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## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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Armenia: People's Party of Armenia; treatment by authorities and society; state protection (2002-2003)

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Armenia has two currently active political parties called the People's Party and the People's Party of Armenia (also known as the Armenian People's Party) (Armenia 2003a; Armenia 2003b). The People's Party (PP), led by Tigran Karapetian, was formed in 1995, and currently claims 3,500 members (ibid.).

This Response to Information Request concerns the larger of the two parties, the People's Party of Armenia (PPA) (Hayastani Zhoghovrdakan Kusaktsutyun, HZhK). Launched in 1998 (*Political Parties of the World* 2002, 21; EFDS 15 May 2003) the PPA currently has 53 regional offices, 1,200 political clubs and 30,000 registered members (Armenia 2003a). The party's founder was the former first secretary of the Armenian Communist Party (1974 to 1988), Karen Demirchyan, who was one of the eight parliamentarians slain in October 1999 when gunmen opened fire on the Armenian parliament during debate (*Political Parties of the World* 2002, 21; EFDS 15 May 2003). Since 24 December 1999, the party's chairman has been Demirchyan's son Stepan (ibid.; *Political Parties of the World* 2002, 21; *Armenia Now* 21 Feb. 2003).

Initially a proponent of President Robert Kocharyan while a member of the parliamentary bloc Unity (Miasnutiun), the PPA moved to the opposition in 2001 (OSCE 31 July 2003, 3; *Europa* 2002 2002, 528). Stepan Demirchyan's strong second place showing in the 19 February - 5 March 2003 presidential elections, helped the PPA to become, according to the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity (EFDS), "the main opposition force, to which other opposition parties ally" (15 May 2003). Similarly, *Armenia Now* stated that Demirchyan's performance seemed to have solidified the opposition (21 Feb. 2003). Before the May 2003 parliamentary elections, the PPA formed the opposition Justice Bloc (Ardarutyun), which united nine opposition parties, including the Republic Party, the National Democratic Union, the Democratic Party, the Hnchak Social Democratic Party and the Union of Constitutional Law (BBC Monitoring 9 May 2003; see also OSCE 31 July 2003, 3). In the May 2003 parliamentary election the bloc came second behind the Republican Party and received 13.71 per cent of the vote to capture 14 of the 75 parliamentary seats by proportional representation (OSCE 31 July 2003, app. A; Arminfo 31 May 2003). The PPA was apportioned 5 of those 14 seats (Armenia n.d.).