

**THE ARMENIAN
VELVET
REVOLUTION**

**STEPAN
GRIGORYAN**



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The book discusses the political situation in Armenia in recent years and presents a chronology and analysis of the political processes in the country from March 31, 2018, when opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan and his allies started a march from Vardanants, the central square in Gyumri, to Yerevan, until May 8, 2018, when the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia elected Nikol Pashinyan prime minister of the country in a special session.

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**Nikol Pashinyan:
"We've got the main
mandate - the mandate of
the Armenian people"**



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STEP-BY-STEP TO VICTORY

Author's note

The book discusses the political situation in Armenia in recent years and presents a chronology and analysis of the political processes in the country from March 31, 2018, when opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan and his allies started a march from Vardanants, the central square in Gyumri, to Yerevan, until May 8, 2018, when the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia elected Nikol Pashinyan prime minister of the country in an extraordinary session.

That Nikol Pashinyan achieved power in Armenia despite the harsh and authoritarian regime established in the country by Serzh Sargsyan and the Republican Party of Armenia (RPA) is truly astounding. This regime censored



the Armenian mass media, blacklisted politicians and experts, and used violence to gain and retain power.

Nikol Pashinyan – together with his team and the citizen activists of Armenia – was able to effectuate the Velvet Revolution, destroying the despised authoritarian system.

During the years of its rule, the RPA attempted to instill the notion that “nothing is more important in life than power and money” in the Armenian people. Adherence to such a credo corrupted those in power. One example is especially vivid and consequential: The RPA tried to strengthen the role of money and the privileges of the wealthy by rigging the Electoral Code of Armenia.

Specifically, before the April 2, 2017 parliamentary elections, the RPA made amendments to the Electoral Code of Armenia that included the “rating system of voting.” The essence of the rating system is a majority-based voting system rigidly bound to party lists. Though the convoluted mechanism contrived by the RPA defies easy description, the way it benefits the ruling party does not. The RPA would listen neither to the criticism of opposition parties nor to the opinion of citizen activists who warned of the danger the rating system posed to the political system in Armenia. Obviously, in an impoverished country this electoral system eliminates any meaningful political debate in the election process and results in simple vote buying.

The ramifications of this policy were apparent in the April 2, 2017 elections for the National Assembly, when administrative instruments and financial resources proved decisive. Party programs and debates between the political actors receded into irrelevance.

What kind of Armenia did the RPA leaders want to build – a country where money would be sacred? where the economy is monopolized? where the political system is close to one-party? where criminal elements play a central role in the life of the country? If this was their dream, it has almost come true, as almost 60% of the seats in the parliament are under their control. And the same is true with the economy: The RPA and its coterie of oligarchs control most of the Armenian economy.

The Armenian people have had a glorious but hard history. Over the past seven centuries, we have suffered enormous human and territorial losses. Yet, there have been victories. The Armenian people, gaining independence in 1991, stood for the rights of their compatriots in Artsakh. They simultaneously prevented a campaign of ethnic cleansing in Artsakh and began to build an independent and democratic Armenia.

And how did the Armenian government, headed by the RPA, respond to these successes? Under pretext of enforcing the law, it put Artsakh war heroes Samvel Babayan and Zhirayr Sefilyan in prison. It's shameful when corrupt officials and oligarchs walk freely in the streets of the country they rob while heroes are kept in prisons; it's shameful when Serzh Sargsyan is travelling around an impoverished country in a convoy of no fewer than fifteen cars with a retinue of personal security guards and traffic police.

Yet, today the people of Armenia have political power and a leader, Nikol Pashinyan, who has inspired hope that everything will improve in the country. And the actions of this Nikol Pashinyan and his supporters led to the collapse of the authoritarian regime in the country. There appeared the Citizen who believed that his every step laid the groundwork for the construction of a strong civil society.

But how was this possible? It turned out that we did exactly what the Ancient Greeks did! For a time, we withdrew from representative democracy and elected the leader of our country on the main square of Armenia, Republic Square. The Ancient Greeks did the same 2,500 years ago.

And then, on May 8, 2018, this fact was ratified at a National Assembly session in which Nikol Pashinyan was elected prime minister of the country. This will go down in the annals of history as a superlative example of political transformation – an example illustrating the wisdom and determination of the Armenian citizen activists who overcame the political crisis in their country by using the experience of the Ancient Greeks.

Thanks to the Velvet Revolution, Armenians began smiling. They began greeting and hugging each other after so many years of suffocation and fear. The Armenian people are a kind and hard-working people. And nobody can underestimate them ever again.

The book consists of two parts:

The first part includes seven chapters on the author's analysis of the main events that happened in Armenia from March 31, 2018, to May 8, 2018. The context surrounding developments in Armenia in recent years and their impact on the revolution in the country are considered.

The five chapters of the second part present a chronology of the main actions of the opposition and the government. They are of great importance and must be kept for the future generations of citizens. Many actions of public officials and the opposition are discussed and analyzed by the author.

I extend my thanks to my friends Mkrtich Karapetyan and Shavarsh Karapetyan and my wife, Maria Amaryan, for their valuable observations related to my work on this book.

*Stepan Grigoryan,
Political Analyst, Head of Analytical Center on
Globalization and Regional Cooperation (Armenia)*

A truly Nationwide Movement

