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Head of state: **Serzh Sargsyan**

Head of government: **Tigran Sargsyan**

Public attitudes were hostile towards topics which were perceived as unpatriotic. Conditions in prisons were reported to amount to inhuman treatment.

Background

President Sargsyan's Republican Party won parliamentary elections on 6 May. While freedom of expression, assembly and movement were largely unrestricted around the election, monitors reported widespread vote buying as well as instances of pressure on voters.

Freedom of expression

Freedom of expression was largely unrestricted. However, those expressing opinions perceived as unpatriotic or anti-nationalist faced widespread public hostility and occasionally violence. Police and local authorities appeared at times to be colluding in the attacks. They also failed to properly investigate or to publicly and unequivocally denounce such acts.

- Civil society activists attempting to hold a festival of Azerbaijani films in Armenia were subjected to violent attacks and forced to cancel the event on two occasions. On 12 April, dozens of protesters blocked the venue of the film festival, scheduled in Armenia's second city, Gumri. They physically assaulted Giorgi Vanyan, the organizer and chairman of the local Caucasus Centre for Peace-Making Initiatives, and forced him to publicly announce that the festival was cancelled. Festival organizers reported that the local authorities had harassed and used psychological pressure to dissuade them from holding the event.

On 16 April, another attempt to hold the film festival in the city of Vanadzor at the Helsinki Citizens Assembly (HCA) office also prompted public protests and violence. Approximately 200 people – including students, political party members and veterans from the Nagorno-Karabakh war – gathered in front of the HCA office. They forced their way into the premises, vandalizing office equipment, throwing eggs and rocks and injuring

one member of staff. Police officers present throughout failed to intervene to ensure the safety of the staff members or to stop the violence. Despite the HCA's requests, additional police did not arrive until after the incident. After an investigation, one woman was fined for throwing a stone at the building, but no thorough or impartial investigation took place. The authorities failed to condemn the violence.

- On 8 May, a gay-friendly bar in the capital, Yerevan, was attacked. Two people were caught on a security camera throwing Molotov cocktails through the windows. However, police reportedly only arrived at the scene 12 hours later to investigate the attack. Two young men were arrested as part of the investigation, but were bailed shortly afterwards by two MPs for the nationalist Armenian Revolutionary Federation – Dashnaktsutyun party (ARF). They condoned the attack, saying it was in line with "the context of societal and national ideology". Eduard Sharmazanov, spokesperson for the ruling Republican Party and Parliamentary Deputy Speaker was quoted justifying the violent attack in local newspapers.

Torture and other ill-treatment

On 3 October, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture published a report following their visit to Armenia in December 2011. It stated that "virtually none of the recommendations made after previous visits as regards the detention of lifers have been implemented". The report also noted that the poor conditions at Kentron Prison in Yerevan made it unsuitable for lengthy periods of detention. The Committee found that the detention conditions of life-sentenced prisoners held at Kentron amounted to inhuman treatment.

Conscientious objectors

By the end of the year, more than 30 men were serving prison sentences for refusing to perform military service on grounds of conscience. Alternative civilian service remained under military control. On 27 November, the European Court of Human Rights, in its fourth decision against Armenia on conscientious objection, found that Armenia had violated the rights of 17 Jehovah's Witnesses in the case of Khachatryan and Others v. Armenia. The Court found that the rights of the Jehovah's Witnesses to liberty and security, as well as the right to compensation for unlawful detention, had been violated. They faced criminal charges and detention because they had left their alternative service when they realized that they were under military control.

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