

REPORT

**On observations of the events that occurred
and of the assemblies that were held
in the Republic of Armenia in April-May
2018**



Yerevan 2018

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Preface

In 2015, a Constitutional referendum was held in the Republic of Armenia and the system of government transitioned from presidential to a parliamentary one. The executive power was to be transferred from the President to the Prime Minister who was to be elected by the Parliament in 2018. Both the Constitutional referendum and the 2017 parliamentary elections were marred by blatant forms of electoral fraud and by abuse of power¹. The ruling Republican party obtained 49.08% of votes in the parliamentary elections thereby consolidating its power and keeping the

¹ See Reports drawn up by Helsinki Committee of Armenia on the 2015 RoA Referendum on Constitutional amendments and on the 2017 RoA Parliamentary elections. They can be accessed at <http://armhels.com/publications/helsinkyan-komitei-zekuycy-sahmanadrakan-popokhutyunneri-veraberyal/> and http://armhels.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Parliamentary_Elections_2017_Report_English.pdf respectively (in Armenian).

entire judicial system under its control in accordance with the amended Constitution. Taking into consideration the political realities of the Republic of Armenia of that particular period of time, it became obvious that after his second term in office expires President Serzh Sargsyan was preparing to assume the office of Prime Minister.

In early 2018, several opposition forces (*Yerkir Tsirani/Apricot Country* political party and *Armenian State Salvation Front* and *No pasaran*² civic initiatives) publicly opposed the Serzh Sargsyan's move to assume the post of Prime Minister and staged numerous rallies. Another initiative (*My Step*) was taken by a Member of Parliament from the opposition *Yelk/the Way Out* Alliance, Board Member of the *Civil Contract* political party Nikol Pashinyan. On March 31, the latter started a protest journey on foot from the city of Gyumri to Yerevan against Serzh Sargsyan and the Republican Party of Armenia³. The protest journey participants went through several regions and localities. They intended to reach Yerevan on April 13 when 24-hour non-stop rallies were to be staged.

On April 13, the protest journey participants, including N. Pashinyan, reached Yerevan and staged the first big rally in Liberty Square. Immediately after the rally, protesters blocked France Square, which is located in the center of the capital city and urged citizens to join their struggle. The movement was snowballing and on April 17 tens of thousands of demonstrators were taking part in civil disobedience actions.

It should be noted that main political forces and political scientists in Armenia regarded this movement and its prospects for success with reservations. Despite warnings and threats made by the authorities, protest actions went on both in Yerevan and in the country's regions and even multiple detentions, arrests and provocations did not deter demonstrators. Finally, on 23 April 2018, under pressure exerted by hundreds of thousands of protesters Serzh Sargsyan resigned from the Prime Minister's post. The official text of the resignation said, *inter alia*: "Nikol Pashinyan was right, I was wrong."

April 23 saw a nationwide celebration throughout Armenia. Thus, the public at large did not allow that State power would become dictatorial in Armenia where in that case the rule of one person would be perpetual and would not change.

² Also known as *Reject Serzh* initiative

³ "I am taking #MyStep". Nikol Pashinyan, 31 March 2018. <https://www.facebook.com/nikol.pashinyan/videos/2013081579012227/> (in Armenian).

Helsinki Committee of Armenia (HCA) has been conducting monitoring of the right to freedom of assembly since 2008. With a view to observing the assemblies that took place in April-May 2018 the HCA engaged 10 observers who participated in the *Observation of freedom of peaceful assembly* retraining course and obtained relevant certificates upon successful completion. Observations were made in the cities of Yerevan and Gyumri. In addition, information about assemblies provided by various media outlets, eyewitness accounts of assembly participants and State bodies' responses were also examined. The present Report addresses within the context of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly the developments that took place in the Republic of Armenia in April-May 2018.



Summary description of the assemblies

From April 13 through April 23, observers from Helsinki Committee of Armenia observed firsthand 70 assemblies in Yerevan and Gyumri. 34 of those assemblies were accompanied by marches. For the purpose of summing up observation results we studied various media reports as well as video materials and information published by members of civic initiatives and by some assembly participants and then we compared them with the data obtained in the course of

firsthand observations in order to present the situation in a most comprehensive fashion. Taking into consideration the fact that over the time period in question there were incidents of interference with the right to freedom of assembly, the present Report focuses primarily on the assemblies that were observed at that particular time.

No instances of interference by law-enforcement agencies with assemblies were observed from April 25 till May 2. Participation in assemblies was unprecedentedly big on May 2, when numerous protest demonstrations were staged in almost all parts of the Republic of Armenia. Their participants blocked main State highways and inter-State roads for some time, including roads to the airport.

The rallies staged in April 2018 were unprecedentedly big in terms of the number of their participants as compared to the rallies held in earlier years by civic initiatives as well as by political forces at the time of elections. (*For instance, on April 13, there were about 4,500 participants of the rally held in France Square, while on April 22 and April 23, only in Republic Square the number of the participants was about 90,000 and 100,000 respectively*).

Providing an accurate number of participants in the rallies that attracted large crowds on some days (*as, for instance, on May 2*) poses a problem because rallies were staged simultaneously in the country's capital and in regional centers as well as in smaller communities. By collating data from firsthand observations and media reports it is possible to conclude that on some days the total number of participants in the rallies that drew huge crowds was over 200,000. It should be noted that the unprecedentedly big number of participants notwithstanding those rallies were peaceful, with clashes between some rally participants and policemen occurring rarely.

Besides *My Step* and *Reject Serzh* civic initiatives, during the same period of time a number of rallies were organized against Serzh Sargsyan's premiership by the leader of the *Country of Apricot* political party Zaruhi Postanjyan. Numerous rallies were also staged in other countries by representatives of the Diaspora Armenians. Among the rallies that drew the largest number of protesters was a march staged in Glendale (USA) on April 22 with about 5,000 participants⁴.

⁴ «Thousands of SoCal Armenians protest election results in their homeland», 22 April 2018, *abc7*, <http://abc7.com/politics/socal-armenians-protest-election-results-in-their-homeland/3380671/>

On some days, counter-protest rallies were held in support of Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan. Their participants tried to stop citizens from joining the rallies staged in Yerevan by *My Step* movement by blocking roads or threatening people⁵.



Legal status of the assemblies

Since the RoA *Law on Freedom of Assemblies* draws a distinction between the assemblies that require notification and those that do not (*spontaneous assemblies, urgent assemblies and assemblies with up to 100 participants*), it is necessary to address the issue of a legal status of the rallies that took place in April. Members of *My Step* civic initiative N. Pashinyan and V. Hovakimyan submitted notifications to the Yerevan City Hall in advance about staging around-the-clock rallies and marches in Yerevan from April 13 till April 18. Restrictions were imposed on those rallies regarding hours for holding them (*it was proposed that rallies should not be held at nighttime*) and routes. In particular, the notification about a rally to be staged on April 13 also

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-rI8lTf6iE&t=277s>

“How Shmeis and his team close the Argavand highway blocking protesters’ progress.” *Factor TV*, 21.04.2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-Vou5WGXXo> (in Armenian).

envisaged a march in Baghramian Avenue⁶. The City Hall, however, proposed another route⁷. The rally that was launched on April 13 was held around-the-clock for several days, even though the number of participants varied significantly on various days and at various hours⁸.

The situation changed radically after April 16, when responding to N. Pashinyan's call for 'decentralized struggle,' numerous citizens started organizing and holding rallies and marches in various parts of the city of Yerevan as well as in the country's regions in parallel with the main rally. The slogans that had been put into circulation by members of *My Step* and *Reject Serzh* civic initiatives and that had been also placed on demonstrators' posters were chanted during those rallies. Participants of the rallies responded to the calls made by representatives the above-mentioned initiatives regarding the selection of forms of protest. In most cases they held rallies in those places and hours that had been suggested by the leaders of the initiatives. At the same time, there were no obvious organizers of the overwhelming majority of the rallies, while many demonstrators would often move to another location and join some other rally.

As per the RoA *Law on Freedom of Assemblies*, a spontaneous assembly is the one that is conducted with the aim of reacting to a certain event immediately⁹. Even though the law currently in force does not specify the concept of "a certain event," spontaneous assembly is addressed in detail in the OSCE *Guidelines on Freedom of Peaceful Assemblies* that was published in 2010¹⁰. In particular, the Guidelines state that spontaneous assembly is generally regarded as one organized in response to some occurrence, incident, other assembly or speech, where the organizer (if there is one) is unable to meet the legal deadline for prior notification, or where there is no organizer at all. Such assemblies often occur around the time of the triggering event, and the ability to hold them is important because delay would weaken the message to be expressed.¹¹ Taking into consideration the above-mentioned regulations and wordings, a

⁶ The buildings of the RoA National Assembly, Prime Minister's Office and the RoA Constitutional Court are located on Baghramian Avenue.

⁷ See relevant decisions made by the Yerevan City Hall at the following site: <https://www.yerevan.am/am/publicmeetings/> (in Armenian).

⁸ A detailed description of the rallies held on those days is provided in the Annex to this Report.

⁹ See Article 26 of the RoA *Law on Freedom of Assemblies*.

¹⁰ As per Article 41 of the RoA *Law on Normative Legal Acts*, the norm of a normative legal Act is interpreted "taking into consideration the goal that the body that adopts the normative legal Act has at the time of its adoption, proceeding (...) from the principles set by the given normative legal Act and in case such principles were not set by the principles of the branch of the law that regulates legal relations in question."

¹¹ See OSCE *Guidelines on Freedom of Peaceful Assemblies*, para. 126. <https://www.osce.org/odihr/73405?download=true>

conclusion can be drawn that the overwhelming majority of the rallies and marches that had been launched on April 16 were spontaneous.



Police assessment of legal status of the assemblies

The RoA Police issued a number of official statements about rallies that were staged in April. The statements made from April 13 to 16 were primarily about notifications or about marches held with violations of the notification requirements and about rally participants' actions to block streets. The police urged rally participants to refrain from making noise at night and pointed out the absence of stewards at rally venues¹².

It should be noted that according to some members of the civic initiatives, stewards were present at rally venues. However, observers with Helsinki Committee of Armenia did not notice

¹² See the RoA Police statements at:

<http://www.police.am/news/view/%D5%B0%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%BF%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B6130418.html>
<http://www.police.am/news/view/hayt130418.html> <http://www.police.am/news/view/haytararutyun13042018.html>
<http://www.police.am/news/view/%D5%B0%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%BF16042018.html> (in Armenian).

at rally venues any individuals who would be carrying the required signs¹³. The Police also confirmed in those statements that rallies staged by *My Step* civic initiative were peaceful.

In its April 16 statement addressed to N. Pashinyan, the Police demanded that the latter terminate the rally. Otherwise, after the expiration of a reasonable period of time the police would disperse it using force and special means¹⁴. It is noteworthy that this statement was placed on the official website of the Police at 3:57 p.m., i.e. after special means had been used in Baghramian Avenue¹⁵.

The above-mentioned decision to terminate the rally staged by N. Pashinyan was periodically referred to also in the statements issued by the Police in the days that followed¹⁶. In the 20 April statement¹⁷ the reference that was made to the same decision mentioned the decision about “*terminating assemblies*” but not about “*terminating an assembly*.” However, no other decisions about terminating an assembly were published on the Police website during that period.

On April 22, during the actions undertaken by the police in Artsakh Street to terminate an assembly, Members of Parliament, leaders of *My Step* civic initiative Nikol Pashinyan, Ararat Mirzoyan and Sasun Mikayelyan were arrested. The statement issued by the police on the same day noted that “*in compliance with Article 33 of the RoA Law on Freedom of Assemblies, the police undertook an action to terminate the assembly using means dictated by the situation. The organizers of the assembly Nikol Pashinyan, Ararat Mirzoyan and Sasun Mikayelyan were forcibly removed from the venue of the assembly.*”¹⁸ It is noteworthy that on May 11, during a conversation with reporters the newly appointed Head of the RoA Police V. Osipyanyan¹⁹ declared

¹³ As per Part 2 of Article 31 of the RoA *Law on Freedom of Assemblies*, “Stewards shall carry visible white signs with the word ‘steward’ written on it. Other signs shall not be permitted.”

¹⁴ The 16 April 2018 RoA Police statement addressed to N. Pashinyan can be accessed at <http://www.police.am/news/view/%D6%83%D5%A1%D5%B7%D5%AB%D5%B6%D5%B5%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%AB%D5%B616042018.html> (in Armenian).

¹⁵ Concerning the use of special means by the police see the section in this Report that has the same title.

¹⁶ See Police statements issued on 17 April 2018 and 18 April 2018 <http://www.police.am/news/view/h217042018.html>, <http://www.police.am/news/view/h318042018.html> (in Armenian).

¹⁷ See the RoA Police statement issued on 20 April 2018 <http://www.police.am/news/view/%D5%B0520042018.html> (in Armenian).

¹⁸ See the RoA Police statement issued on 22 April 2018 <http://www.police.am/news/view/hayt22042018.html> (in Armenian).

¹⁹ V. Osipyanyan was appointed as a Head of the RoA Police on 10 May 2018. At the time of the events that took place in April he held the post of the Deputy Head of the Yerevan City Division of the RoA Police.

that it was not the police that made the decision to remove N. Pashinyan and others from the venue of the assembly²⁰.

Mechanisms for dissemination of information about assemblies

Social networking websites

Social media was actively used for dissemination of information about rallies. Members of *My Step* and *Reject Serzh* civic initiatives as well as other individuals periodically used Facebook social network to share information about assemblies. N. Pashinyan as well as other leaders of the civic initiatives used their Facebook pages to provide live video streaming for constantly passing on information about rallies as well as for urging citizens to stage rallies.

From April 20 on, Infocom channel of the Telegram cellular application was used actively for regularly disseminating information about rallies that were planned or were being held in the country's various localities as well as for sharing media reports about the movement.

Mass media

In April and May, *Union of Informed Citizens* non-governmental organization published two reports on monitoring of coverage by TV companies. The first report was about TV companies' coverage of the opposition's initiatives from March 31 till April 9 and the second one was on 3 TV companies' coverage of the political changes that occurred in the period from April 23 till May 8²¹. According to the findings of the monitoring, over the period of time from March 31 till April 9, *Armenia* and *Public TV* Companies rarely covered or did not provide any coverage at all of the protest journey on foot undertaken by the *Civil Contract* political party²², while for a certain period of time in the aftermath of the Serzh Sargsyan's 23 April resignation they did not provide sufficient coverage of the events unfolding in the country and their underlying causes. They also stopped broadcasting analytical programs. The most impartial and comprehensive coverage during the two above-mentioned periods was provided by *Shant TV* Company. Even though monitoring of the coverage provided by TV companies in the period of

²⁰ "I gave my consent in order to show the general public that the police really support our people." *Radio Liberty*, 11 May 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hVFHSlXuWwk> (in Armenian).

²¹ See the reports in question produced by *Union of Informed Citizens* non-governmental organization http://uicarmenia.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Serzh-Srgsyan-on-TV-Interim-Report_arm-1.pdf <http://uicarmenia.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Final-Report-on-TV-channels-arm.pdf> (in Armenian).

²² The said protest journey on foot is the same one undertaken by *My Step* initiative.

time from April 13 to April 23 was not conducted, it can be concluded that on the whole the scope and nature of coverage were the same as in the periods of the monitoring.

The rallies that were launched on April 13 in Yerevan received extensive coverage by internet-based media, which at times provided 24-hour live broadcasting (*Radio Liberty, Civilnet, Factor TV, News.am and others*). It is noteworthy that the number of viewings and subscribers of video materials of those media outlets was unprecedentedly big compared to the number of viewings of continuing protest demonstrations and rallies held in previous years. For instance, on April 13, *Radio Liberty* had 72,000 subscribers to its YouTube channel, while by May 2 the number of subscribers reached 172,000. Over the above-mentioned period, posted video materials were viewed 42 million times²³. Likewise, the number of visits to and viewings of *News.am, Civilnet, Factor TV* and other online media also grew, albeit to a smaller extent.

Ways to demonstrate civil disobedience and protests

On April 13, when members of *My Step* civic initiative participating in the protest journey on foot were approaching the city of Yerevan, a number of students, many of whom had participated in the protest demonstrations staged in fall 2017 against abolition of the deferment of military service²⁴, appealed to universities' students to boycott classes and to join *My Step* civic initiative. On the same day, the protest journey participants headed by their leader N. Pashinyan made an entry to the main building of Yerevan State University chanting the civic initiative's slogans.

On April 15, the leader of *My Step* civic initiative N. Pashinyan called upon citizens to start mass actions of civil disobedience from the next day on, viz. *to block street traffic and to shut down metro, to close entrances of administrative buildings of State bodies, to undertake students' walkout and strikes, etc.*

Responding to his appeal, numerous rallies were launched in Yerevan and in other localities throughout the country from April 16 on in parallel with the main rallies staged by *My Step* civic initiative. Numerous citizens, university and high school students, university

²³ <https://socialblade.com/youtube/user/azatutyunradio/monthly>

²⁴ See the Facebook page of the civic initiative *For the development of science* https://www.facebook.com/pg/%D5%80%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B6-%D5%A3%D5%AB%D5%BF%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%A1%D5%B6-%D5%A6%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%A3%D5%A1%D6%81%D5%B4%D5%A1%D5%B6-1847230015591891/events/?ref=page_internal (in Armenian).

instructors as well as employees of a number of enterprises and organizations and on April 23 a group of servicemen from the RoA Armed Forces peacekeepers' brigade also responded to the appeal²⁵.

In order to block traffic in streets and highways rally participants would stand or sit in the roadway sections, use cars, city benches, outdoor trash containers and other objects. In the course of some rallies their participants would block street traffic but would quickly disperse as soon as policemen arrived so as to avoid being forcibly taken to police departments. Then they would again block traffic (*for instance, during rallies staged on Mashtots Avenue on April 21*) or would stop traffic by constantly moving to and fro in pedestrian crosswalks (*for instance, during the rallies staged on Azatutian Avenue on April 20*).

From April 16 on, rally participants started resorting to protest methods that had not been used during earlier protest actions staged by civic initiatives. For instance, on April 16, at 10 a.m., about 30 activists disrupted operation of the Yerevan metro for 30 minutes at *Yeritasardakan* station. The activists would stand or lie between metro carriages and platforms thereby not letting the carriage doors to close. The policemen's attempts to remove activists notwithstanding, the latter would hold one another or would move to other doors in carriages and would keep them blocked.

On April 17 and 19, rally participants also blocked entrances to State bodies' administrative buildings in Yerevan (*RoA Cassation Court, Prosecutor General' Office, Government, etc.*) so that employees would not be able to enter or leave the buildings. On April 17, the participants of the rally staged near the Government's administrative compound in V. Sargsyan Street started deflating or piercing tires of the vehicles parked nearby.

On April 19, during the march with N. Pashinyan's participation its participants started chanting the slogan "[*If*] *you are against Serzh, honk the horn!*" and handing out leaflets with the same slogan. This action drew an enthusiastic response from drivers. On the days that followed, drivers would periodically emit a sound signal, especially at the rallies' or marches' locations.

²⁵ "Brigade of Peacekeepers joined demonstrators." *Factor TV*, 23 April 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYd9FsdLZAww> (in Armenian).



Actions of the RoA law-enforcement agencies during assemblies and marches

Over the period of time from April 13 through April 15, no instances of policemen's interference with assemblies and marches held in Yerevan were observed. At assemblies' venues or during marches there were few or even no policemen at all. However, in places adjacent to assemblies' venues (*for example, in the yards close to France Square and on Demirchian Street*) scores of police vehicles and numerous policemen were stationed there. (For example, on April

13, there were at least 60 policemen and 17 police vehicles in the yards of the buildings near Republic Square where the rally of *My Step* civic initiative was being held).

From April 16 on, when the number of rallies and marches staged in Yerevan and in other localities throughout the country increased dramatically, the number of policemen stationed at assemblies' venues and in the vicinity of administrative buildings of State bodies increased too. From April 16 on, when the police deployed barbed wire barriers on Baghramian Avenue, there was a constant presence of significant police force on Baghramian Avenue and on Demirchian and Proshian Streets as well as on other streets in Yerevan, including armored vehicles, water cannon vehicles and a large number of police vehicles of various sizes²⁶.

Since rally participants' acts of *civil disobedience* were for the most part limited to blocking street traffic, the police always tried to counteract using various methods. Most often the police would forcibly remove rally participants from the roadway sections of the streets and would form a human chain in an attempt to prevent protesters from returning to the street. The police would also forcibly take demonstrators to police departments.

Isolated instances were observed of the police directly supporting the rally, even when its participants blocked street traffic (for instance, during the rally that was taking place at the intersection of *David Anghaght* and *Ulnetsi* Streets on April 20). In those cases when representatives of police initiated negotiations with rally participants at a rally venue, the tensions between parties would ease noticeably (*for instance, during the rally staged on the same day on Mamikoniants Street*).

Servicemen from the police units that performed official duties at assembly venues did not for the most part wear any personal identification insignia at all. Furthermore, in some instances the insignia that shows a serviceman's rank was torn off or was invisible, while many policemen would wear masks that completely covered their faces. In some cases personal identification insignia was worn for the most part by officers (*the last name and the first letter of the first name were indicated or insignia included serviceman's personal number*). Plainclothes police officers too took part in forcibly taking assembly participants to police departments. This fact was confirmed by the statement that was issued by the police on April 20²⁷.

²⁶ Quantitative data on the stationed police force are provided in the Annex to this Report.

²⁷ See 20 April 2018 statement issued by the RoA Police. <http://www.police.am/news/view/%D5%B0220042018.html> (in Armenian).

It should be noted that on numerous occasions policemen would forcibly take assembly participants to police departments in non-police vehicles as well as in public transportation vehicles the license plates of which were often missing or covered. Observers noted that uniforms of some policemen who performed official duties at assembly venues were not in compliance with the required standards. Many police servicemen wore non-standard gloves that look very much like brass knuckles, while some policemen's shields were equipped with protruding metal screws.

A number of participants of the rallies that were staged in April testified that during those rallies policemen tried to hinder videotaping of their actions by demonstrators. In some cases policemen demanded that those participants present a reporter's ID claiming that unless an individual is a reporter, he or she does not have the right to videotape policemen's actions. (*For example, on April 21 in Nor Nork district in Yerevan policemen took from a driver his vehicle's keys and demanded that a citizen who was videotaping their actions to stop videotaping and then they seized his cellular phone*²⁸). On numerous occasions policemen would refuse to answer questions of the reporters who were at an assembly venue about demonstrators who had been forcibly taken to police departments. (*For example, during rallies that were staged on Abovian Street on April 17 and in France Square on April 18.*)

²⁸ H. Mosyan. "Incomprehensible behavior of traffic police officers. 24 April 2018. https://www.facebook.com/MosyanHovhannes/videos/vb.100001035435755/1914107945300368/?type=2&video_source=user_video_tab (in Armenian).



Instances of limitations on assembly participants' freedom

According to the report provided by the RoA Police, from April 16 to April 26, 1,283 persons were forcibly brought to police departments, including 1,144 in Yerevan. 918 of those persons were also subjected to administrative detention, while alleged participation of other 365 persons in mass disturbances was checked. During rallies there were instances of policemen forcibly taking to police departments mere passers-by who were not participating in rallies²⁹. The majority of the demonstrators who were forcibly brought to police departments were held there for the period of time set for administrative detention (up to 3 hours) or for a longer period of time, i.e. with a violation of the legal requirement. In some instances, they were interrogated as witnesses in criminal cases, as a result of which the period of de facto limitation of demonstrators' freedom was noticeably prolonged. On many occasions the demonstrators who

²⁹ "Policemen forcibly took a number of demonstrators from an area near the Pedagogical University to police departments." *Radio Liberty*. 20 April 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7hcEKmrFMK8> (in Armenian).

were forcibly brought to police departments were not allowed to make a phone call³⁰. The lawyers who cooperated with the unified hot line set up by human rights defenders reported that in many cases officers in police departments prevented them from meeting with the persons who had been forcibly brought there claiming that there was no person there having their client's name, demanded that lawyers wait there until the issue could be clarified and would not let lawyers get in. Policemen put other obstacles as well³¹. Some incidents were registered of police departments telling a lawyer that there was no person there having their client's name. However, later on it would become known that the person in question was in fact in that police department. In some cases the obstacles for lawyers to enter police departments were removed after intervention from the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman.



³⁰ “87 persons were forcibly taken to police departments from central streets in Yerevan.” *Radio Liberty*. 18 April 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8sAn2CbNICc&t=2s> (in Armenian).

³¹ “The lawyer was not allowed to enter the police department.” *Radio Liberty*. 17 April 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=30cgILO2I1A> (in Armenian).

Disproportionate use of force and acts of violence

Instances of uncalled-for interference, disproportionate use of force and acts of violence on the part of police servicemen were registered in the course of observation of the assemblies held from April 16 till April 22.

Police interference with assemblies began on April 16 during the rally staged on Baghramian Avenue, where the police placed fences and then deployed barbed wire barriers in an attempt to prevent rally participants from entering the National Assembly premises. When rally participants tried to break through the barrier placed by the police, some policemen and rally participants exchanged blows and swear words. Policemen used their truncheons to hit those protesters who pushed policemen or who would try to move the fences. Some rally participants snatched pieces of gear (*shields, truncheons*) from policemen.

Numerous incidents of violence and of disproportionate use of force were observed during assemblies. Some policemen committed acts of violence by dealing blows to assembly participants, including while forcibly taking them to police departments. For example, on April 19, while removing a protester, who was lying under a police vehicle near the Government building № 3, a policeman kicked him several times. While forcibly taking to police departments the participants of the assemblies that were being held in Liberty Square and on A. Aharonian Street, policemen struck those protesters out with their feet. They also tried with the use of brute force to remove a driver from a cabin of his truck that was blocking street traffic.

In their interviews given to mass media on different days some assembly participants reported that policemen had been subjecting to beatings and profane language those demonstrators who had been standing in a roadway or had been forcibly taken to police departments³². According to another account, policemen beat up Medical University lecturer doctor H. Hovhannissian who attempted to protect students from police violence³³.

Outright violence was committed at assembly venues by servicemen from special unit of the RoA Police³⁴. For example, on April 17, at about 3:30 p.m. 6 servicemen from special police

³² “An eyewitness: Policemen came and beat up several persons while taking them away.” *Radio Liberty*. 20 April 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3hj0v5KDM4> (in Armenian).

³³ “Policemen subjected to beating the doctor who attempted to protect his students.” *Hetq*, 23 April 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=krhIDajWZ-Q> (in Armenian).

³⁴ Servicemen from the said unit are known to the public as “red berets.”

battalion started pursuing a person who was at the venue of the assembly that was being held on Grigor Lussavorich Street. They caught up with him near the Children's Park where they started beating him with truncheons³⁵. On the same day servicemen from the same unit also resorted to disproportionate use of force and to violence against demonstrators, who blocked Mashtots Avenue and Amirian Street intersection, both while removing assembly participants from the roadway section of the street and while forcibly taking them to police departments in a police vehicle³⁶. It is clearly visible in the video material, which was disseminated on April 21, that policemen from the same unit tried to smash with their truncheons and feet a door of a protestor's car that was parked in a roadway section of the street³⁷. Various protesters also reported about other acts of violence perpetrated by this police unit³⁸.

The use of special means by police

According to the information provided to Helsinki Committee of Armenia, on April 16 on Baghramian Avenue and on April 22 on Artsakh Street the police used the total of 11 special means. The special means used were *Zarya-2* flash grenades (4 grenades on April 16 and 5 grenades on April 22) and *Svirel* (ASZ-40) acoustic flash grenades (2 grenades on April 22).

On April 16, assembly participants sustained injuries of varying severity because of the use of special means by the police and blood stains were noticeable at the assembly venue. 46 citizens, including 6 policemen sought medical assistance in healthcare facilities as a result of the use of special means³⁹. Also reporters with *168.am* and *Factor.am* news websites sustained injuries⁴⁰. On the two above-mentioned days, assembly participants were not warned in advance

³⁵ For a detailed description of the assembly see Annex.

³⁶ "Red berets subjected a citizen to beatings in a police vehicle." *Factor TV*, 18 April 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=piilaLYvb9s> (in Armenian).

³⁷ "Red berets are kicking a citizen's car." *CivilNet*, 21 April 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yx_xU1SMrQw (in Armenian).

³⁸ "Policemen against students: running and failing to catch." *CivilNet*, 18 April 2018 <https://youtu.be/r-bFgMFhemE?t=2m20s> (in Armenian).

"Policemen looking for students, running and failing to catch." *CivilNet*, 18 April 2018 <https://youtu.be/vERB2Y6nVAk?t=2m38s> (in Armenian).

³⁹ See the 16 April 2018 official statement of the RoA Ministry of Health. <http://www.moh.am/#1/1216> (in Armenian).

⁴⁰ "The attackers on reports must be punished: Statement by journalism organizations. *News.am*, 20 April 2018. <https://news.am/arm/news/447352.html> (in Armenian).

about the use of special means and the police did not take into consideration the grounds set by the law for the use of special means⁴¹.

Besides, the statement about the possibility of the special means use by the police on April 16 was posted on the RoA Police website at 3:57 p.m., i.e. after special means had been used. The RoA *Law on Police* states that *it shall be incumbent on police servicemen to pass tests that determine their ability to act in the situations that give rise to the necessity to use special means*⁴². The use of *Zarya-2* special means is allowed only in an open location at a distance of at least 2.5 meters from people⁴³, whereas flash grenades were thrown in the direction of a large crowd of assembly participants⁴⁴.



⁴¹ See Article 29 of the RoA *Law on Police*.

⁴² The RoA *Law on Police* prohibits the use of special means while terminating peaceful assemblies that are held by unarmed protesters but with a violation of the established procedure (Article 29). It also requires that prior to the use of special means the police must warn about its use in advance giving sufficient time for complying with lawful demands and terminating violations of law, with the exception of those cases when a delay in their use poses an immediate threat for the life and health of citizens or a policeman or may have other grave consequences or when in the existing situation such advance warning is not possible (Article 31).

⁴³ See the RoA Health Minister's Order № 09-N *On establishing criteria for allowing the use of the special means that are applied against a human being*.

⁴⁴ For a detailed description of the said assemblies see Annex.

Other interferences with the right to freedom of assembly

Numerous eyewitness reports were received from various media outlets as well as from social media users about incidents of violence against assemblies and individual participants of assemblies perpetrated by other persons. In some cases individual activists and reporters were targeted, in some other cases violence was perpetrated against groups of rally or march participants and the latter's property was damaged. Instances of violence against assembly participants perpetrated by other persons occurred on April 16 on Heratsi Street⁴⁵, on April 21 in Avan administrative district⁴⁶ and in other locations.

On April 22, over 50 individuals on Erebuni Street attacked participants of the march with electroshockers, truncheons and stones and verbally abused them and threw stones at the cars that were honking horns. Many of the attackers wore masks that covered their faces. There were over 20 policemen at the place of the incident who, however, did not interfere adequately with the actions of perpetrators of violence⁴⁷. A reporter and a cameraman from *Shant* TV Company as well as a cameraman from *Factor* TV media outlet got hurt too during the incident⁴⁸. A criminal investigation of the incident was launched on April 25. Subsequently, the Mayor of the town of Massis was involved in this criminal case as a suspect⁴⁹.

On April 22, yet another incident took place on Acharian Street in Avan administrative district of Yerevan, where a group of masked men blocked the road to Kentron community and assaulted with truncheons and stones the cars that were honking their horns. A reporter with

⁴⁵ See Annex.

⁴⁶ "About 150-180 individuals beat up young persons and smashed cars that were going behind the march." *Haykakan zhamank*, 21 April 2018. <http://armtimes.com/hy/article/135959> (in Armenian).

⁴⁷ "In Erebuni (district) unknown individuals are perpetrating violence against citizens." *Factor* TV, 22 April 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wxNUis0GHCC> (in Armenian),

"Several dozen masked men are subjecting a young man to violence." *Radio Liberty*, 22 April 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ntTTZzfmrII> (in Armenian).

"In Erebuni (district) masked men attacked and beat demonstrators." *News.am*, 22 April 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHxUxZ8wc1o> (in Armenian).

⁴⁸ "They assaulted me from all sides, whereas the police did nothing": the abused reporter. <https://www.aravot.am/2018/04/22/951984/> (in Armenian).

⁴⁹ "The Mayor and Deputy Mayor of the town of Massis have been detained." *Radio Liberty*, 31 May 2018 <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/29261179.html> (in Armenian).

Public Radio was subjected to violence too and his car was damaged⁵⁰. According to media reports, two of the attackers were employees of Avan Community Head's Office⁵¹.

Pressure brought to bear on and violence against reporters

In the course of the assemblies and marches staged in April 2018 the *Committee To Protect Freedom of Expression* registered 18 incidents and 22 victims of violence against media representatives. As of June 30, 11 criminal cases were instituted in connection with those incidents. In 5 cases charges were brought. 3 cases are in the court of law: 1 of those has been admitted for trial and a court ruling has been handed down in another case. Over the same period of time 6 incidents of pressure brought to bear against media representatives were registered. Only in one instance a criminal case was instituted, which was subsequently dismissed in the aftermath of a change of the political situation.

The *Committee To Protect Freedom of Expression* and a number of journalism and human rights organizations issued statements about violations of reporters' and media outlets' rights over the above-mentioned period condemning acts of violence and demanding from law-enforcement agencies to expeditiously identify those responsible and to bring them to justice. International organization *Reporters Without Borders* also addressed the situation condemning the unjustified use of force against journalists and noting the 14 April incident, when a group of demonstrators stormed into the Armenian public radio broadcaster's headquarters⁵².

Human Rights Defenders' integrated hotline

Prior to April 13, a Human Rights Defenders' Integrated hotline was established on the initiative of a number of human rights organizations⁵³. The latter took into consideration the

⁵⁰ "A criminal case in connection with violence perpetrated against reporter Vruyr Tadevosyan was not instituted." *Hetq*, 25 April 2018. <http://hetq.am/arm/news/87999/lragrox-vruyr-tadevosyani-handep-brnutyanyan-depqi-artiv-greakan-gorts-chi-harucvel.html> (in Armenian).

⁵¹ "The identity of two members of the criminal group that smashed demonstrators' cars in Avan is known." *Haykakan zhamanak*, 23 May 2018. <http://armtimes.com/hy/article/137874> (in Armenian).

⁵² Violence against reporters during 11 days of protests in Armenia», *Reporters without borders*, 25 April 2018. <https://rsf.org/en/news/violence-against-reporters-during-11-days-protests-armenia>

⁵³ The founding organizations were Helsinki Committee of Armenia, Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Vanadzor Office, Union of Informed Citizens, *Asparez* Journalists Club, Transparency International Anticorruption Center and Open Society Foundations-Armenia non-governmental organizations.

experience of *Electric Yerevan* civic initiative of 2015 and of the July 2016 events during which the police forcibly took a large number of rally participants to police departments and committed acts of violence. The hotline telephone numbers were disseminated through social media and leaflets.

The hotline went into operation on April 13. Representatives of the involved human rights organizations ensured its 24-hour operation on a daily basis and in cooperation with the lawyers engaged in the hotline they provided legal aid on the basis of information received to those forcibly taken to police departments. When necessary, they cooperated with the hotline that was operated by the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office.

In all days of the civil disobedience campaign that was launched in Yerevan the involved human rights NGOs were alerted numerous times through the hotline about demonstrators being forcibly taken to police departments and about violence perpetrated in police departments. Also received were messages from students of some schools in Yerevan and in other localities (*Noyemberian, Hrazdan, Echmiadzin and Armavir*) that their participation in demonstrations is hindered. Various media outlets (*Radio Liberty, Hetq*, etc.) were notified through the hotline about those incidents. Every day the hotline Working Group would make statements about those forcibly taken to police departments and about violence and disseminate those statements via mass media⁵⁴.

According to the data provided by the Human Rights Defenders' integrated hotline, in the time period from April 17-23, 33 citizens were detained, while the number of those forcibly taken to police departments reached 1,000. About 500 cars were taken to the Police impound lot.

Criminal cases

A number of criminal cases were instituted in connection with the events that took place in April, including in connection with the facts of *My Step* civic initiative members' entry into

⁵⁴ Statements issued by Helsinki Committee of Armenia see at <http://armhels.com/category/%D5%B4%D5%A5%D6%80-%D5%AC%D5%B8%D6%82%D6%80%D5%A5%D6%80%D5%A8/%D5%B0%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%BF%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B6%D5%B6%D5%A5%D6%80/> (in Armenian).

Yerevan State University and Yerevan Basic Medical College as well as into the administrative building of the Public Radio⁵⁵.

As of April 23, 41 persons were detained on suspicion of organizing and conducting unlawful rallies and riots as well as of perpetrating violence during those events⁵⁶. On July 21, the RoA Special Investigations Service dropped an investigation of the criminal case instituted in connection with the events that took place from April 13-22⁵⁷. Within the framework of the said criminal case N. Pashinyan, A. Mirzoyan and S. Mikayelyan were detained and other members of *My Step* and *Reject Serzh* civic initiatives were criminally prosecuted.

The RoA Special Investigations Service opened an investigation of over 50 criminal cases of policemen's abuse of power accompanied by violence during the assemblies held in the Republic of Armenia from April 13 on. Later on those cases were merged into a single criminal case and an investigative group was established⁵⁸. Over 60 episodes of perpetration of violence are investigated within the framework of that criminal case, with reporters, lawyers and numerous citizens having been recognized as aggrieved parties.

In Conclusion

The events that took place in April and May can be qualified as manifestations of civil disobedience, the root causes of which were numerous social, political and legal problems that had accumulated in the Republic of Armenia in the last decades. An environment, which was relatively tolerant of free speech, rallies and internet-based media, was largely conducive to the success of the movement. Besides, the protest demonstrations and actions staged by civic initiatives ("*I am against*," "*No to Depredation!*", "*For the development of science*," etc.) in previous periods of time contributed to the consolidation of *civil disobedience* methods and to participants' gaining experience.

It should be noted that in the period of time immediately after the Armenian President's term in office expired, from April 9 till April 17, when the executive power was not de jure in

⁵⁵ See the 18 April 2018 Statement of the RoA Special Investigations Service at <http://www.ccc.am/hy/1428493746/3/5828> (in Armenian).

⁵⁶ See the 23 April 2018 Statement of the RoA Special Investigations Service at <http://www.ccc.am/hy/1428493746/3/5834> (in Armenian).

⁵⁷ See the 21 June 2018 Statement of the RoA Special Investigations Service at <http://www.ccc.am/hy/1428493746/3/5898> (in Armenian).

⁵⁸ See the 16 May 2018 Statement of the RoA Special Investigations Service at <http://www.ccc.am/hy/1428493746/3/5859> (in Armenian).

Serzh Sargsyan's hands, there were no instances of the use of force by law-enforcement agencies against rallies that were taking place in Yerevan (*except rallies that were staged on April 16*). This fact gives grounds to conclude that *the powers that be* could not imagine that the movement could attain such a resounding success. On the other hand, we believe that Serzh Sargsyan was avoiding the use of force so that the public would not associate his obtaining a mandate to stay in power with new violence. The absence of the law-enforcement agencies' interference with rallies staged by the opposition in January-March 2018 also serves as evidence to this effect. However, when the movement was gaining momentum and the number of rally participants was increasing dramatically, the authorities no longer were in possession of the resources that would be sufficient to stop the movement without casualties and serious losses.

The events that were unfolding in this country in April and May received extensive coverage by domestic and foreign media outlets. Representatives of the Armenian civil society⁵⁹ as well as of international organizations responded to the developments⁶⁰.

After Serzh Sargsyan's resignation on April 23 the law-enforcement agencies stopped interfering with rallies that were still going on. The leader of *My Step* civic movement N. Pashinyan was nominated for the Armenian premiership and on May 8 he was elected to that post by the National Assembly during second session. The resulting situation in the country, when the Government was formed by the parliamentary minority.

Nevertheless, numerous instances of disproportionate use of force, violence and abuse of official powers by the police were registered in the course of assemblies held from April 16 to April 23. A number of citizens and reporters sustained injuries of varying severity as a result of the use of special means by the police. Numerous demonstrators who were forcibly taken to police departments from assembly venues were held there with violations of the legally established time limits and procedures, while activities of lawyers who dealt with protection of those persons' rights were obstructed. In some cases pressure was brought to bear on numerous

⁵⁹ See *Armenia: Urgent Appeal To International Organizations And Democratic States*. 22 April 2018.24 <http://hetq.am/eng/news/87789/armenia-urgent-appeal-to-international-organizations-and-democratic-states.html>

⁶⁰ ODIHR Director urges Armenian authorities to protect and ensure right to freedom of peaceful assembly. 19 April 2018. <https://www.osce.org/odihr/378325>

"We call on authorities to protect #HumanRights and freedoms in the context of the ongoing protests, particularly those of peaceful demonstrators. Continued restraint on all sides remains critically important.", UN Human Rights, @UNHumanRights
20 April 2018. <https://twitter.com/UNHumanRights/status/987428439702589441>

rally participants and reporters by police or as a result of police inaction. The final evaluation of those incidents will be possible only after the relevant criminal investigation and trial are over.

ANNEX

(Assemblies observation results)

April 13

Marchers from *My Step* civic initiative approached the city of Yerevan at about 2 p.m. and headed towards Liberty Square. On the same day a number of Yerevan State University students announced a boycott of classes and urged other students to join their initiative as well as to take part in a rally that was to be held in Liberty Square on the same day at 6:30 p.m.⁶¹ Members of *Reject Serzh* and *Armenian State Salvation Front* civic initiatives also joined the march.

At about 4 p.m. the marchers (around 150 participants) reached the main building of Yerevan State University, where leaders of the initiative demanded a meeting with the University President⁶². The university security staff member did not allow them to enter the building. However, some time later the march participants entered the building, where they started chanting “*Take a step, Reject Serzh!*”, i.e. one of the slogans of the civic initiative. The marchers broke through one of the closed inner doors⁶³, while in the yard of the university they hoisted the flag of their initiative⁶⁴.

At about 5 p.m., the marchers headed towards *Liberty Square* walking through a number of streets in central Yerevan. The marchers used loudspeakers, percussion instrument (drum), flags and objects releasing colored smoke and urged citizens to come to Liberty Square at 6:30 p.m. to participate in the rally. Members of the civic initiatives had announced in advance that the rally would last 4 days, 24 hours daily⁶⁵.

⁶¹ “A boycott of classes launched in Yerevan State University against Serzh Sargsyan’s third term in office.” *Haykakan zhamanak*, 13 April 2018 <http://www.armtimes.com/hy/article/135365> (in Armenian).

⁶² “Pashinyan succeeded in entering YSU. They are engaged in awareness-raising. (Updated).” *Haykakan zhamanak*, 13 April 2018 <http://armtimes.com/hy/article/135375> (in Armenian).

⁶³ “Pashinyan: ‘This lesson is enough for Mr. Simonyan’.” *Radio Liberty*, 13 April 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-VgDhKSy0M> (in Armenian).

⁶⁴ “Members of *My Step* initiative hoisted their flag in front of Yerevan State University.” *Radio Liberty*, 13 April 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TpiTne2sFJs> (in Armenian).

⁶⁵ “A 24-hour rally will be launched on April 13: Lena Nazaryan appealed to the public from the National Assembly’s rostrum.” *Haykakan zhamanak*, 10 April 2018 <http://armtimes.com/hy/article/135164> (in Armenian).

At 6:30 p.m., the rally was launched in Liberty Square, with 4,400-4,700 participants. At 7:30 p.m., Nikol Pashinyan called for “*taking control over France Square.*” Rally participants blocked 3 avenues leading to France Square (Mashtots Avenue, Sayat-Nova Avenue and Baghramian Avenue) as well as an intersection at Mashtots Avenue and Tumanian Street using benches and trash containers available in the area. N. Pashinyan announced that the non-stop rally was to move to France Square. Later on he presented to the participants the methods of operation in case of possible police interferences in planned rallies and actions⁶⁶.

At night, tents were pitched in France Square. About 200 rally participants spent the night in tents, on the benches that had been brought to the Square and in the cars parked at the Square.

At venues of the assemblies staged on April 13 in Liberty Square and in France Square there was almost no police presence. However, in places adjacent to the Square there were at least 60 policemen, 17 police vehicles, including 3 minibuses and 3 small cars that were not designated as police vehicles. At night, on Demirchian Street dozens of police vehicles were parked, including big passenger vehicles of police troops⁶⁷.

April 14

The 24-hour rally that was launched on April 13 went on. In France Square there were tents and a stove placed by the protesters and loudspeakers were located in the center of the Square. The roadway sections of the 3 avenues leading to the Square were still blocked. By 2 p.m. the number of participants of the rally to be held in that place reached 1,400 and the rally that had been announced in advance began.

At 2:50 p.m., rally participants started a march along Sayat-Nova Avenue. During the march its participants were chanting “*Take a step, Reject Serzh!*” At 3:20 p.m., when marchers reached the intersection of Sayat-Nova Avenue and Khanjian Street, N. Pashinyan with a group of participants ran to the building of the Public Radio of Armenia and entered it through the main entrance. Rally participants raised their hands. An alarm siren system went off in the building. A policeman who was on duty aimed his handgun at rally participants but did not use it. Some protesters forcibly broke through a door in the 3rd floor into a studio for shows that broadcast live. N. Pashinyan demanded from employees of the Public Radio of Armenia to let him go on

⁶⁶ “‘We should be prepared for every eventuality:’ Training exercises on France Square.” *Radio Liberty*, 13 April 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kkInr0j-VqE> (in Armenian).

⁶⁷ “There is a buildup of police forces on Demirchian Street.” *Radio Liberty*, 13 April 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CiH78Gl-4gg> (in Armenian).

air with a statement. However, they rejected his demand and shortly afterwards electricity was turned off in the Public Radio building. N. Pashinyan made his statement in the presence of media representatives who were in the building at that moment and then apologized to Radio employees and promised to compensate the broken door restoration costs.

At 4:30 p.m., protesters left the Public Radio building close by to which about 700 people assembled. The protesters resumed their march by going down Khanjian Street. At about 5 p.m., the marchers blocked the intersection of Arshakuniats Avenue and Grigor Lussavorich Street for a short period of time bringing traffic to a stop. Then they moved towards Mashtots Avenue and at about 6 p.m. returned to France Square, where yet another rally was launched at 7 p.m., with the number of participants reaching 2,000.

April 15

On the morning of April 15 France Square was still blocked. The rally participants had placed additional tents and stoves in the Square. A rally was staged at 2 p.m. with about 500 participants. At 6:30 p.m., the number of participants reached 1,500 and members of *My Step* civic initiative started making speeches. N. Pashinyan called upon citizens to start mass actions of civil disobedience from the next day on, *in particular to block public transportation in the capital city, including metro*. After the rally was over, some participants went away, while others stayed in France Square till next morning.

April 16

At around 8 a.m., the rally participants who were in France Square (about 70 persons) started moving towards the intersection of Baghramian Avenue and Moskovian Street and blocked street traffic by sitting in front of cars and by bringing public city benches into the roadway sections of the street. At about 8:30 a.m., when rally participants reached the building of the Writers' Union in Baghramian Avenue, policemen placed metal fences thereby preventing the rally participants from moving forward (there were 250 policemen equipped with truncheons and gas masks).

At around 8:30 a.m., a group of young people blocked Abovian Street and then the Abovian-Koryun Streets intersection and chanting '*Come out into the street!*' and '*Boycott classes!*' The number of participants was around 250. There were 10-15 policemen at the assembly venue.

At 10 a.m., 15-30 activists disrupted operation of the Yerevan metro at Yeritasardakan station by standing or lying between doors in carriages. About 20 police servicemen tried to remove activists from carriages or to push them into the carriages by using force. Some policemen tried to negotiate with the young people who blocked the doors of metro carriages. The policemen demanded that the young people should not block operation of the metro claiming that other metro trains had to stop in the tunnels, while in them there may be passengers with health problems. At 10:30 a.m., the activists left the metro station and joined the participants of the rally that was being held in the intersection of Abovian and Koryun Streets. At the same time another group of demonstrators blocked traffic on Heratsi Street.

At about 10:30 a.m., about 400 rally participants from the blocked section on Baghramian Street went to Koryun Street, where in N. Pashinyan's presence they broke the handle of the entrance door and entered the building of the Yerevan Basic Medical College. According to the information obtained by rally participants, the College students were not allowed to leave classrooms and to join rallies. In the building the demonstrators started chanting '*Boycott classes!*' and urged students to get out of their classrooms.

At about 11 a.m., an incident took place on Heratsi Street between demonstrators and unknown persons. 5-6 individuals came out of their cars and started a brawl with the demonstrators who had blocked the street, physically and verbally assaulting them. A driver in one car tried to drive a car towards a demonstrator who was standing in front of him. The police servicemen who were present at the assembly venue did not properly interfere during the incident. Then over 20 policemen (special battalion servicemen equipped with truncheons and gas masks) removed assembly participants from the street and moved benches to sidewalks. At the same hour the police unblocked traffic on Kievian Bridge that a group of demonstrators had blocked earlier with various objects and cars⁶⁸.

At 11:10 a.m., a march, in which N. Pashinyan was participating, went by Koryun Street to Khanjian Street. Over 80 policemen (almost half of them were special battalion servicemen equipped with gas masks and truncheons) were stationed near the RoA Police building located at 130 Nalbandian Street. At 11:30 a.m., the marchers stopped near senior high school # 3.

⁶⁸ "Using force, the police opened Kievian Bridge that had been blocked for 2 hours." *Radio Liberty*, 16 April 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gn5XOMdZGx4> (in Armenian).

"Tense situation in the center of Yerevan. 11 a.m.–3 p.m." *Radio Liberty*, 16 April 2018 <https://youtu.be/0aZ7Y9Z28Bc?t=25m29s> (in Armenian).

Approaching its entrance N. Pashinyan urged students to boycott classes. At 11:40 a.m., the marchers reached Armenian State Pedagogical University, where again N. Pashinyan with a group of march participants entered the building and chanting the civic initiative's slogans he urged those present there to join protest rallies. The number of marchers increased to 1,100, while the number of the policemen who accompanied them was 30.

At 12:00 p.m., the march proceeded by Khanjian Street towards Grigor Lusavorich Street. While marching, demonstrators were applauding and urging people to go to France Square. At 12:20 p.m., a group of marchers ran from the intersection of Mashtots Avenue and Grigor Lusavorich Street to Victory Bridge. According to the information obtained by N. Pashinyan, the police were going to remove cars of the demonstrators who stopped traffic on the bridge. He urged marchers to dismantle the wheels of the car that the police were removing and that at the moment was in Hrazdan gorge. In the presence of media people N. Pashinyan would from time to time appeal to citizens to provide water and food to the demonstrators who stopped street traffic in various parts of the city. Around 70 policemen were on Victory Bridge. N. Pashinyan welcomed them and apologized for the inconvenience caused by rallies.

At around 12:00 p.m., 10-40-strong groups of protesters showed up at various intersections on Mashtots Avenue. Using trash containers and benches or standing in roadway sections of the streets they blocked traffic there.

At 12:40 p.m., there were about 300 rally participants in France Square. With N. Pashinyan's participation, the marchers went from Victory Bridge towards Sarian Street and returned to France Square at 1:20 p.m.

At 1:30 p.m., in France Square, N. Pashinyan called upon demonstrators who were in different parts of the city to join demonstrators in France Square. At 2:00 p.m., a rally was launched in France Square with members of the civic initiative making speeches. The number of participants exceeded 5,000.

At 3:00 p.m., N. Pashinyan told rally participants that *“accompanied by you, we, the four members of the National Assembly, will go to our work place”* and urged people to go on with actions *“with open hands”* and in case of police violence to not reciprocate.

At about 3:00 p.m., rally participants approached the police barrier set up in Baghramian Avenue. V. Osipyanyan⁶⁹ was negotiating with N. Pashinyan trying to convince the latter that only

⁶⁹ Prior to 10 May 2018 V. Osipyanyan held the post of the Deputy Head of the Yerevan City Division of the RoA Police.

members of the Parliament should go to the National Assembly building. N. Pashinyan climbed onto the metal fence in an attempt to cross to the opposite side (about 40 policemen were standing right at the fence). The police servicemen who were stationed behind the fence (about 120 policemen equipped with shields, bulletproof vests and helmets) started hitting their shields with truncheons thus making noise. Pushing each other forward, rally participants started to remove fences and penetrate the rows of the policemen who formed a human wall. Some rally participants were holding truncheons raised by policemen, pushed shields and removed fences. One of the protesters threw in the direction of policemen a nylon bag full of trash from the trash container⁷⁰.

Several other protesters snatched shields and truncheons from policemen and were pushing the latter. Reciprocal exchange of blows and obscenities was observed. At that time a barbed wire barrier was set behind the police chain and police reinforcements arrived. When rally participants made it to the barbed wire barrier, police servicemen again started hitting their shields with truncheons, while protesters were chanting “*Policeman, join us!*” Then N. Pashinyan and several protesters attempted to go over the barbed wire barrier. At 3:30 p.m., policemen threw flash grenades and acoustic flash grenades at rally participants thereby causing panic. A number of protesters sustained injuries of varying severity and blood stains were noticeable at the rally venue. Some protesters started to move away from the barbed wire barrier and to seek shelter in the yards of nearby buildings. Some of the injured protesters were taken to healthcare facilities by ambulances. However, some other protesters refused to go to healthcare facilities contending that they were concerned that after they are taken to a healthcare facility they might be detained by the police.

As of about 3:40 p.m., rally participants were still at the barbed wire barrier. According to rally participants, N. Pashinyan was taken to a healthcare facility because of the injuries sustained during an attempt to cross over the barbed wire barrier. The tensions were running high between policemen and protesters. Some protesters were making rude expressions about the police. The policemen standing in the first row put on gas masks but soon removed them. The situation remained relatively stable. Using a loudspeaker, members of the civic initiative from time to time urged rally participants to maintain certain distance from the barbed wire barrier.

⁷⁰ “Clashes: Pashinyan is trying to cross over the barbed wire barrier set up by police (long version).” *Radio Liberty*, 16 April 2018 <https://youtu.be/ppoATJzfXOM?t=6m33s> (in Armenian).

The rally participants, whose number exceeded 4,500 at 4:30 p.m., periodically chanted slogans “*Policeman, join us!*”, “*Armenia!*”, “*Nikol!*”, “*Take a step, Reject Serzh!*” etc.

At 4:30 p.m., N. Pashinyan returned to the venue of the rally on Baghramian Avenue. At 6:30 p.m., the majority of rally participants went to France Square where the rally was resumed. During the rally N. Pashinyan called on residents of all localities in the Republic of Armenia to block on the next day State and inter-State roads and whenever possible to come by cars to Yerevan. He also announced a “*nationwide strike and boycott of classes.*” He also urged people to continue actions aimed to block streets, including at night so that it would not be possible for members of the National Assembly to get there and thus the elections of the Armenian Prime Minister would be disrupted.

On April 16, there was a heavy police presence in various parts of the city of Yerevan. There were over 80 policemen in an area close to the administrative building of the RoA Police and there were about 90 policemen in front of the RoA Government building and on Melik-Adamian Street⁷¹ who were equipped with gas masks and truncheons. There were about 250 policemen equipped with rubber truncheons and gas masks near the building of the Writers’ Union on Baghramian Avenue. Metal fences were also placed and about 120 policemen stationed in the intersection of Baghramian Avenue and Proshian Street⁷². In Demirchian Street, 3 armored personnel carrier, 2 armored SUVs and a tow truck with barbed wire were stationed⁷³. All in all, at least 23 big and small police vehicles were stationed in the areas next to the RoA National Assembly building⁷⁴.

April 17

At 8:00 a.m., in France Square there were several dozens of rally participants in small groups as well as some tents and stoves. The Square was closed to traffic as public city benches and trash containers were placed in roadways. Behind the police barrier set up at the beginning of Baghramian Avenue there was one water cannon vehicle. The policemen on duty there were

⁷¹ “Policemen blocked streets leading to the Office of the Republican Party of Armenia.” *Radio Liberty*, 16 April 2018 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XeNqa2DA_ic (in Armenian).

⁷² “On the other side of barbed wire: Police forces in Baghramian Avenue.” *Radio Liberty*, 16 April 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xDrR8bYOhco> (in Armenian).

⁷³ “Armored police vehicles in Demirchian Street.” *Radio Liberty*, 16 April 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUHa9XnC5es> (in Armenian).

⁷⁴ “Heavy police presence in the streets next to the National Assembly.” *Radio Liberty*, 16 April 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yoYNVXkrlYs> (in Armenian).

equipped with shields, helmets and bulletproof vests. About 30 demonstrators, many of whom were wearing medical face masks⁷⁵, kept the intersection of Mashtots Avenue and Tumanian Street blocked. Policemen forcibly took several of them to police departments. At the same time Colonel Hovhannissian, a representative of the Police, was negotiating with the rest of the protesters and demanding that they open the streets to traffic.

At around 8:00 a.m., policemen forcibly took a group of protesters, for the most part students, to police departments from the section of Abovian Street which is next to Yeritasardakan station of Yerevan metro. The police representative would not answer a reporter's question of what the reason was for forcibly taking protesters to police departments. Accompanied by about 120 protesters, N. Pashinyan marched to the intersection of Abovian and Isahakian Streets and sat down in the roadway section of the street. At 8:20 a.m., over 10 policemen approached the blocked section of the street and demanded that protesters vacate the roadway. Soon afterwards demonstrators ran to the intersection of Abovian and Koryun Streets and blocked traffic there using trash containers. N. Pashinyan called upon demonstrators to change an assembly venue whenever tensions between them and the police start running high. Assembly participants then again left the intersection and marched by Koryun-Moskopian and Terian Streets to Sayat-Nova Avenue.

At 9:10 a.m., N. Pashinyan changed direction of the march towards France Square, where, according to the information he got, the police were preparing to disperse the rally. At 9:30 a.m., there were about 1,200 protesters in France Square. Then protesters launched a new march by Mashtots Avenue and Pushkin Street. The rally participants placed trash containers and benches in the roadway section of Sakharov Square. Then they marched by Nar-Dos and Tigran Mets Streets and at 10:50 a.m. arrived at Republic Square. There were about 60 policemen and a metal fence was placed in Melik-Adamian Street⁷⁶. At 11:00 a.m., the marchers were passing the intersection of Mashtots Avenue and Amirian Street where another group of protesters had earlier blocked the roadway by stationing a bus there. This group of protesters joined the marchers whose total number was approaching 3,500. At 11:30 a.m., the marchers reached France Square, where the total number of rally participants after their arrival was nearing 10,000.

⁷⁵ Rally participants started wearing medical face masks after April 16, when the police used special means against protesters.

⁷⁶ One of the entrances to the building of the Armenian Government as well as the Headquarters of the Republican Party of Armenia are located in Melik-Adamian Street.

At 12:00 p.m., N. Pashinyan announced in France Square “*a start of popular, non-violent velvet revolution.*”

On April 17, numerous protest actions took place simultaneously in various parts of the city of Yerevan. At around 10:00 a.m. a group of demonstrators blocked the intersection of Halabian and Arzumanian Streets. Over 20 policemen who were present at the assembly venue demanded that protesters unblock the roadway section of the streets and then used force to remove protesters to the street sidewalks. Shortly afterwards the protesters again blocked the roadway section of Halabian Street. At 11:00 a.m., the police attempted again to use force to remove protesters from the street (at that moment the number of policemen was over 40). In the course of the assembly a group of residents from nearby buildings got into a bitter argument with the protesters demanding that the latter unblock the street⁷⁷. At 1:00 p.m., assembly participants started a march towards the Yerevan City Hall.

At around 1:00 p.m., the march, with participation of N. Pashinyan, went by Abovian and V. Sargsyan Streets and approached the buildings of the Cassation Court and of the Office of the RoA Prosecutor General, where a group of protesters stopped and sat near the entrances with a view to not let staff members to enter or leave the premises. Assembly participants also approached the Government’s administrative compound, which is located on V. Sargsyan Street, where they started deflating or piercing tires of the vehicles parked nearby. Assembly participants were also writing the civic initiative’s slogans on the first floor doors and windows of the Government building. A group of assembly participants went to an area close to the Yerevan City Hall blocking traffic in Khorenatsi and Grigor Lusavorich Streets. Another group blocked the intersection of Mashtots Avenue and Khorenatsi Street. Yet another group of protesters (about 40 persons) blocked the intersection of Grigor Lusavorich Street and Arshakuniats Avenue. At the same time over 50 demonstrators held Victory Bridge blocked. Policemen removed them from the roadway to sidewalks and forming a human chain would not let protesters move back to the roadway.

At around 3:20 p.m., the protesters who were blocking traffic in Arshakuniats Avenue were forcibly taken to police departments. At the same time about 250 demonstrators were holding a rally in Grigor Lusavorich Street and blocking street traffic. About 20 servicemen from the special battalion of the police who arrived on the scene in a police vehicle started to remove

⁷⁷ “It is my neighborhood. I do not want a quarrel here: Resident of Arzumanian Street.” *Radio Liberty*, 17 April 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1mCHzvUR1AY> (in Armenian).

the trash containers and benches that were placed in the street and to move rally participants to sidewalks. Then, 6 policemen from that unit started pursuing one of the rally participants. They caught up with him near the Children's Park where they hit him with truncheons. Several demonstrators were forcibly taken to police departments. Shortly afterwards police servicemen left the assembly venue and demonstrators blocked the street again. 80 protesters who had been in the area of the Government's administrative compound, which is located on V. Sargsyan Street, joined the demonstrators who were holding Grigor Lusavorich Street blocked.

At 4:00 p.m., in almost all intersections in the part of Mashtots Avenue that was leading to France Square there were numerous groups composed of 30-200 protesters. They blocked street traffic using benches, trash containers, flower pots and other objects.

At 4:50 p.m., the protesters who were marching by Amirian Street (at least 1,500 persons) joined the participants of the main rally that was staged in V. Sargsyan Street. There were over 300 policemen stationed in front of the RoA Government Building, which is located in Republic Square, and in nearby areas. They formed a human chain and kept the entrance to the Government Building and Melik-Adamian Street closed.

At 8:20 p.m., a rally was held in Republic Square, which was attended by 33,000-35,000 people. An ambulance was parked in an area near the rally venue. Then rally participants marched through some streets in Kentron community.

At 9:30 p.m., a group of people was standing near the barb wire barrier set up in Baghramian Avenue. Some of them were throwing cigarette stubs in the direction of policemen and verbally abused the latter. A person was trying to put on fire the content of the trash container located near the sidewalk. Shortly afterwards 2 passenger cars, which license plates were partially covered, were moving at a high speed towards the barbed wire barrier and right in front of the barrier they stopped. Another group of people who were there called on citizens to get away from that area in order to avoid problems with the police. At 10:00 p.m., in the intersection of Mashtots Avenue and Tumanian Street a group of young people stopped in the roadway section of the street and started damaging the traffic signs erected at the side of the road, tearing off parts of the sidewalk surface and throwing them into the roadway section and breaking traffic lights with metal bars. Some of the people in the intersection demanded that the young men who were damaging traffic signs stop their actions. Those young men also subjected

an editor of *Factor.am* media outlet to violence⁷⁸. N. Pashinyan qualified the incident as provocation masterminded by the Republican Party of Armenia⁷⁹.

On April 17, students of several senior high schools in the city of Gyumri announced a boycott of classes. Demonstrators held a march to the Regional Governor's Office and then to the City Hall and for about 5 hours kept Liberty Square blocked. The number of assembly participants during the day reached 1,500, while up to 50 policemen were present throughout the entire period of the assembly.

On April 17, a significantly large number of policemen were stationed in areas close to the RoA National Assembly and the Government. There were barbed wire barriers, armored police vehicles and over 5 police buses. About 50 policemen (equipped with shields, bulletproof vests, helmets and truncheons) kept the intersection of Baghramian Avenue and Proshian Street closed, while the section of the 2-way road between the intersection and the National Assembly was also blocked with barbed wire barrier and by police servicemen on duty who were constantly present there and equipped with shields, bulletproof vests, helmets, truncheons and gas masks. A water cannon police vehicle was stationed there too.

April 18

At 10:40 a.m., with N. Pashinyan's participation the demonstrators who assembled in France Square started a march towards Baghramian Avenue. The number of participants was about 3,000. The barbed wire barrier that on previous days had been placed at the beginning of Baghramian Avenue was removed. However, a large number of police vehicles were stationed in Demirchian Street. The marchers approached the Residence of the RoA Prime Minister, which is located at 26 Baghramian Avenue, where initially about 15 policemen were stationed. However, very soon their number reached 180 (those policemen were equipped with shields, helmets, bulletproof vests, truncheons and gas masks). At 11:00 a.m., N. Pashinyan called on the participants to not use medical face masks. At 11:20 a.m., the marchers returned to France Square.

At about 11:00 a.m. policemen started forcibly taking from France Square to police departments the activists who blocked the roadway section of the street. In the process, in some

⁷⁸ "The editor of Factor.am was assaulted." *armlur.am*, 18 April 2018 <https://armlur.am/797735/> (in Armenian).

⁷⁹ "On the events in France Square." N. Pashinyan. 17 April 2018 <https://www.facebook.com/nikol.pashinyan/videos/2025061384480913/> (in Armenian).

cases policemen used brute, disproportionate force. According to assembly participants, while forcibly taking them to police departments, some police servicemen abused them verbally and used violence⁸⁰. Many policemen wore masks and participated in forcibly taking demonstrators to police departments. Police representatives would not answer reporters' questions regarding reasons for forcibly taking protesters to police departments. Then policemen formed a human chain and stood at the edge of the sidewalks not letting people who were there to step onto the roadway section of the street.

At 11:35 a.m., when marchers with N. Pashinyan's participation reached France Square, about 200 policemen blocked their progress by forming a human chain in front of the marchers. N. Pashinyan and a representative of the police started negotiations and eventually the police allowed marchers to proceed further. The marchers went along Mashtots Avenue and Koryun and Charents Streets towards Yerevan State University. At 12:10 p.m., a group of protesters entered the YSU building from the main entrance and started chanting inside the building "*Join us!*" At 12:40 p.m., the march was resumed and its participants went down Alek Manukian, Vardanants and Nar-Dos Streets, Tigran Mets and Arshakuniats Avenues and then Grigor Lusavorich and Vazgen Sargsyan Streets. While marching, protesters were chanting slogans ("*Join us!*", "*Take a step, Reject Serzh!*", "*Come out into the street – to revolution!*") and applauding. The number of participants of the march at various times fluctuated between 1,200 and 1,500. About 30 policemen were accompanying the march. At around 2:00 p.m., marchers stopped near the Yerevan City Hall, where N. Pashinyan announced about a rally that was to be staged at 7:00 p.m. that day in Republic Square. A group of assembly participants blocked traffic in Grigor Lusavorich Street, while others went to the Government's administrative compound where about 150 policemen were already stationed.

At 2:00 p.m., a number of assemblies were held in the intersections of Mashtots Avenue and Tumanian, Pushkin and Amirian Streets as well as in France Square, with up to 50 persons participating in each. The assembly participants would sit down in pedestrian crosswalks of the street, walk in groups while there was a green light in traffic lights or block traffic using benches, trash containers and other objects. At 2:30 p.m., police servicemen, many of whom were wearing masks, removed the demonstrators who were blocking traffic in the intersection between Mashtots Avenue and Tumanian Street and forcibly took many of them to police departments.

⁸⁰ "87 persons were forcibly brought to police departments from central streets in Yerevan." *Radio Liberty*, 18 April 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8sAn2CbNICc&t=2s> (in Armenian).

There were instances of the use of brute, disproportionate force by some police servicemen. A servicemen from the special police battalion committed acts of violence against a demonstrator in a police vehicle⁸¹. Servicemen from the special unit in question would periodically be taken in police vehicles to the intersections that were blocked at the moment by demonstrators and would remove the latter from the roadway sections of the road, forcibly take demonstrators to police departments and in some cases pursue fleeing demonstrators. Seeing that a police vehicle is approaching, most demonstrators would leave the roadway section of the street and would go to another intersection or would stay on sidewalks. Then other police units would arrive at the assembly venue (many policemen would be equipped with shields, bulletproof vests and helmets) who would then remove benches and trash containers placed in the street and who, forming a human chain, would stay at the edge of the sidewalks thereby blocking demonstrators' access to the roadway section of the street. When assembly participants managed to get onto the road again, police servicemen would again remove or forcibly take them to police departments.

At 3:00 p.m., a group of protesters in France Square started a march towards the Yerevan City Hall. The marchers went down Mashtots Avenue where at various places other protesters joined the march (the total number of marchers reached 500). During the march, servicemen from the special police battalion tried not to let demonstrators walk in the roadway in Mashtots Avenue and in some cases harassing demonstrators. During the march protesters had an altercation among themselves concerning the fact that some of them were wearing medical face masks (other protesters demanded that no masks be worn). After they reached the City Hall, the protester moved to V. Sargsyan Street and joined participants of the assembly that was being held near the Government's administrative compound. At 4:30 p.m., there were about 2,000 protesters in the assembly venue. The number of the participants decreased to 900 by 5:30 p.m.

At 6:40 p.m., the demonstrators who were near the Yerevan City Hall marched to Republic Square where a rally that was announced in advance was launched. The number of rally participants exceeded 30,000. At 7:40 p.m., leaders of *My Step* and *Reject Serzh* civic initiatives made speeches from the platform placed in the Square. N. Pashinyan called on rally participants to not allow persons wearing masks or drunken persons to be in the rally venue.

At 10:00 p.m., a march was launched towards Baghramian Avenue through Amirian Street and Mashtots Avenue. The number of marchers fluctuated from 8,000 to 10,000. At each side of

⁸¹ "Red berets subjected a citizen to beating in a police vehicle." *Factor TV*, 18 April 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=piilaLYvb9s> (in Armenian).

Demirchian Street that intersects with Baghramian Avenue about 40 policemen were stationed who closed the road for traffic. When marchers reached the Residence of the RoA Prime Minister, where about 400 policemen (equipped with shields, bulletproof vests, helmets and truncheons) formed a police chain and stood in front of the Residence also blocking the roadway section of the Avenue. Some policemen were wearing masks. The marchers were chanting the civic initiative's slogans (including "*Policeman, join us!*") At 11:00 p.m., N. Pashinyan announced that the march will return to Republic Square. Members of the civic initiative used a loudspeaker to urge the demonstrators who were still standing near the police chain to leave the place and join the march. At about 11:30 p.m. the march reached Republic Square, where drivers of passing-by cars started honking car horns. N. Pashinyan announced the end of the rally.

On April 18, numerous assemblies were staged also in various parts of Yerevan. Many protesters were forcibly taken to police departments from the area next to Yerevan State University⁸². According to D. Petrosyan, servicemen from special police battalion hit and perpetrated violence against demonstrating students⁸³. There again was heavy police presence in various parts of the capital. Helsinki Committee of Armenia observers noted that some policemen had gloves that looked very much like brass knuckles. Some policemen's shields were equipped with protruding metal screws.

On April 18, a rally in the city of Gyumri went on and had about 2,000 participants. Its participants held a march calling on students to boycott classes and went to Gyumri Polytechnic University and Academic College, where students inside the building standing near windows raised posters with inscriptions "*The door is locked*" and "*Help!*" Several demonstrators were forcibly taken to police departments during the rally and the march who some time were released after other participants' demands. At the rally venue and during the march over 50 policemen were present, including high-ranking officers.

April 19

At 8:00 a.m., there were about 60 rally participants in Republic Square. At around 8:30 a.m., rally participants, including N. Pashinyan, approached Melik-Adamian Street where the police placed metal fences. About 30 policemen who were equipped with shields and helmets

⁸² "Students are forcibly taken to police departments from areas next to Yerevan State University." *Radio Liberty*, 18 April 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YyTVp5NggkE> (in Armenian).

⁸³ "Policemen against students: running and failing to catch." *CivilNet*, 18 April 2018 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-bFgMFhemE> (in Armenian).

immediately approached the barrier. However, rally participants continued walking towards the 3rd Government building where about 30 policemen were stationed. Rally participants stopped in front of the chain formed by the police so as not to let staff members of the Ministries enter the building. Other groups of protesters formed human chains in front of the police-formed walls to block entrances to the building from other streets. There were about 500 protesters in front of the building and in nearby areas. About 20 servicemen from the special police battalion started pushing and shoving the rally participants standing in the section of the road from Republic Street to the building so as to move them away and forcibly taking several protesters to police departments. A group of protesters was also forcibly taken to police departments from the area in front of the central entrance to the building. Several protesters were trying to open the door of the police minivan where some of their fellow protesters were placed whom the police was going to take to police departments. One of the protesters was lying under this police vehicle. Policemen removed that protester kicking him several times in the process. Then policemen most of whom were wearing masks removed the protesters who were sitting in front of the central entrance to the building.

Reporter Tirayr Muradyan was subjected to beating in an area close to the 3rd Government building. According to him, he was beaten by 2 individuals in civilian clothes whose faces he had photographed before the incident. In the words of T. Muradyan, *“right next to the place where I was subjected to beating there were policemen sitting in a minivan and the incident was visible to them.”*

At 10:00 a.m., the rally was still going on in front of the 3rd Government building. About 180 policemen formed a chain and stood near the main entrance to the building. The number of rally participants reached 800. The participants were chanting slogans addressed to the policemen: *“Take a step, lay down your weapon!”*

At around 10:20 a.m., rally participants started to march down Khanjian Street and Arshakuniats Avenue. Besides the slogans that they used in previous days the marchers were also chanting *“[If] you are against Serzh, honk the horn!”* and handing out leaflets with the same slogan. As a result of their actions, drivers of the cars that were passing near marchers would periodically emit a sound signal. At 11:00 a.m., the marchers, whose number was about 2,000, reached *Petak/Beehive* trade center through alleyways from Arshakuniats Avenue. The policemen who were accompanying the march formed a human chain in front of the entrance to

the trade center and did not allow demonstrators to enter it. The marchers started chanting ‘Strike!’

At around 11:30 a.m., the participants resumed their march down Arshakuniats Avenue. At 41 Arshakuniats Avenue, participants of another rally blocked street traffic. The marchers went on down the Avenue and then down Garegin Nzhdeh Street and Bagratuniats and Admiral Isakov Avenues and Argishti Street to the Children’s Park of Yerevan. The number of marchers fluctuated from 2,000 to 3,000. At various times the march was accompanied by 10 to 30 policemen. According to the marchers, policemen forcibly took to police departments several participants walking in the rear of the column.

At 12:30 p.m., at 41 Arshakuniats Avenue there were about 250 demonstrators who were standing in the roadway section of the Avenue. About 10 policemen were at the assembly venue. They were then joined by another group of policemen. Representatives of the police demanded that protesters leave the roadway. However, the latter refused to do so, whereupon policemen started to unblock the street with the use of force and to forcibly take assembly participants to police departments. The assembly participants were taken to police departments also in non-police vehicles which license plates had been removed⁸⁴. Of all the police servicemen present at the assembly venue only Colonel R.K. Nersisyan was wearing the insignia that made personal identification possible. Then police servicemen (about 60) formed a human chain at two sidewalks of the avenue thereby preventing the protesters from getting back to the roadway section of the avenue. The protesters were holding posters in the direction of the roadway with the inscription “*[If] you are against Serzh, honk the horn!*” Most of the drivers in the vehicles passing along Arshakuniats Avenue did honk the horn.

At around 2:00 p.m., another group of protesters blocked the intersection of Komitas Avenue and Griboyedov Street. The police servicemen who arrived at the assembly venue forcibly took some participants to police departments. According to the assembly participants, in the process the policemen would not introduce themselves and would speak rudely and derogatorily with protesters⁸⁵.

⁸⁴ See video posted by Helsinki Committee of Armenia on 19 April 2018 at https://www.facebook.com/230871066953463/videos/2155085161198701/?hc_ref=ARQqL0R1CexeK4fS-xbFridEEdbAq34nc_12KJLQdpdm_akA4-p7hnLqjr8cwc2ejUg_.

⁸⁵ “Wife of opposition Member of Parliament Ararat Mirzoyan was forcibly taken to a police department.” *Radio Liberty*, 19 April 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYBW-NtV_w8 (in Armenian).

At 3:00 p.m., a protest caravan was organized in Komitas Avenue. 10 participating cars carried flags of the Republic of Armenia and slogans of *My Step* civic initiative.

At 5:30 p.m., participants of the assembly held in the Children's Park of Yerevan went to Republic Square. The number of the participants was about 2,000. They used vuvuzelas and carried posters with the inscription “[If] you are against Serzh, honk the horn!” The drivers of the cars passing through the Square would honk the horns⁸⁶. There were over 120 policemen in front of the Government Building. Most of them were equipped with shields, bulletproof vests and helmets, while some of them were wearing masks. At 6:30 p.m., a group of participants started a march towards Mashtots Avenue.

At 7:30 p.m., leaders of *My Step* civic initiative started making speeches. At 10:00 p.m., the assembly was followed by a march down the streets of Kentron community, with about 8,000 people participating.

April 20

At about 9:00 a.m., 20-30 protesters started a march down Mashtots Avenue towards Liberty Square, where there were 20-30 demonstrators at that moment.

At 9:30 a.m., an assembly was held in Gyulbenkian Street where several protesters blocked traffic with their cars. Police servicemen were trying to remove cars by pushing them and were forcibly taking their drivers to a police department. At 10:00 a.m., protesters, including N. Pashinyan, started a march in Davitashen district. At the beginning, 700 people were marching, whereas later on, on Halabian Street the number of marchers reached 1,500. The marchers blocked Kievian Street for some time. Then the march went on along Leningradian Street towards Malatia and South-Western district and in the process the number of marchers reached 5,000. Their number was about 10,000, when the march reached Republic Square. There they were joined by participants of rallies and marches staged in various parts of the city. The march with participation of N. Pashinyan was constantly accompanied by about 50 policemen on the average. At the Yerevan City Hall 50 more policemen were stationed, while in Republic Square there were at least 100 policemen equipped with shields, helmets and truncheons.

At about 10:30 a.m., an assembly was held in an area close to Yerevan State Pedagogical University. 10-20 young men blocked traffic on Tigran Mets Street by using trash containers and

⁸⁶ The protesters thus tried to make the acoustic noise clearly audible for members of the Armenian Government who were holding a meeting at that time in the Government Building.

standing in the pedestrian crosswalk. Using brute force, policemen took them to police departments. Other participants of the assembly were trying not to let policemen forcibly take those students and were pulling those students back. A passer-by who was criticizing police actions was forcibly removed from the assembly venue⁸⁷. According to eyewitnesses, while forcibly taking protesters to police departments, policemen were beating them. Policemen also forcibly took to police departments the persons who were not standing in the roadway section of the street but who policemen believed were assembly participants⁸⁸.

At 11:00 a.m., participants of the assembly (about 30 participants) held on Yerevan-Abovian highway blocked the roadway section for about 30 minutes. By using force, police servicemen (about 40 policemen) unblocked the road but the parties involved got into a heated argument. Several protesters were forcibly taken to police departments; one protester was taken in a non-police car by persons who were not wearing police uniforms. At 11:25 a.m., policemen forcibly removed reporter Tirayr Muradyan from the assembly venue in a non-police car. The reporter was wearing a reporter's badge and he informed policemen several times that he was a reporter⁸⁹.

At 11:00 a.m., a number of rallies were staged in Arabkir community of the city of Yerevan. 80-100 protesters staged a rally in Azatutian Avenue. They were crossing the pedestrian crosswalk non-stop, thereby blocking traffic. About 40 police servicemen were at the rally venue. Using force, they were removing protesters to sidewalks and forcibly taking them to police departments, including by non-policemen vehicles and even a public transportation bus. While taking protesters to police departments policemen were using disproportionate force and violence⁹⁰. One police servicemen instructed his colleague to note the license plates of those cars whose drivers were honking horns. At 12:20 p.m., policemen twice demanded over the loudspeaker that protesters terminate the rally.

At 1:00 p.m., another rally was being held near the intersection of David Anghaght and Ulnetsi Streets. The rally participants (their number fluctuated from 120 to 200) blocked traffic

⁸⁷ "Policemen forcibly took a number of demonstrators from an area near the Pedagogical University to police departments." *Radio Liberty*. 20 April 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7hcEKmrFMK8> (in Armenian).

⁸⁸ "An eyewitness: Policemen came and beat up several persons while taking them away." *Radio Liberty*. 20 April 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3hj0v5KDM4> (in Armenian).

⁸⁹ "Policemen forcibly removed reporter Tirayr Muradyan from the assembly venue." *Radio Liberty*. 20 April 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qXU3fqkRR_s (in Armenian). According to Police Information Department Head Ashot Aharonyan, the reporter was not forcibly taken to a police department. He was released from the car at some distance from the venue. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oqpXEwzDhlo> (in Armenian).

⁹⁰ "Traffic was paralyzed in Azatutian Avenue: A group of protesters was forcibly taken to police departments." *Radio Liberty*. 20 April 2018. <https://youtu.be/uy144JZMfV8?t=3m14s> (in Armenian).

in David Anhaght Street by standing in the pedestrian crosswalk. The police servicemen present at the rally venue (about 20 policemen) formed a chain and were standing in front of the protesters and instructed car drivers to change the route.

At about 2:30 p.m., 2 assemblies were being held in Azatutian Avenue at its intersections with Avetis Aharonian and Mamikonians Streets. At the intersection of Avetis Aharonian Street about 200 protesters were holding an assembly. Their number increased to 500 by 3:00 p.m. There were about 10 policemen at the assembly venue who were negotiating with protesters so that the latter would unblock the road. About 100 protesters were holding an assembly at the intersection of Mamikonians Street. At 4:30 p.m., about 60 police servicemen arrived at the assembly venue (most of them were equipped with shields, bulletproof vests and helmets) and using force they started removing protesters from the roadway section of the intersection and forcibly taking them to police departments. While taking protesters to police departments, policemen used brute, disproportionate force and in some cases committed acts of violence against protesters. Some protesters and policemen exchanged insults. A truck was stationed at the intersection and policemen tried to remove its driver by forcibly pulling him out. When the police unblocked street traffic, the shield-wielding police servicemen formed a human chain and stood along the sidewalks so as to prevent protesters from returning to the roadway section of the street. Then, at 4:50 p.m., police servicemen moved to the intersection of Aharonian Street, where protesters left the roadway section of their own will and went to the sidewalks. At about 5:30 p.m., the participants of the assemblies staged in Arabkir and Zeytun communities started a march towards Republic Square. When they were going down Abovian Street, the number of marches was at least 1,000.

At 7:00 p.m., a rally was launched, where the civic initiative's leaders and members made speeches.

Besides the events described above, numerous other rallies and marches took place on April 20 both in Yerevan, Gyumri and Vanadzor as well as in other localities. In Gyumri, the main rally was launched at 6:00 p.m. in Taterakan (Theater) Square, which was followed by a march with very many participants. A large number of policemen were accompanying the marchers. Instances of policemen dealing blows to drivers who honked the horns were observed. During the rally and the march, some unknown persons were putting down the license plate numbers of more active drivers, who were honking the horns, were threatening them and were taking pictures of individual participants' faces and provoking wrangles.

April 21

On April 21, the number of protest rallies and participants increased noticeably in Yerevan and in other localities in the Republic of Armenia.

A rally with N. Pashinyan's participation was launched in Nor Nork district at 11:00 a.m. The number of participants was about 800. There were about 100 policemen at the rally venue and many of them were wearing masks. The policemen were forcibly taking rally participants to police departments and did not let them get onto the roadway section of the street. The participants were trying to push their way through the police chain. In the course of the ensuing hustle the police men held and took away one of their colleagues who was not feeling well⁹¹. V. Osipyan kept demanding that N. Pashinyan terminate the rally contending that it was being conducted with violation of the rules set for submission of notification. N. Pashinyan announced that the rally is urgent and is related to the incidents that had occurred the previous night⁹². Shortly afterwards N. Pashinyan announced that their rally "is declared terminated." Then he called the Nor Nork department of the Yerevan city Division of the RoA Police and submitted notification over the phone for holding an urgent rally and then a march was conducted.

At 12:30 p.m., the number of march participants was about 1,100. New groups of people were joining the march from time to time. At 12:40 p.m., the column split and several groups went in different directions. At 1:30 p.m., those groups again came together on Totovents Street and the number of participants grew to 9,000. The march passed through Avan-Kanaker-Zeytun and Kentron communities towards Republic Square. At 6:00 p.m., the number of marchers stood at 18,000-20,000.

At 12:00 p.m., another march was launched near the Cascade complex in Yerevan. Reaching the intersection of Abovian and Isahakian Streets, the participants (approximately 50 people) blocked street traffic. At that very hour, 5 servicemen from the special police battalion were trying to break the door of a car parked in the intersection of Abovian and Moskovian Streets by dealing blows with their truncheons and feet. Then they forcibly took the driver to a police department⁹³.

⁹¹ "Live coverage from Yerevan. 21 April 2018, 11:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m." *Radio Liberty*. 21 April 2018. <https://youtu.be/z9otKtlw4b8?t=26m40s> (in Armenian).

⁹² According to N. Pashinyan, at night unknown persons assaulted activists and damaged cars.

⁹³ "Red berets are kicking a citizen's car." *CivilNet*, 21 April 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yx_xU1SMrQw (in Armenian).

From 2:00 p.m. till 4:00 p.m., numerous rallies were staged in various sections of Mashtots Avenue, with 50-100 participants in each and in some cases the number of participants would reach 700. The participants would stand in the roadway section of the Avenue or would walk nonstop in the pedestrian crosswalk. There was heavy police presence in the Avenue, with groups of up to 100 and in some cases of up to 400 policemen. Those groups would move to various sections of the Avenue and would unblock street traffic and in some cases would forcibly take protesters to police departments.

Isolated instances of policemen subjecting protesters to beatings and other acts of violence took place. Many rally participants would leave the street during police actions but then would return and block traffic again. In some cases there were minor scuffles with police. In the streets of Kentron community protest actions on cars, motorcycles and bicycles were also taking place. At 4:10 p.m., the participants of various rallies staged in Mashtots Avenue joined the march and went down Tumanian Street. The number of marchers was approaching 1,100. Another march was launched in the intersection of Mashtots Avenue and Amirian Street, with about 2,000 people participating in it.

At 7:00 p.m., a rally was staged in Republic Square with 50,000-55,000 participants.

On April 21, numerous other rallies were held and protest caravans were organized in Yerevan as well as in other localities of the country. The protest caravan that was heading from Ararat to Yerevan was stopped by police servicemen at around 12:30 p.m. (a driver in one of the cars was member of the *Civil Contract* political party, Head of *Nor Kyank* rural community Garik Sargsyan). According to eyewitnesses, unknown persons dealt blows to cars with metal bars, while the policemen present on site did not interfere.

Unknown persons, the two of them presenting themselves as Village Heads, got into a bitter argument with the protest caravan participants. At about 2:30 p.m., G. Sargsyan's car was removed with the use of a tow truck. In the process, the protesters who were blocking the tow truck as well as the protesters who were standing between the tow truck and the car were forcibly taken to police departments. On the same day, the police hindered a protest caravan that was organized by D. Sanasaryan, the leader of the civic initiative *Reject Serzh*⁹⁴.

⁹⁴ "David Sanasaryan accused policemen of stealing his car documents." *Shantnews*, 21 April 2018 <https://www.shantnews.am/news/view/16856.html> (in Armenian).

April 22

In the morning, at 10:00 a.m., negotiations were held in *Armenia Marriott* Hotel between the RoA Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan and N. Pashinyan in the presence of mass media⁹⁵. Soon after the end of the meeting N. Pashinyan left the building. A march was launched with participation of numerous citizens who had gathered in front of the hotel. At 10:40 a.m., the march reached Erebuni district (the number of participants was about 1,000). At the intersection of Artsakh Avenue and Erebuni Street they were met by about 150 policemen who formed a human chain and blocked further advance of the marchers (the policemen were equipped with shields and helmets). N. Pashinyan urged the participants to keep their distance from police servicemen. V. Osipyan and N. Pashinyan started negotiations. However, soon afterwards police servicemen forcibly took Pashinyan and a number of rally participants to police departments. Other rally participants tried to hinder police actions. Then the police dispersed the rally by throwing flash grenades in the direction of the protesters and forcibly taking some of them to police departments. New police servicemen, most of whom were wearing masks, joined police actions. During those actions, shield-wielding policemen formed a chain and were walking towards rally participants, while other policemen were forcibly taking some rally participants to police departments. In the process the police servicemen were using disproportionate, brute force and acts of violence. As a result of police actions numerous rally participants sustained injuries.

From 11:00 a.m., a number of spontaneous rallies were launched in Kentron community, the number of participants in each one fluctuated from 10 to 30 and in some cases it reached 90. In Republic Square the police were forcibly taking citizens to police departments in an attempt to prevent organization of rallies and marches. In the process, police servicemen were inconspicuously dealing blows to those persons who were resisting most actively and were taking them in overcrowded vehicles. According to rally participants, some police servicemen made verbal threats about the intention to use violence, if protesters continue to conduct protest actions in the same way. At about 12:00 p.m., there were at least 150 police servicemen and over ten big and small police vehicles. Some policemen were equipped with truncheons and gas masks and were wearing masks. The police would not let passers-by and potential rally participants get onto roadway sections. From 1 p.m. on, participants of spontaneous rallies (from 50 to 200 participants depending on the rally) that were being held in Kentron community of

⁹⁵ «Conversation of Nikol Pashinyan and Serzh Sargsyan», CivilNet, 21.04.2018p.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cd5ba_D5ZZ8

Yerevan (primarily on Mashtots Avenue) came together to start marches with a large number of participants (in some cases the number of participants exceeded 2,000). Later on, at an intersection of Tigran Mets and Nar-Dos Streets they formed one march and moved to Shengavit community. According to the information obtained by rally participants, some leaders of *My Step* civic initiative were held in Shengavit police department. At 2:00 p.m., 7,000-10,000 protesters were moving down Amirian Street, while in France Square there were about 80 policemen who formed a human chain and who were equipped with shields, truncheons and helmets. At 3:00 p.m., the number of the march participants who were going down Nar-Dos Street towards Shengavit was about 70,000 (cars, too, were part of this protest action and license plates of most of them were covered one way or another). At 4:30 p.m., the number of people assembled in front of Shengavit police department (in Garegin Nzhdeh Street) exceeded 80,000. About 140 policemen (most of whom were equipped with helmets, shields and truncheons) formed a human chain in front of the police department. At 5:30 p.m., a march was launched from Garegin Nzhdeh Square to Republic Square, where the main rally of the day was scheduled to be held at 7:00 p.m. From 7:00 p.m. on, about 90,000 rally participants were there in Republic Square.

On April 22, various small-scale spontaneous rallies and one-man actions took place also in other parts of the capital city. At nighttime, there was heavy police presence on many streets in Yerevan. Groups of 30-40 policemen were stationed near the crosswalks where rallies had been held more often (for the most part at intersections on Mashtots Avenue).

On April 22, in the city of Gyumri numerous employees of fairs, senior high school and university students and other citizens conducted a march demanding that leaders of *My Step* civic initiative be released. During the march, policemen used force against protesters in an attempt to forcibly take them to police departments. However, when they encountered the protesters' resistance, they stopped their actions. The number of the march and rally participants at different hours fluctuated from 5,000 to 10,000.

April 23

On the morning of April 23, several marches were started in the center of Yerevan, with the number of participants in each of them fluctuating from 200 to 1,500, whereas at 12:00 p.m., the number of participants of each of two marches was about 3,000. At 1:30 p.m., the number of participants of the march that was moving down Arshakuniats Avenue reached 40,000. Strikes and boycott of classes were organized in various districts of the city and numerous streets were

blocked for traffic. Some marches were accompanied by policemen. Persons in military uniforms, in wheelchairs and in medical uniforms joined the marches. At around 4:00 p.m., the marches reached Republic Square, where the number of participants was reaching 100,000 (N. Pashinyan had been already released). At 4:15 p.m., the participants of the rally staged in Republic Square learned that Serzh Sargsyan had submitted his resignation. The following hours celebrations began in different parts of the capital city.

On the morning of April 23, in Gyumri a group of senior high school and university students (over 100) and employees of a sewing enterprise (about 200 people) conducted a march along several streets of the city. Residents of both Gyumri and nearby communities were joining the march. At its peak, the number of people participating in the march was about 20,000.

On April 23, numerous rallies were held in Vanadzor, Ijevan, Sevan and Echmiadzin as well as in other localities throughout the country⁹⁶.

⁹⁶ “Employees of *Gloria* sewing factory in Vanadzor declared a strike.” *Hetq*, 23 April 2018 <http://hetq.am/arm/news/87882/vanadzori-gloria-kari-fabrikavi-ashkhatakcinery-gortsadul-en-haytararel.html> (in Armenian).

“About 200 school students in Odzun village started boycott of classes in the morning.” *Hetq*, 23 April 2018 <http://hetq.am/arm/news/87892/odzuni-dproci-shurj-200-ashakertner-aravotyan-dasadul-en-sksel.html> (in Armenian).

“A march of unprecedented scale is being held in Ijevan.” *Hetq*, 23 April 2018 <http://hetq.am/arm/news/87905/ijevanum-annakhadep-masshtabi-ert-e.html> (in Armenian).

“Residents of the town of Sevan are also staging a protest action.” *Hetq*, 23 April 2018 <http://hetq.am/arm/news/87883/sevancinery-evs-boxoqi-akcia-en-irakanacnum.html> (in Armenian).

“Students of various schools in Echmiadzin and their parents are conducting a protest action.” *Hetq*, 23 April 2018 <http://hetq.am/arm/news/87889/ejmiatsni-dprocneri-ashakertner-ev-nranc-tsnoxnery-boxoqi-akcia-en-ancacnum-tarmacvox.html> (in Armenian).