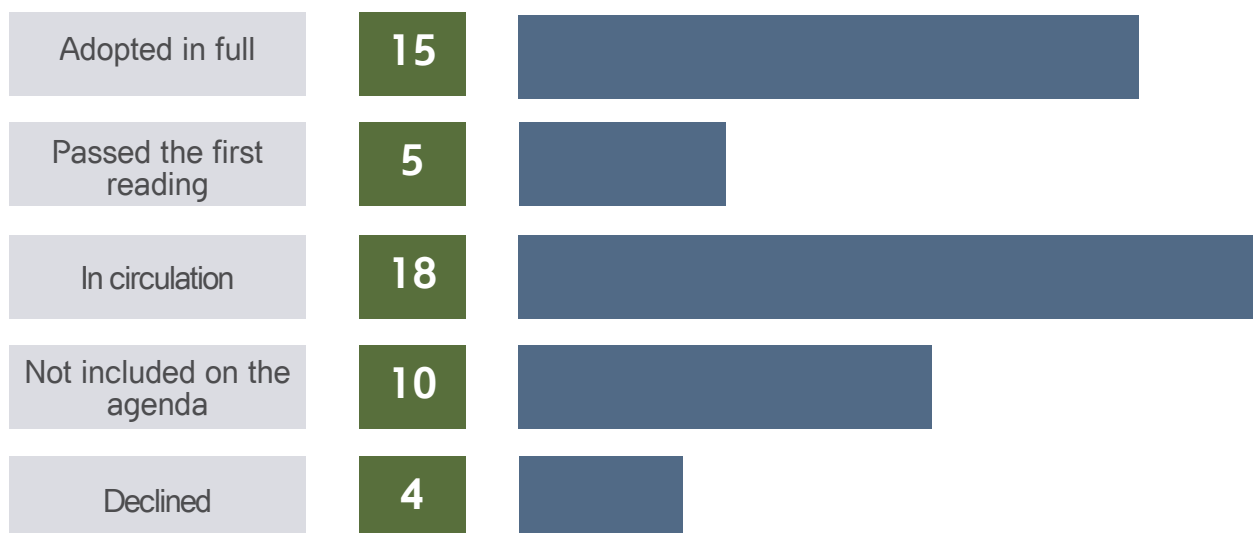
Figure 7. Legislative initiatives of the Prosperous Armenia faction



According to parliamentmonitoring.am website statistics in the 3rd session Mikayel Melkumyan is the PAP faction deputy who made speeches the most (45). Sergey Bagratyan asked questions the most (39) and also abstained in the votes the most in the faction (14). Karine Poghosyan voted in favor the most (189), Arayik Aghababyan voted against the most (24). Gevorg Petrosyandid not vote the most and Shake Isayanis the top absentee (97 absences).

Bright Armenia faction. During the 3rd session of the 7th convocation 15 of the drafts authored by the Bright Armenia faction deputies were adopted in full, 5 passed the first reading and 18 draft laws are in circulation. 10 of the draft laws authored by the faction were not included on the agenda and 4 were discussed and declined over the plenary sitting.

Figure 7. Legislative initiatives of the Bright Armenia faction



According to parliament monitoring.am website statistics over the 3rd session Rubik Stepanyan voted in favor the most among the Bright Armenia faction deputies (182), Armen Yeghiazaryan voted against the most (27), Sargis Aleksanyan abstained the most (177 times). Gevorg Gorgisyan and Arkadi Khachatryan did not vote the most (10).

Edmon Marukyan is the top absentee (128). Gurchen Baghdasaryan asked questions the most (12), and Arkadi Khachatryan made speeches the most (12).



NA LEGISLATIVE WORK: PRACTICE AND TRENDS

In the 3rd session of the 7th convocation certain noteworthy trends were seen in the NA legislative work:

NA lawmaking performance: 169 laws were adopted in the 3rd session which exceeds the number for the 2nd session by 26. This means that the NA lawmaking performance increased by 18% in comparison to the previous session.

The session was also marked with a relatively low number of extraordinary sittings/sessions held. Specifically, if over the 2nd session 7 extraordinary sittings/sessions were convened, this number was only 3 in the 3rd session. In a normal setting this is an important indicator of engaging in lawmaking without haste regardless of the sharp rhetoric and mutual criticism between the ruling and opposition faction representatives in the committees and plenary sittings.

The proactiveness and engagement of the parliament in drafting laws: In the 3rd session of the 7th convocation an unprecedented ratio was recorded in the lawmaking work of the NA and the government. If only 9% of the laws adopted over the 2nd session were authored by the parliament and 91% by the government, around 31% of the laws adopted in the 3rd session were authored by the parliament and 69% by the government. In numbers, only 12 drafts submitted by the deputies or factions were adopted during the 2nd session, whereas in the 3rd session this number was 53 or nearly 4.5 times more.

We can state that a critical change happened compared with the previous convocations with regard to the implementation of the lawmaking function of the parliament and restriction of the traditional hegemony of the government. This somewhat restored the distorted balance between the legislature and the executive.

This fact contributed not only to the proactiveness of the deputies but also to the increased resistance of the NA towards the government. This way a more debate- and dialogue-based environment was formed for drafting, discussion and adoption of laws.

The realization of lawmaking opportunities of the opposition over the session

The 3rd session was characterized by a more intense political confrontation among the parliamentary forces which manifested itself not only in stronger rhetoric, but also in mutual intolerance towards drafts authored by deputies and factions and low level of collaboration among the deputies of different factions.

The only draft jointly authored by the deputies of 3 factions is the legislative package proposing amendments to the laws on Education and on Basic vocational (trade) and secondary vocational education which was adopted despite the unfavorable conclusion by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport.

Despite the unfavorable position of the government the draft law proposing amendments to the law on “Compensation for Damages caused to the life and health of the service members during the RA defense” authored by the Bright Armenia faction received a favorable conclusion in the parliamentary standing committee. The draft however was declined by the majority in a vote.

Compared to the 2nd session the number of drafts declined by the parliament in a vote and not included on the agenda increased by 5 in the 3rd session. 10 out of 21 declined drafts were authored by BAP and the other 11 by PAP deputies, whereas this list has no drafts authored by the ruling faction representatives.

The majority of the drafts discussed and declined during the plenary sittings were also those of the opposition. Specifically, 4 out of 8 legislative initiatives were authored by the BAP, 3 by the PAP and 1 by My Step faction deputies.

The BAP put into circulation the draft package proposing amendments to the laws on “Service in the National Security bodies”, “Service in the police” and on “Public Service”. It was proposed that the posts of the director of the National Security Service and Chief of Police which are service and professional positions be viewed as political posts and requirements set for candidate for deputy be prescribed for these appointees as well.

One of the aims was to have these bodies report to the NA. My Stepfaction voted in favor of the package in the first reading. The package was adopted with 113 votes in favor and 2 abstaining. However My Stepfaction changed its position in the second reading opposing the draft, the PAP also made a sharp turnaround from its initial position. Finally in December of 2019 the legislative package was declined in the second reading with 19 votes in favor and 89 against.

As argued by the political majority the “liberalization” of the senior posts of the mentioned structures leads to contradictions with the Constitution. In these conditions it is not feasible to resolve the issues of deputies of the NSS director and Chief of Police, their subordination in the sense that they will still remain sectoral officers with respective ranks. The rationale presented was that the issues were to be reviewed in the context of the constitutional amendments therefore such amendments should be avoided before that.

The parliament had also declined the package proposing amendments to the laws on “Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly” and on the “Setup and Operation of the Security Council” in the first reading submitted by My Stepfaction deputy Anna Karapetyan. It proposed securing legal grounds for the NA President to attend the sittings of the National Security Council by virtue of the law and be entitled to present suggestions regarding the agenda and discussed documents. The legislative package sought to raise the NA’s political role and weight in the key decision-making processes that would be appropriate for the parliamentary government system.

For the adoption of a draft 3/5 of the deputies or at least 80 deputies need to vote in favor, whereas only 66 deputies from My Stepfaction voted in favor, BAP almost entirely voted against stating that their suggestion to allow NA faction leaders in the NSC sittings was not accepted. The PAP abstained in the vote.

Generally speaking, the draft failed due to My Stepfaction’s careless attitude, and because of the absence of many of the faction deputies. On the other hand the government albeit not expressly also opposed the draft stating that the National Security Council is part of the executive. This implies that only the representatives of the executive shall be members of the Council. In reality however such description is quite artificial since no grounds for recognizing or viewing the NSC as part of the executive exist. The first article of the law on the “Setup and work of the Security Council” states that the Security Council is a state body headed by the Prime Minister, and Clause 2 of Article 2 states that the Security Council “at the suggestion of the Prime Minister reviews issues concerning the security of the Republic of Armenia, its territorial integrity and inviolability of borders.”

Under RA constitutional-legal regulationsthe parliament has direct involvement in addressing issues within its powersregarding boththe RA security and territorial integrity and inviolability of borders.In this sense,initially the NAPresident'selimination from the Council, which happened as a result of adoption of the mentioned edition of the lawby theformer ruling powerwas not anyhow justified and did not derive from the logic of the Security Council itself and the aims it pursued.

30 out of 53 laws authored by the parliament and adopted in full were those of My Stepfactiondeputies, 15 were authoredby Bright Armenia deputiesand 8 byPAPfaction deputies. So the ratio of the draft laws authored by the ruling and opposition factions is 51/49, at that theNAMajority-minority ratio is 67/33.

This means thateven given My Stepfaction's decisive majority the opposition managed to have nearly as many adopted draftsas the ruling faction.Compared to the 2ndsessionMy Stepfaction improved itslegislativeproactivenessindicator 5 times, whereasBAP and PAP-4 times.

The practice of interpellations in the 3rdsession

Under the NARules of Procedurethe parliamentaryminority is given an opportunity to submit a written interpellation to the member of the cabinet andbased on the response raise the question of the future tenure of a certain member of the government and even present a motion of no confidence to the prime minister .The factioncan submit an interpellation to the government membersno more than once over one regular session, and upon receipt of interpellationmaximumwithin 30 daysas instructed by the Prime Ministerthe correspondingmember of the cabinetsends the President of theNational Assemblythe written responseto the interpellation.

The interpellation is discussed over the NA four-day sittings,and consequentlythe faction can

- either proposeadopting adecision of the National Assembly on presenting the question of future tenure of a given member of the cabinet for the review of the Prime Minister, which is voted upon without discussion,

- or announce that the faction intends to present a motion of no confidence to the Prime Minister, after which this faction can within 24 hours of the end of the discussions submit to the President of the National Assembly a draft decision of the National Assembly on presenting a motion of no confidence to the Prime Minister which is discussed under the procedure prescribed by the rules of procedure.

This tool of influencing the political processes was employed twice in the parliament of the 7th convocation, in the 2nd and 3rd sessions. Both times this right was exercised by the Bright Armenia faction. Specifically, the opposition faction raised the question of Minister of Finance Atom Janjughazyan's removal from office in the 2nd session and the Minister of Environment Erik Grigoryan's in the 3rd session.

The dissatisfaction with the latter was due to the low level of the Ministry's oversight in terms of compliance with the environmental norms in the mining industry as claimed by them. The government responded to the BAP's written interpellation on the level of RA deputy Prime Minister Tigran Avinyan. He demonstrated his full support to the Minister of Environment and the policy he carried out in the sector. My Step faction announced before the vote that it was going to vote against, since it did not note any grounds to present a motion of no confidence to the minister. The Prosperous Armenia faction stated that an inquiry committee was set up in the NA to look into mining issues and before the end of its work the discussion of the question was not advisable. The NA draft decision on presenting the question of future tenure of the Minister to the Prime Minister was not adopted with 17 votes in favor and 67 votes against.

The established practice of making a written interpellation in the parliament of the 7th convocation shows that the factions mostly avoid using it for political tactical reasons. This is perhaps due to the consistent and clear ratio of forces in the NA. In this respect the institution of interpellations for now is only formally employed and is treated as an end in itself to a certain extent. However it allows specific sectoral issues to be raised more comprehensively and brings on discussions in the parliament around them.

Factions as a lawmaking entity: legal framework and practice in the 3rd session

Under Article 65 of the law on the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly the parliamentary faction was also given the right to come up with a legislative initiative. Vesting the factions with such a power under the NA Rules of Procedure aims to present the political teams as entities in the lawmaking process and emphasize the collective responsibility derived from it. Authoring a draft law by a faction has more of a political than strictly legal implications. Its main goal is to stress the exceptional programmatic and fundamental significance and importance of the draft laws authored by the faction. It implies equal participation in the preparation of the draft and responsibility of all the team members for its further course and adoption. One can form an understanding of a faction's teamwork and organizational qualities, its political mobility and conceptual approach as a whole based on whether the draft laws are authored by the factions or not and also judging from the share of draft laws authored by the factions in the "basket" of draft laws authored by the NA. So the latter is in a sense an important indicator of a faction's adherence to these values.

In the 3rd session of the 7th convocation only Bright Armenia out of 3 NA factions carries on the practice, already noted in the previous session of submitting all drafts only on behalf of the faction. The other two factions hardly employ this mechanism. Particularly, the BAP (regardless of the sessions) has 6 drafts authored by the faction among those included on the agenda, 10 drafts among those not included and 20 drafts among those fully adopted, whereas MySteph has only 2 drafts circulated on behalf of the faction and fully adopted and does not have any such drafts included on the agenda or not yet included. And PAP has only one draft authored on behalf of the faction, which is still not included on the session agenda.

The practice of authoring drafts on behalf of the faction also has its drawbacks. The problem is that this approach denies the deputy the opportunities for individual initiatives, even less for collaboration with deputies from other factions on individual level. This stance goes against the constitutional-legal principle for the deputy to be led by his/her conscience and convictions and not being limited by the imperative mandate. This allows for demonstration of open or tacit disagreement with the position expressed by the majority in respect of specific issues or draft laws initiated by it.

SETUP OF THE CORRUPTION PREVENTION COMMITTEE

During the 3rd session the National Assembly of the 7th convocation in the scope of implementation of its function of electing the management of other bodies of public administration set up the Corruption Prevention Commission which basically replaces the former Senior Officials Ethics committee.

The commission was to be set up back in 2018 in line with the logic of the legislative package proposing amendments and additions to the law on the “Corruption Prevention Commission” and related laws adopted on March 23 of the same year. The amendments and additions furnished the new structure with higher guarantees of independence and defined a broader scope of functions and while a competition council was formed to elect commission members it was not set up.

In 2019 the President of the National Assembly initiated a legislative process proposing amendments to the procedure for nomination of candidates for members of autonomous bodies. In this context, given the frameworks for the nomination of candidates for the commission members, amendments were initiated also in the setup procedures of the Corruption Prevention Commission.

The package was adopted on September 13, 2019 with 104 votes in favor and 1 against. The legislative amendments intended to set up the first composition of the commission having 5 members until November 30, 2019 with the following proportion: 2 members of the commission are appointed at the recommendation of the government and the NA majority for a 6-year term, two are candidates nominated by the NA opposition factions for a 4-year term and one member nominated by the Supreme Judicial Council is elected for a 3-year term. Following the appointment of the first full composition of the commission, within one week the latter elects a head of the commission from among its members.

On November 19, 2019 the parliament elected by secret ballot the first composition of the Corruption Prevention Commission. The NA Prosperous Armenia faction's candidate Narek Hambardzumyan had secured the lowest number of votes.

However in the election of the head of the commission held on November 26 the latter did not secure sufficient votes and Haykuhi Harutyunyan appointed under Bright Armenia faction's quota was elected head of the commission. Edgar Shatiryan rendered his resignation viewing the election results as a vote of no confidence towards him. The position of the member under My Step faction's quota became vacant.

The Corruption Prevention Commission, according to the strategy to fight corruption and the plan of action for its implementation in 2019-2022 adopted by the government on October 2, 2019 is viewed as one of the three key components of the institutional system for the fight against corruption along with the law enforcement system and the Anti-corruption commission, the investigative body to be formed. The analysis of the setup of the first composition of the commission and parliamentary discussions around it allow us to make the following observations:

- The law on the “Corruption Prevention Commission” adopted in 2017 set such a procedure. Specifically, it stated that in order to elect the candidates for member of the Commission the President of the National Assembly sets up a competition council made up of members each appointed by one of the following: the President of the Constitutional Court, Defender of Human Rights, opposition factions of the National Assembly, the Public Council and Chamber of Advocates. The list of winners in a three-level competition held by the latter is presented to the NA President and they are appointed members of the commission. Under these legal regulations, even though the parliament is in charge of holding the competition, it (especially the political majority) does not play a direct role in it. This way the potential risks for the commission to be influenced and hampered by NA political forces were minimized.

With the introduced legislative amendments the entire process of commission setup unfolds within the political logic and with the direct involvement of the political majority and the government.

Considerable differences exist also in the requirements set for the candidates for commission members.

The law adopted in 2017 stated that any person meeting the requirements set for a deputy who has higher education, at least ten years of professional work experience and recognition can be appointed commission member.

Under Article 30 of the Electoral Code the requirements set for a deputy are: having attained the age of 25, having been a citizen of the Republic of Armenia only for the preceding 4 years, having been permanently residing in the Republic of Armenia for the preceding 4 years, having electoral rights and command of the Armenian language.

Article 10 of the law on the “Corruption Prevention Commission” sets the following requirements for the member of the commission: “Any person who is a RA citizen only, with higher education and knowledge of the Armenian language, having at least five years of work experience at least three of which as a member of political, autonomous, administrative or public authorities formed by law or holding other posts with functions of organization, management, regulation and coordination (whether the work was performed in the public or private sector) can be appointed commission member”. In addition, at least one of the members of the commission shall have a law degree and at least one shall have an economics degree.

The comparison of the two legal regulations shows that not only the requirements for the commission member of having attained the age of 25, having been permanently residing in the Republic of Armenia for the preceding 4 years have been lifted, but also those of being well-known (even though the former regulations of the law did not clarify the criteria of being well-known). In addition, the requirement for 10 years of professional work experience was replaced with 5 years of general work experience, at that at least three of them as a member of political, autonomous, administrative or public authorities formed by law or holding other posts with functions of organization, management, regulation and coordination, including the private sector. So, the scope of the potential candidates, and therefore also the selection range has been significantly broadened. Given this the category of being well-known naturally had to lose its significance. Perhaps this is the reason why the majority of the members of the first makeup of the commission are not well known to the society.

It should be noted that the commission setup procedure is a temporary one. The objective is to revert to the commission setup model based on competition and professional criteria.

³ Under Article 80 of the Electoral Code the requirements set for a deputy are: having attained the age of 25, having been a citizen of the Republic of Armenia only for the preceding 4 years, having been permanently residing in the Republic of Armenia for the preceding 4 years, having electoral rights and a command of the Armenian language.

Item 54 of the RA anticorruption strategy adopted by the government on October 3, 2019 envisages amendments to the procedure for setup of the Corruption Prevention Commission “maintaining the competition mode of the setup of the Commission”. Moreover, out of considerations of increasing the guarantees for the independence of the commission it is proposed that the procedure of termination of the powers be revised as well stating that the powers of the Commission member can be terminated only upon consent of the Commission and only in cases prescribed by law. In this context the composition of the first group of the commission members is due to the objective urgency of implementation of the process.

The first item in the 2019-2022 plan of action for the implementation of the anti-corruption strategy states that in order to ensure the normal operation of the Corruption Prevention Commission the National Assembly is to adopt a legislative package concerning mentioned revisions in the procedures of commission setup and extension of the scope of functions in 2021-2022.

- As far as the scope of functions, the Corruption Prevention Commission is significantly different from the former Senior Officials Ethics Committee which did not have any legal leverage to enforce the duty of officials to file declarations and ensure their completeness.

The functions of the Corruption Prevention Commission include engagement in the anti-corruption policy development, regulation of the property and income declaration process, audit and analysis of the declarations, ensuring the enforcement of regulations regarding senior officials' incompatibility requirements and other restrictions and conflict of situational interests. The commission is vested with a quite broad scope of authority, particularly to review and rule on applications concerning senior officials' incompatibility requirements, violations of ethics rules and cases of conflict of situational interests, presentation of recommendations, all the way to holding to account. Also it is charged with the maintenance of the register of declarations, review and ruling on cases regarding declaration violations, performance of expert analysis of anti-corruption draft strategies and plans of action (including sectoral), design of corruption prevention programs, implementation of educational and public awareness raising programs concerning the fight against corruption, presentation of recommendations on organization and inclusion of anti-corruption courses in the educational programs as well as in training programs for officials and public servants and so on. One of the most critical functions, that the Commission is vested with is the initiation of administrative offense proceedings regarding improper and incomplete filing of declarations and applying to the Chief Prosecutor's office in cases when there appears to be deliberate failure to file the declaration or concealment of data that has to be declared or presentation of false data in the declaration.

Under the anticorruption strategy adopted by the government in 2019 the Corruption Prevention Commission assumes several new functions such as the anticorruption monitoring, an essentially innovative institution for the Republic of Armenia, the oversight of the receipt of gifts by officials and that of officials' integrity. Basically, the so called "vetting" option is introduced, which is based not on personnel filtering but rather on the concept of smooth changes when the new additions made need to be "corruption-proof".

At this point only a few of these strategic goals are reflected in the law on the Corruption Prevention Commission. Particularly, presentation of conclusions of consultative nature as a result of review of the integrity of the prosecutors, prosecutor-candidates and investigator has not been included. This is a noteworthy fact in the sense that at this stage the legislature hurried to formulate in the law the functional requirement for presentation of conclusions of advisory nature on the integrity of the judges and judge-candidates by the Commission. This way, it has left out the prosecutors and investigators' integrity factor demonstrating a somewhat discriminatory approach.

It should be noted that the legislation stating the procedures for the setup of the commission and its scope of authority has failed to provide regulations for the frameworks for the launch of new institutions. Even though the goals of maintaining the gifts register, controlling the receipt of gifts, as well as presenting conclusions on officials' integrity are set by law, however the tools for their implementation and integrity assessment criteria as well as the practical significance of the conclusions issued and their final impact on designation to these posts have not been provided. In this sense one of the primary issues of the Corruption Prevention Commission should be the development of the implementing regulatory framework and from that perspective special importance is attached to the role of the first composition of the commission.

- The realization of the principle by which the influence of the political power is not critical in the procedures for setup of the first composition of the Commission is of key significance in the fight against corruption. This is so especially in the sense of securing political guarantees for the commission's operational independence when the institution is first launched. Its first manifestation was the election of the commission member who was appointed under the quota of the parliamentary force which is viewed as oppositional as head of the commission. The second one was the initiation of ethics-disciplinary proceedings against Yerevan mayor.

However the legislation concerning the Corruption Prevention Commission also has certain gaps which can potentially pose as factors preventing the success of the commission. Specifically, the law states that at least one of the Commission members must have a law degree and another one must have a degree in economics. However, it is not specified which entities are charged with ensuring this requirement. The law does not state specific professional requirements for the Commission member either.

Corruption Prevention Commission is made up of 5 members, at that the right to nominate 2 of them is given to the parliamentary opposition forces. In case of the current parliament, where the opposition is represented by two factions this legal regulation does not cause any difficulty. However the law does not regulate such a situation when there are more than 2 opposition factions in the parliament. This presumably suggests the ability of these forces to hold an internal political dialogue and reach consensus or compromise.

NA inquiry committees: establishment of the institution and legal matters

Under Article 20 of the constitutional law on the “NA Rules of Procedure” an inquiry committee can be set up in the parliament by virtue of the law through securing the signatures of at least 1/4 of the number of deputies (1/3 in case of matters concerning the defense sector). The aim is to reveal the facts and circumstances concerning the issues of public interest in the purview of the National Assembly and present them for discussion in the National Assembly. The ability to set up an inquiry committee has significantly increased the oversight potential of the parliament and the operational significance of this function. It was introduced along with the opportunity set by the NA Rules of Procedure to set up an ad-hoc committee to present its conclusions in connection with drafts of specific laws, decisions, statements, addresses as well as those concerning the deputy ethics.

The inquiry committee is set up by submitting a respective draft signed by at least 1/4 of the number of NA deputies or 33 deputies joining the initiative to the NA President (1/3 or 44 deputies in case of issues concerning the defense sector), without need for further discussion and adoption in a vote. At the same time, the NA ad-hoc committee is set up by the decision of the National Assembly and only the faction is entitled to submit its draft.

This means that setting up an inquiry committee is easier than an ad-hoc committee, which is important especially to the parliamentary minority. This mechanism allows it to initiate oversight proceedings concerning an issue of public significance.

⁴ Law on the NA Rules of Procedure, Article 20

During the 3 sessions of the National Assembly of the 7th convocation the oversight resource for the setup and operation of the inquiry committee was fully utilized. Five inquiry committees were formed, 2 of them during the 2nd session and 3 in the 3rd session.

The first inquiry committee was set up by the signatures of 47 deputies representing the NA parliamentary majority for a term of 6 months. It was formed with the aim to review the circumstances of the military operations unfolding in April of 2016, based on the framework of the NA standing committee on Defense and Security under the legal regulation of the law on the NA Rules of Procedure .

The committee intends to review the questions of provision in the armed forces, rear armament, combat preparedness, compliance with the combat duty rules, manpower administration of troops during the military operations, evaluate the promptness of decisions by the command aimed at the prevention and averting of the opponent's attack operations, the legality and validity of legal positions given to the cases.

The committee has the right to request from the competent bodies and obtain regulatory and non-regulatory documents concerning the defense sector, orders, instructions, materials of internal investigation, report letters, notes, reports by the panel and military council, which can also be confidential.

Note: According to the report of the committee a document volume of 2684 pages of informational, analytical, intelligence, troop command and other nature, confidential and strictly confidential was reviewed in the first 6 months of operation. Based on the results of the research 21 sittings were held and 10 servicemembers were questioned. As a result of the review around 400 questions were prepared and asked and corresponding information, clarifications and explanations were received. As stated by the head of the committee at the upcoming stage it will hear around 40 officials from the approved list and will work on a final conclusion of the committee during the 2 final months.

⁵ Authorities of an inquiry committee in the area of Defense and Security can be exercised only the competent standing committee of the National Assembly as demanded by at least 1/3 of the total number of deputies. NA Rules of Procedure, Article 20, Clause 2

Taking the opportunity given by the law on the NA Rules of Procedures, the committee at the end of the 3rd session came up with the initiative to extend the work of the committee for up to six months which was carried unanimously in the parliament.

The second inquiry committee made up of 16 members by the decision of the NA was also set up by the initiative of the political majority. At the end of the 3rd session it also came up with the motion to extend its term of authority for up to 6 months which was carried unanimously in the parliament. The committee was set up to investigate the performance of the structural divisions of the Water Commission and Water Management PIU in Ararat and Armavir marzes. This committee also performed its work on a regular basis reviewing documents concerning the sector, inviting and receiving explanations from the deputy head of the Water committee, director of the Water Management PIU, heads of water consumption companies.

During the 3rd session three inquiry committees were set up as initiated by the parliamentary minority, PAP and BAP faction deputies. The first one was formed to review the legality, justification and trustworthiness of financial and other reports submitted to the competent bodies of the executive and accepted by them in the scope of the investment programs in the mining sector. In addition to collection of reports, documents and information regarding the matters under review, the committee is vested with the authority to order expert evaluations and request information and clarification from officials. The NA vote approving the number of members with 99 votes in favor, carried unanimously, shows that the political majority did not in principle object to making the issue a subject of parliamentary oversight and the decision was adopted in the situation of full political consensus.

The need to set up the committee was essentially due to the discussions of the issue of Amulsar mine exploitation within the society which in reality triggered the review of the course of performance of investment and tax liabilities by other problematic metallurgical mines of the republic, specifically Zangezur copper-molybdenum combine, Teghut, Sotk and Mghard mines.

In terms of substance, the inquiry committee managed to review information on cases under preliminary investigation or court proceedings received from the Prosecutor's office in the scope of the questions under review, information on subsoil users with the extraction rights of the mineral metal resources provided by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure and define the scope of questions regarding the entities operating in the sector addressed to the competent authorities.

⁶ The term of authority of the committee is up to six months, which can be extended once for up to six months upon committee's suggestion through a decision of the National Assembly. NA Rules of Procedure, Article 20, Clause 7

Initiated by the PAP faction and supported by BAP deputies a fourth inquiry committee investigating the process of organization of ground transfer of passengers and the work of authorities servicing, coordinating and overseeing the sector in 2016-2019 was set up in the parliament in November by virtue of the law. With 98 votes in favor and 2 abstained the decision was adopted setting the number of members of the committees at 15.

The question under review was the process of organization, service and licensing of ground transfer of passengers from Yerevan to other marzes and the work of authorities servicing, coordinating and overseeing the sector in 2016-2019. The aim is to identify the current issues and present recommendations seeking to regulate the field.

The third initiative by the parliamentary opposition to set up the 3rd inquiry committee came up in December in response to the unfolding public-political discussions around the possible relationship between the process of acquisition of vehicles in Yerevan Municipality and issuance of building permits to several business entities and around the existence of seemingly corrupt practices. The committee initiated by 35 deputies from PAP and BAP factions by virtue of the law and set up for a term of 6 months will look into the legal grounds and corruption risks associated with the transfer to Yerevan community of vehicles and other property, service provider agreements, as well as issuance of non-proprietary rights, building permits and preferences since September 2018.

The analysis of the practice of setup of inquiry committees allows us to make a few generalizations:

- The practice of setup of the committees and extension of their term of operation attests to the parliament's motivation to use the oversight tool to its fullest potential and assign the NA oversight function a dominating role.
- The first two inquiry committees were initiated by the NA political majority, in the environment of a low level of engagement and certain resistance of the parliamentary opposition. This allows us to presume that the parliamentary opposition disregards the political component of this institutional tool and the political majority is not inclined to act based on a consensus. However the setup of all 3 inquiry committees in the 3rd session was initiated by the opposition factions. In this case overcoming the internal positional competition the PAP and BAP presented a united approach and jointly exercised the opportunity provided to the opposition under the law on the NA Rules of Procedure. On the other hand, the decisions on setting the number of members of the last 3 committees formed in the NA were carried almost unanimously without votes against and abstaining, which demonstrates the approach of the political majority to not create obstacles for the opposition at least when it comes to the setup of inquiry committees and to offer it certain oversight "privileges".

- The review of the legal norms for setup of inquiry committees however demonstrates certain risks that legal anecdotes may arise. Specifically clause 1 of Article 20 of the law on the NA Rules of Procedure states that the inquiry committee is set up if demanded by at least 1/4 of the total number of deputies (1/3 in case of issues concerning defense sector) by virtue of the law. However Part 6 of the same article states that the number of the members of the inquiry committee is set by the National Assembly through the adoption of a respective decision. In reality, the law does not regulate which legal mode is in place when the NA does not adopt the decision on setting the number of members of the inquiry committee in a vote. Even given that the right of deputies to once again come up with setting up a committee for the same issue through collection of signatures is not restricted, theoretically a situation may arise when exercising the statutory procedure of setting the number of the members through adoption of a NA decision the NA majority will keep killing the initiatives of the opposition to set up an inquiry committee regardless of the legislative requirement for it to be set up by virtue of the law.
- The already shaping practice of setup of inquiry committees shows that the initiatives of their setup are at times not based on the objective necessity or urgency, let alone the NA scope of authority or relevance. The letters signed by deputies and addressed to the NA President which are sufficient for presenting a statement on the setup of the inquiry committee, are almost always structured the same way: the description of the subject of the review and the scope of authority of the committee are not different in substance and do not essentially offer more than the rephrasing of the committee's title.

In reality, this fact is critical in the sense that it leaves a lot of room for interpretation of the powers of the committees, thoroughness and directions of the investigations.

For instance, the formulation of the subject of review by the committee looking into the legal grounds and corruption risks associated with the transfer to Yerevan community of vehicles and other property, service provider agreements, as well as issuance of building permits and preferences contains a suspicion of an alleged crime which is not so much in the purview of the inquiry committee of the political body, but rather within the scope of functions of the law-enforcement bodies. Interestingly, the committee was set up at the stage when the RA Prosecutor's Office had already requested the Yerevan Municipality to provide the document package related to this process and property donations in order to review it. Had the committee initially defined the standards and limits of the investigation and specified its aims, it would have been possible to evaluate to which extent it stayed within the limits of the parliamentary functions and to which it could ensure no interference with the processes unfolding in the criminal-legal field.

In case of another inquiry committee investigating the work of the Water Commission, its structural divisions and Water Management PIU in Ararat and Armavir, the rationale for not including the other marzes in the scope of the review and not setting chronological boundaries was not provided.

The inquiry committee looking into the circumstances of the military operations unfolding in April of 2016 in terms of specificity compares favorably with the first one.

These observations show that the parliament acted somewhat hastily when it came to the setup of inquiry committees as they treated their setup rather than the expected outcome as the ultimate aim. There is an obvious need to clarify the aims of the operation of the committees, their toolset and methodological guidelines and to ensure regulations.

The institution of inquiry committees is still on the path of development and the mentioned issues exist due to the short course of its introduction. This presents the parliament with the imperative to review the issues concerning the setup of the inquiry committees in order to make this institution more purposeful and efficient.

Urgency of issues of ethics and conflict of interest

The parliament has the power to set up ad-hoc committees as stated in Article 16 of the law on the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly. The ad-hoc committee is set up through the adoption of a decision of the NA to discuss certain laws, NA draft decisions, statements and addresses, as well as questions concerning deputy ethics and to issue NA conclusions regarding them.

During the three sessions of the National Assembly of the 7th convocation no ad-hoc committee was set up, in connection with any issues of deputy ethics or conflict of interest.

The institutional “neutralization” of the Ethics committee

During the 3 sessions of the 7th convocation the NA did not address any question of ethics, and carried out no proceedings. And this was the case despite the fact that the parliamentary discussions over several key issues were extremely heated and accompanied by violations of ethics norms or such actions which could be reviewed at least with regard to potential violation of deputy code of conduct.

Specifically, 3 attorneys had applied to the National Assembly factions demanding that an ad-hoc Ethics committee be set up to review the matter of violation of ethics rules by NA deputy Andranik Kocharyan, head of the NA standing committee on Defense and Security Affairs when in an interview to a website he had made certain statements regarding the former NA Vice President Arpine Hovhannisyan. The application cited clause 2 of Article 3 of the law on the “Guarantees of work of the deputy of the National Assembly”. With regards to the violation of ethics rules by the deputy it states that the deputy shall respect the moral norms of the public, contribute to the creation of trust and respect towards the National Assembly with his/her actions, everywhere and while engaging in any activity demonstrate conduct as befits the deputy and demonstrate a respectful attitude towards the political opponents. But the application did not result in any discussion under the formal procedure.

The virtual absence of practice of Ethics committee setup is due to the legal system of oversight for compliance with the ethics norms and setup of an ad-hoc ethics committee which makes the success of this institution in the current parliament practically impossible.

Initiation of proceedings for a case of possible violation of ethics norms is politicized due to the approach of giving it an ad-hoc committee status. Such a committee can be set up only if initiated by the NA factions, at that the legal standards for initiation of proceedings and review of the matter are not set.

NA factions, having the discretion to setup the ad-hoc committees, can simply dismiss applications regarding violation of ethics norms not only from citizens or political, public associations, but also those from deputies. This way the opportunity for public oversight of the conduct of NA deputies has been cancelled. It also explains why the citizens and civil society representatives are less and less inclined to apply to the factions with such issues.

One of the main reasons for the institutional neutralization of the ethics ad-hoc committee is also the legal framework contributing to the loss of operational significance of the conclusion regarding the violation of ethics. Under the law on the NA Rules of Procedure the conclusion drafted as a result of the setup and operation of the committee does not lead to the implementation of any disciplinary or other measures, does not even merit a discussion in the NA and is merely published on the NA official website.

In this situation the deputy code of conduct broadly speaking cannot have the resource to influence deputies' conduct. Over the previous session, due to the political discussions over a specific case, My Step faction leader Lilit Makuntsin her public statements had sent certain signals that legislative amendments were needed in order to restructure and rethink the substance of the ethics. However the factions did not come up with any initiatives in that area during the 3rd session.

PARLIAMENTARY HEARINGS. PRACTICE AND TRENDS

The main measure ensuring the engagement of the society and its impact in the decision making process in the National Assembly are the parliamentary hearings.

Under the law on the “Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly” the parliamentary hearings can be initiated by the President of the National Assembly, standing committees (ad-hoc committees regarding draft laws for sectors in their purview) and factions regarding the draft they have authored. It is stated that in the course of every regular session the faction can hold one hearing. This restriction does not apply to other entities entitled to hold hearings, the NA President and committees. Perhaps this seeks to limit the opportunity to abuse this institution for political means.

It is stated that the day of holding the hearings shall not coincide with the plenary sittings of the National Assembly, and the minutes generated in their course shall be approved by the entity organizing the hearings and published on the National Assembly website.

In the 3rd session of the 7th convocation the NA President Ararat Mirzoyan exercised the right to organize parliamentary hearings provided in the law on the NA Rules of Procedure the most. The 3 NA factions did not hold any parliamentary hearings and only 3 out of 11 standing committees initiated parliamentary hearings. In the 4 months of the fall session 5 parliamentary hearings were held in the National Assembly and 9 of them during the past 2019.

In the 3rd session the NA President Ararat Mirzoyan came up with 2 initiatives to hold parliamentary hearings. One of them concerned the amendments to the law on the Parties, the other one addressed issues of violation of ownership rights as a result of recognition of exclusive priority public interest by the state in the scope of Northern Avenue-Cascade program.

⁸ Law on the Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly, Article 125

During the 3rd session the NA standing committees on Science, Education, Culture, Diaspora, Youth and Sport Affairs, on Defense and Security Affairs, on Financial-Credit and Budgetary Affairs each held one parliamentary hearing.

The standing committee on Science, Education, Culture, Diaspora, Youth and Sport Affairs organized hearings on the topic of “Education reforms and future strategic challenges” where planned amendments to the law on “General Education” were discussed. The standing committee on Defense and Security Affairs organized parliamentary hearings entitled “Resistant Armenia”. Questions of mapping of disasters and risks, cultivation of resistance, targeted use of investments, awareness, introduction of the international practices and technical infrastructure were discussed.

The standing committee on Financial-Credit and Budgetary Affairs held parliamentary hearing on the topic of the Credit policy in Armenia.

The standing committee on European integration held only 1 session during the NA fall sitting. The only sitting was an extraordinary one during which it was decided to organize parliamentary hearings by the end of the year dedicated to the current RA-EU relations. The hearings however were not held.

The analysis of the practice of organization of hearings during the 3rd session of the parliament of the 7th convocation allows us to point out a few noteworthy trends and features of development of this institution.

- The factions of the National Assembly did not organize any hearings during the session. The same was seen in the previous session, which reinforces the opinion that the political forces do not view hearings as an opportunity to set lawmaking policy priorities.
- Certain signs of slowdown were noted in the work of the parliamentary standing committees. During the 2nd session 4 standing committees held hearings and in the 3rd session 3 standing committees did. The standing committee on Science, Education, Culture, Diaspora, Youth and Sport Affairs is the only one to hold hearings in both sessions.

The 5 NA standing committees- those on Foreign relations, European integration, State-legal, Territorial administration, local self-government, agriculture and nature protection, Healthcare and social issues did not hold any hearings during the 2nd and 3rd sessions of the 7th convocation.

- Despite the lower number of the hearings their public influence has somewhat increased. Some of the hearings caused certain stirs in the public and generation of political processes, which was hardly seen in the past. Specifically, the hearings on the amendments to the law on the Parties initiated by the NA President during the session promoted public-political debates over these amendments. And hearings on the issues of violation of ownership rights as a result of recognition of exclusive priority public interest by the state in the scope of Northern Avenue-Cascade programme made it possible to reassess the process of protection of ownership rights of the citizens, collect a factual database of possible illegal acts, which can warrant the restoration of these rights or at least a due compensation process.

The hearings organized by the standing committee on Science, Education, Culture, Diaspora, Youth and Sport Affairs on the topic of “Education reforms and future strategic challenges” the amendments planned in the law on “General Education” were discussed. These were followed by students’ protests against the intention of the government to make the Armenian subjects elective in non-specialty faculties demanding that the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport Arayik Harutyunyan resign. The NA hearings served as a platform for the government to voice its approaches at the same time creating an opportunity for an in-depth understanding of the issue and open professional and public discussions. As a result the legislative amendments were revised to a certain extent.

- It is turning into a consistent practice for standing committees or factions to organize meetings, not regulated by law, in order to discuss sectoral issues with heads or officials of relevant public authorities and other interested actors attending. In terms of aims and substance they fully fit in the logic of the hearings. Such meeting-discussions were organized by most of the standing committees.

For instance a discussion took place in the standing committee on Human Rights Protection and Public Affairs with the participation of representatives of law-enforcement bodies and parents of the service members fallen in time of peace. The matters regarding the investigations being carried out in connection with the death cases of service members during non-combat activities in the armed forces were discussed.

The standing committee on Healthcare and social issues held a working discussion entitled "The current state of ongoing programs aimed at the prevention, early detection and high treatment efficiency of malignant diseases in the Republic of Armenia and ways to resolve current issues."

The standing committee on Financial-Credit and Budgetary Affairs organized a working discussion entitled "The development options of RA public procurement system."

Committees held such discussions in the scope of the parliamentary oversight function. These were often preferred to the parliamentary hearings, the organization of which requires certain procedures stated in the NA rules of procedure. This can lead to the lower demand for the hearings and hinder the development of the institution.

The Law on the NA Rules of Procedure states that minutes are prepared regarding the hearings, approved by the decision of the entity convening the hearings and published on the official website of the National Assembly. Also, Part 90 of the NA Operating Procedure states that the President of the National Assembly, the committee or the faction can prepare written speeches, suggestions, conclusions, information notes regarding the topic of the hearings organized, as well as other materials summarizing the outcomes of the hearings, which can be publicized at the suggestion of the committee or the faction upon consent of the President of the National Assembly.

The objective of the first legal norm is to record the fact of holding the hearings and their course. The second one seeks to raise the efficiency of the hearings and publicize the information gathered around the discussed issues. Unlike the former this legal norm is of discretionary nature, whereas it is important in the assessment of the impact of the hearings on public-political agenda and policy pursued in the sector or its change. Without the latter the institution of hearings is an end in itself and makes the principle of public influence on the lawmaking process formal.

None of the committees holding hearings has published any written speeches, suggestions, conclusions, notes and other materials summarizing the outcomes of the hearings. They have not even published the minutes which is required by law. In practice, only the notifications regarding the hearings were published.

During the 3rd session of the 7th convocation the controversial trends in the way the institution of hearings was employed justify the need to furnish this tool with adequate legal mechanisms and align it with the modern trends in communication between the government and the society.

