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INTERNATIONAL CONTRIBUTION TO ARMENIAN CIVIL SOCIETY:

A VIEW FROM CIVIL SOCIETY

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CB- Caucasus Barometer

CI- Counterpart International

CRRC- Caucasus Research Resource Center

CSI – Civil Society Index

CSO- Civil Society Organization

EU- European Union

FH- Freedom House

NGO- Non-governmental Organization

RQ- Research Question

US- United States

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this policy internship paper is to analyze: a) Armenian civil society, its history and current state, b) the perceptions of leaders of Armenian civil society organizations about current state of Armenian civil society as well as c) their opinion about international donors.

The methodology includes review of secondary data analysis such as academic articles, research papers and some measurements of civil society (Freedom House Nations in Transit, Counterpart International CIVICUS Civil Society Index) and primary data analysis such as in-depth face-to-face interviews with representatives of some well-known civil society organizations in Armenia.

The paper proposes that civil society in Armenia has been improved since the collapse of the Soviet Union. International contribution has a great influence on this process; nevertheless it implies specific problems such as push of interest and not detailed consideration of the state's real capacities.

All the findings state that civil society development is an ongoing process that needs time and efforts.

## **Introduction**

The following policy internship paper is intended to analyze the international contribution to the promotion of civil society as a way to improve democracy in Armenia.

The methodology of the paper includes the review of secondary data and primary data analysis.

For the secondary data analysis some research articles and reviews were used as well as Freedom House Nations in Transit, Counterpart International CIVICUS Civil Society Index, Caucasus Barometer data have been analyzed.

For the primary data analysis the results of in-depth face-to-face interviews were analyzed.

This paper proposes to look at the international contribution to civil society as a two-face thing having both positive and negative sides. Among positive ones is its contribution to civil society organizations and institutions in general for development while negative imperatives are external factors such as interest and not realizing the state's real capacities.

Findings of the paper are the following: Armenian civil society is overall underdeveloped though according to primary data analysis results, Armenian civil society institutions are developing and becoming more sustainable and stronger.

International contribution has a big role in this because as primary data analysis implies, the role of the US and the EU is seen to be very important in making Armenian civil society sustainable. Developed and well established civil society in its turn is seen as a key to strong democracy in the country.

## **Chapter I Literature Review**

The democratic form of governance becomes popular in all over the world. This is not so much because democracy is a 'perfect' political arrangement but only that it seems to be less flawed than other forms which have come under inspection (Zaidise, 2004).

According to some authors, democratization need not be a purely internally driven phenomenon and factors such as regional diffusion and pressures from international organizations can also facilitate democratic development. However, foreign assistance can promote democracy in two ways: indirectly by transforming some of the structural conditions that serve as prerequisites for regime transition survival, and directly, by empowering agents (e.g. individuals, political institutions or social organizations) that struggle for regime change in the domestic arena (Finkel et al, 2007).

In addition to above mentioned argument, there is a widespread assumption that in reality the so-called “exported” democracies do not work in countries which lack a history of liberal institutions and government, so there is a need for starting the democratization process deep from below. The reason why civil society became so popular is that it is seen as a way of avoiding the problem of imported democracies. It is a bottom-up approach to building democracy. For this reason the development of civil society is seen by international donors as creating and finding some balance between democracy promotion and particular countries history of governance. In other words, the successful civil society culture may be one of the ways of filling the gap between the need for democracy and the real state of affairs.

A lot of studies have been done in order to assess the role of civil society in democracy making in transitional countries, and one of them suggests that “the strength of civil society prior to transition and its density post-transition not only plays a significant role in the deepening of

political freedoms and civil liberties among transitional citizens, but also leads to better institutional performance” (Tusalem, 2007).

However, in order to understand the role of civil society in construction of democracy, it is important first to understand what “civil society” is, what its main functions and limitations to those functions are, in addition what defining features are that help civil society achieve democracy as an end goal.

### **1.1 The Concept of Civil Society**

Civil society is the realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating, self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order of set of shared rules (Diamond, 1994). According to Zaidise, “civil society supposes citizens that actively participate in state affairs, expressing their opinions and using their rights, trying somehow to influence the process of state governance without seeking to achieve power instead.” In other words, civil society is the “user” of the state power in two forms: 1) It may restrict or limit it (in case of authoritarian regime); 2) It can legitimate it when that authority is based on the rule of law (Diamond, 1994).

### **1.2 Interactions of Civil Society and Democracy**

Mainstream notion of civil society has both political and social objectives. The political mission aims to promote good governance and democratic culture, and foster the rule of law and human rights through supporting local NGOs, civic associations, think tanks, advocacy and human rights groups, media and research and educational institutions. The social objective has been promoted by development agencies in order to enhance social and economic development and poverty reduction (Babajanian, 2005). As US Ambassador in Armenia Yovanovitch in one

of her speeches, devoted to civil society, mentioned, “Government needs civil society as a skeptic, a partner, a challenger, a training ground, and a source of innovation. Government and civil society must work in tandem, like oars on a boat. If only one oar is rowing, the boat loses direction and goes nowhere” (Yovanovitch, 2011).

According to Diamond, civil society has some basic functions in democracy building. In order for civil society to be more effective, it must appear in all the fields or levels of governance, and not least the local level (Diamond, 1994). When civil society organizations try to control or affect the state power, they focus on election-monitoring as very important component of democratic structure. This leads to another important function of civil society- information dissemination which provides the protection of citizens’ interests (Diamond, 1994) as well as their right to know. Afterwards, in a society where the government is responsible to ordinary people and the latter have a right for open information, the next function of civil society- freedom of association is coming forward. This function reminds a feedback process during which civil society on the one hand enhances the accountability, responsiveness and legitimacy of the political system, on the other hand helps people be active in state affairs. Besides, civil society organizations protect people’s rights (e.g. Freedom of Information Center of Armenia protects people’s right to know), or try to influence government decisions concerning, for example, the adoption of draft laws.

Thus, it is important to mention that in order for civil society to be successful in constructing democracy, it must be somehow distinct and independent from the state, but very much concerned about its problems. In other words, civil society itself must have internally democratic character as well as high level of organizational institutionalization (Diamond, 1994).

However, despite the power of well organized civil society in construction of democracy, there are also limits for it. It is very difficult for an organized civil society to be completely independent from the government as well as enjoy large popularity. This stands in contrast with the statement that “civil society is first and foremost identified by its detachment from the state” (Zaidise, 2004: 4).

All the above mentioned opinions can be supported by bringing both supportive and non-supportive arguments taken from the Armenian reality. On the one hand, there is a huge international contribution to the promotion of civil society in Armenia; on the other hand, there is still a big gap as well as a lot of problems not solved yet in that sphere.

### **1.3 Problems Caused by International Aid**

Despite the steadily increasing level of democracy assistance programs, there is little evidence whether such programs achieve their goals (Finkel et al, 2007). When talking about the foreign aid especially aimed at democracy promotion, there is a general confusion about the criteria of choosing one or the other country. There is always a gap between a country where it is likely for democracy to work and a country, where it will be comparably difficult to achieve. So it may happen that foreign assistance officials may be more willing to invest in countries that represent likely success than in those in which democratization is likely to fail (Finkel et al, 2007).

The development of civil society is a very complex and time-consuming process. Aimed to strengthening the civil society for consolidating democratic structure in a particular country, many scholars and aid practitioners have argued that foreign aid can undermine democratic government. Friedman (1958) states that foreign aid is controversial to civil liberties and

democracy. Because most aid goes to governments, it tends to strengthen the role of the government sector in general economic activity relative to the private sector. It may be a threat for a country seeking for democracy consolidation because democracy and freedom, as Friedman and others have argued, are less likely to emerge and to survive where most economic activity is organized by the public sector (Friedman, 1958).

Among dangers caused by foreign assistance may be the one that donors may hijack foreign aid to pursue their own objectives rather than development and the alleviation of poverty. Despite giving space to recipient governments to define their own priorities, donors are continuing to impose competing and sometimes clashing priorities on aid recipients thus eroding rather than building the capacity of some of the worlds' neediest governments (Woods, 2005).

Meanwhile, among scholars there is a debate whether democracy assistance programs achieve their goals. As Knack mentions, using several alternative democracy indexes and measures of aid intensity, no evidence is found that aid promotes democracy. However, this does not imply that no democracy promoting programs work as intended, but rather that those successful programs appear to be either too few or are compensated by other effects of aid that tend to undermine democratic development (Knack, 2004).

Therefore, from the part of literature review one can conclude that the process of international contribution is not that simple. In other words, both recipient and donor countries carry risks in the sense that there is always doubt whether the aid serves its initial aim or not. After all, when the real needs and abilities of a recipient country are not taken into consideration in details, it leads to another kind of problems like misunderstanding of the concept or role of civil society by society itself.

## **1.4 Research Questions**

Taking into consideration all these issues, this paper proposes to look at the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the level of development of civil society in Armenia?

RQ2: What is the opinion of Armenian CSOs leaders about Armenian civil society today?

RQ3: What is the opinion of Armenian CSOs leaders about the role of the US/EU in supporting civil society development in Armenia?

RQ4: What are the perceived problems related to foreign aid?

## **Chapter II Methodology**

To answer the RQs, the following methodology was used: various reviews and reports, academic articles were used in order to find out the process of development of civil society and its current situation in Armenia. Freedom House Nations in Transit Report 2010, Counterpart International CIVICUS Civil Society Index 2010 as well as CRRC Caucasus Barometer 2006 and 2007 were reviewed.

In addition to secondary data analysis, primary data analysis- mainly five in-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted with directors or representatives of some of the most prominent civil society organizations in Armenia for further gaining information on the experts' opinions concerning the level of development of Armenian civil society and the role of international contribution to the development of Armenian civil society. The list of interviewees' was a purposive sample from the list of overall available civil society organizations taken from

the electronic website [ww.ngo.am](http://ww.ngo.am) from the section Human Rights and Policies. The aim was to find especially such civil society organizations that directly deal with civil society development issues in Armenia, those that have at least some policies or projects devoted to this component. From those organizations that fit the above mentioned criteria the most prominent (well established, financially viable, successful in attracting foreign funds) were selected. Besides, the snowballing method was used by asking the interviewees who else they can advise me to talk to. The list of CSOs interviewed is available in the Appendix A of this paper; the interview guide is provided in the Appendix B.

## **Chapter III Secondary Data Analysis Findings**

### **3.1 History of Civil society in Armenia**

In order to understand and be able to assess the international aid to the development of civil society in Armenia, there is a need to look at the history of civil society in Armenia, the development and current condition.

Civil society's history in Armenia can be considered either short or long, depending on the point of view adopted. If viewed as an associational, communal life outside of the state, civil society arguably has a long history in Armenia (Counterpart International, 2010).

During centuries civil society in Armenian history has had a tremendous role. As Counterpart International (2010) mentions, throughout the various periods of domination and oppression and after the loss of statehood, the Armenian people demonstrated an alternative form of self-organization, developing a strong survival system of voluntarism within the church and community.

After the establishment of the Soviet rule in Armenia, it took into its control almost all the aspects of life including that of civil society. The existing formal organizations and associations, such as the political party, the trade unions, the public organizations and the Young Communist League, were controlled by the authoritarian state, while any independent civic associations or activities were seen as a threat to the power of the state (Babajanian, 2005).

Many scholars argue that the Soviet era ‘public’ organizations mostly served the state and the party, with their missions and activities sustaining Communist ideology, rather than addressing public needs through voluntary initiatives (Blue et al, 2004). This may be one of the reasons why most post-communist citizens still strongly mistrust and avoid public organizations even now when participation is voluntary. Besides, the politicization and state control of the public sphere serve as a disincentive for many people to join formal organizations (Howard, 2003). So the predominant view is that civil society in post-Soviet countries is weak and underdeveloped as the realm of voluntary associations remains limited.

### **3.2 Current Situation of Armenian Civil Society**

As it was already understood, the strong leadership of the Communist rule contributed to the decline of formal associational civil society in Armenia (Counterpart International, 2010). The Armenian civil society sector still suffers from the Soviet legacy of “public organizations” and its socio-psychological baggage which has contributed to the lack of public trust and support for such organizations (Aslanyan et al, 2007).

Modern day Armenian civil society is traceable to the late 1980s, when, according to Ishkhanyan, “...Armenians believed in the ideals of civil society and the possibilities of democratizing the Soviet system. This idealism brought hundreds of thousands of people into the

streets of Yerevan ... and made social and political activists out of many apathetic Soviet citizens” (Ishkhanyan, 2008: 8).

There are different opinions concerning the level of development and the level of civil society activity in Armenia. According to Freedom House report by Iskandaryan (2010), the legal and political environment for nongovernmental organization (NGO) activity in Armenia is generally favorable. The 2009 amendments to the Law on Public Organizations aim to increase transparency but were criticized for potentially complicating NGO activity. Civil society organizations were increasingly active in 2009, playing an important role in forming public opinion, engaging more with public offices, and participating in international cooperation, including European integration and rapprochement with Turkey.

However, NGOs remain concentrated in the capital and major cities and are still largely dependent on foreign funding for their sustainability (Iskandaryan, 2010).

Freedom House Nations in Transit program assigns scores to civil society by assessing the growth of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), their organizational capacity and financial sustainability, and the legal and political environment in which they function; the development of free trade unions; and interest group participation in the policy process (Iskandaryan, 2010). The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest and 7 the lowest level of democratic progress. If we make a comparison between the levels of civil society development in South Caucasus countries based on Freedom House reports from 2001 to 2010, the picture is the following:

**Table 1: Civil Society**

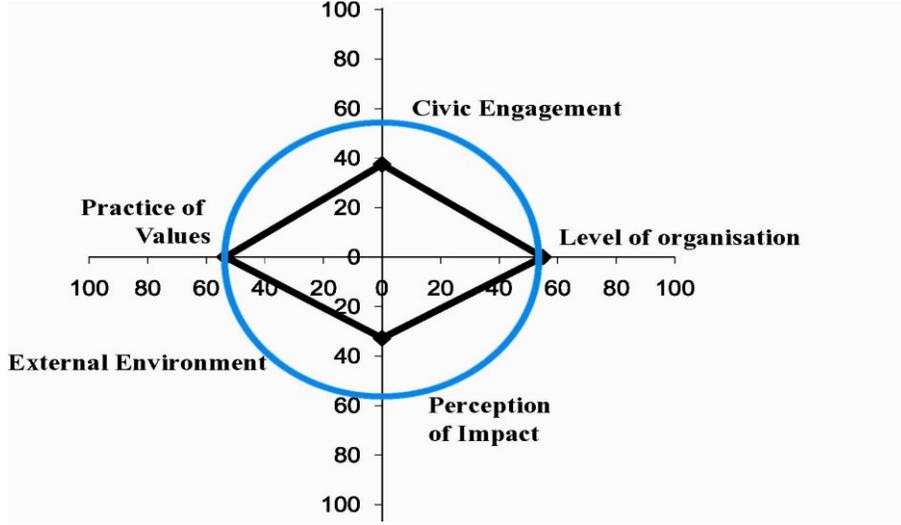
	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>
<b>Armenia</b>	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.75	3.75
<b>Azerbaijan</b>	4.50	4.50	4.25	4.50	4.75	5.00	5.25	5.25	5.50	5.75
<b>Georgia</b>	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.75	3.75

*Source: Freedom House Nations in Transit 2010, www.freedomhouse.org.*

One can see from the table that the most relatively stable condition of civil society development is in Armenia. This graph shows that since 2008 there was a decrease in civil society sector of Armenia so that Armenia's civil society rating is 3.75. Almost the same situation is in Georgia where since 2008 civil society rating remains at 3.75. Out of the three countries, one can see that Azerbaijan is in the worst condition where since 2004 the civil society sector is getting worse.

CIVICUS Civil Society Index implemented in Armenia by Counterpart International takes civil society as a complex phenomenon comprised of five components which are plotted in a Civil Society Diamond diagram. The Armenian Civil Society Diamond (see Figure 1) shows that the five dimensions share a moderate level of development and are relatively well balanced. The Level of Organization, Practice of Values and External Environment dimensions show similar levels of development, while the Civic Engagement and Perception of Impact dimensions lag somewhat (Counterpart International, 2010).

**Figure 1: Civil Society Diamond for Armenia**



*Source: Counterpart International. CIVICUS, Civil Society Index, 2010.*

According to Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC) Caucasus Barometer (2006) public opinion survey data on volunteerism and NGOs, the percentage of membership of any local NGOs is very low in Armenia- 2.5% while in Azerbaijan and Georgia it is 1.6 and 1.3 % accordingly (see table 2, CRRC, 2006). This can be linked to the above statement proposed by Counterpart International CIVICUS CS Index about the low level of civic engagement. In fact, different measures of civil society in Armenia show almost the same results: low level of engagement, low level of membership of civil society organizations, low level of volunteer work- 5.6% in Armenia while in Azerbaijan and Georgia 22.9 and 4.7 % accordingly (see table 3, CRRC, 2007).

**Table 2: Membership in NGOs**

<b>Country</b>	<b>% of “Yes” answers</b>
<b>Armenia</b>	2.5
<b>Azerbaijan</b>	1.6
<b>Georgia</b>	1.3

*Source: CRRC Caucasus Barometer, 2006.*

**Table3: Did volunteer work in the past six months (2007)**

<b>Country</b>	<b>% of “Yes” answers</b>
<b>Armenia</b>	5.6
<b>Azerbaijan</b>	22.9
<b>Georgia</b>	4.7

*Source: CRRC Caucasus Barometer, 2007.*

## **Chapter IV Primary Data (Interview) Analysis Findings**

### **4.1 General Perceptions of Civil Society**

The first set of questions is designed to assess the interviewees overall perceptions of today’s civil society through the question “What is “civil society” for you? How do you understand the term?” Some interesting answers were noted such as civil society is “...the group of citizens coming together around specific issues.” Civil society includes activities of different segments of society as well as active citizens fulfilling their initiatives through different associations. It appears that almost all the interviewees somehow stress the role of civil society

as a strong tool to affect both authorities and political forces. In other words, civil society is considered to be “one of the main and most important comprising factors of democracy which speaks about the free society within a state.”

The second question was “How would you describe Armenian civil society today? Is it different from what it was five or ten years ago? How?” Almost all of the interviewees think that today’s Armenian civil society has both positive and negative developments. Among positive ones are that civil society institutions are developing and becoming more sustainable and stronger, there are more independent experts and analysts in the field, professionalization and role distinctions occurs within civil society.

According to interviewees, during different periods of time the tasks of civil society are changing while its main role is staying the same: representation of ordinary people. From this point of view today’s Armenian civil society can be characterized with the fact that its main task now is to struggle for democratization.

#### **4.2 Problems of Politicization and Detachment**

The second set of questions related to problems caused by politicized and detached civil society. Its aim was to measure whether our interviewees see it as a problem or not. To the question “Do you think in Armenia there is a danger of civil society becoming too politicized? In what way?” overall the answers were negative in the sense that participants do not see civil society politicization as a threat. In addition, some of them think that “actually civil society or citizens in general can never become too politicized.” They rather see the danger in the type of politicization. If the process of politicization takes some signs of nationalism, fascism, or authoritarianism, then this will be a threat to the state. From another point of view it is more

dangerous to deny the right for civil society to play an active and constructive role in the state affairs than to make it politicized as well as it is important not to misinterpret and misunderstand the term “politicization”. However, according to interviewees though very small part of Armenian civil society organizations is really independent, they do not see something strongly negative in politicization.

Next question sounds like the following: "Is Armenian civil society detached from ordinary people? Is that a problem? Why?" If we speak about the detachment of civil society then it is more urgent to consider that of the government or the state. In other words, people highly agree that civil society is even less detached from ordinary people than government is. There are some reasons for this among which is the growing divisions between wealth, income and power. When there are some signs of authoritarianism in the state, the small elites do not want civil society to become more effective which in its turn leads to weak and divided society in general.

At the same time there are some organizations in civil society that depend on outside funding and grants and care more about making money than serving to the needs of ordinary people.

Another point of view concerning the reason of civil society to be detached from ordinary people is foreign funding in the sense that “civil society in Armenia is mainly based on foreign funding which means that orders are not coming from ordinary people and from their needs but rather from that very foreign organization which provide funding. This fact creates situation within which CSOs become responsible not to the society in general but to the donor that contributed to its project.”

### **4.3 Potential Problems Related to International Aid**

Since one of the parts of literature review discusses the problems related to foreign aid, it was interesting to know whether Armenian CSOs leaders consider those issues as problems. Therefore the following set of questions refers to the problems related to international aid. The first one is the following: “There is an argument among the scholars that the development aid promotes only the central government and strengthens its positions in a country. What do you think is this the case for Armenia? Why yes? Why not?” Based on interview responses foreign aid usually has two components: to the state and to NGOs. However, this is normal in any country, because it is the government that implements reforms and brings changes to society. If one takes the question which one should get more foreign funding- the central government or civil society, he/she should consider foreign donors’ policy which states “more for more” and “less for less”. This means that its aid to the government will depend on how the government will perform. It will get more assistance if it does more in terms of reforms; it will get less if it does less. This should also be applied to civil society where success in civil society should be rewarded by funding and greater assistance but it also should be used in the cases of bad performance of civil society through reducing funding. In other words, only the best should get the funding.

Majority of interviewees do not think that development aid simply promotes only the central government. It is really about big institutional reforms. Of course, part of funding goes to the central government but development aid is focused on various positive aspects, such as change of laws and creation of new institutions. One of the interviewees stated that there is a good counterargument to the above mentioned: sanctions applied against some countries such as

Cuba in order to limit the central government power, strengthen the central government even more instead of helping society in general which continue living in extreme poverty and hunger.

The last question of this subgroup was designed to know interviewees' opinions about the possible future of international contribution to Armenian civil society development and possible developments in case if international aid is withdrawn. Here answers fall into two types: some of the interviewees are optimistic in the sense that they think international aid is going to continue because currently there are some signs of positive developments: grants are now somehow diversified and are more or less clear in their directions and intentions while another group of interviewees think that in the future international contribution will be more to the central government than to civil society because it is much easier for donor organizations to control the central government than a lot of independent and small CSOs. The third part of interviewees state that even if international aid is withdrawn, nothing serious will happen if there is initiative and eagerness of civil society. They state that it is not as bad if funding stops but rather when there is funding and support for civil society but the government resists it. As a result, the government becomes much stronger than civil society which speaks about authoritarian type of state. But in general, civil society should not operate with financial priorities first and if international funding is somehow stopped, it will be good because it will encourage Armenian CSOs to return to their initial goals and ideas, to help the people and not necessarily to make money.

#### **4.4 Assessing US and EU as Donors**

The next set of questions includes interviewees' assessments of US and EU as donor players in Armenia. Some questions are designed to ask interviewees to draw comparison

between the US and the EU contribution to civil society development in Armenia. It sounds like the following: “How would you assess the US and the EU contribution to civil society in Armenia?” According to interviewees, it has both positive and negative elements. Positive element is that it helps capacity building within the country and the negative one is that the order always comes from outside so that local issues are not always taken into consideration. Donor money is “addictive” so that when there is no donor money a lot of problems occur. The foreign funding cannot always go on: once it will end so that the time has come to start building sustainable Armenia with our own money and efforts.

Based on the interview results, the American assistance to civil society is based on decisions made in Washington and not in Yerevan so that most of the US priorities are not priorities of Armenian civil society. This means that civil society is actually not engaged as a successful partner of the US in general. From another point of view, being considered as a threat CSOs do not have proper assistance from government of Armenia so that international contribution is really vital for their existence.

Meanwhile it is evident that the US contribution both in quantity and quality is much than that of the EU. However, both donors are seen to be very important for the country at least for the transitional period in Armenia. The reason is that the US experience of having comparatively stable democracy is much stronger than that of the EU as well as internal problems that the EU has at the moment (e.g. issuing visa). All these issues limit the EU capacities to stand in the same level with the US in promoting civil society development in Armenia.

However, when speaking about the US and the EU as foreign donors in Armenia, it is important to mention that the ways the US and the EU try to contribute to civil society

development in Armenia are different. The EU main policies are connected with euro integration and anticorruption. One of the main goals of the EU is to make institutional reforms while for the US first of all it is important to develop a political will for achieving some tangible results. In that sense there are two different concepts of development which also give different results in the process of civil society development.

Next question is the following: “What is the aim of international donors in contributing to Armenian civil society?” Interviewees stressed that the general aim of foreign donors is to keep stability in the South Caucasus region through developing its comprising states separately. In other words, speaking generally, the aim of European or American donors is to strengthen civil society, to balance and pressure the government in terms of democratic reform and economic development in order to get more democratic government and therefore more stable region. However, it is important to mention that aims of separate donors differ so do their activities and approaches. The EU considers the region as a whole implementing similar projects in the South Caucasus states. This is not often so effective because the states do not consider themselves to be part of a region.

However, it is easier for both the EU and the US to deal with states as a region than as different countries within a region.

According to one prominent civil society representative, the difference between the US and the EU interest in Armenia is that the aim of the EU is to have stable neighbors (including Armenia) for stable cooperation while for the US the imperialist thinking is dominant: they are dealing with Americanization of the whole world (including Armenia). In other words, the US tries to push its model of democracy while the EU emphasizes the institutional reforms.

Finally the last question of this set was the following: “Can you name one success story of international contribution to civil society development in Armenia? Was it a US initiative or an EU initiative?” Several examples were brought such as the example of the US funding for NGOs dealing with the rights of disabled people (Pyunik and other NGOs). These NGOs deal with disabled people providing training and support for people with disabilities, one thing that the Armenian government was not doing. Among other examples are the EU support to the conditionality of public participation in many attached programs, the US support to public participation, public order, other supporting reforms in economic field. So the most important thing is capacity building such as civil society representatives participating in program budgeting issues, different law reform enforcement projects (freedom of speech) proposed by the EU and other similar successful programs.

Among failure stories of international donors some interesting ones were mentioned such as the amount of money and efforts spent on supporting free media while it is still considered to be one of the spheres dependent on the central government. Another good example is that of elections- money and efforts spent on elections, but still we do not have free and fair elections in Armenia, or the US initiative to provide shelters to sexually harassed women that did not work and was taken out.

#### **4.5 Policy Suggestions/Advice to Donor Organizations**

After all, considering interviewees’ opinions about current Armenian civil society condition and international contribution to its development, in my opinion it is also important to know what would be their policy advice to international organizations interested in civil society

development in Armenia. The reason for this may be the fact that all the interviewees were civil society representatives and activists in that sphere who are more aware of what is going on.

They state that the status of international donors is important in the sense whether they are absolutely unbiased and do not have any interest except for helping. This problem always comes with international aid when aid receiving countries state that international donors push their interest while the latter claim that their aim is to have democracy and developed countries in the world.

Interestingly enough, one of the interviewees mentioned that besides all the developments mentioned above, there is also another negative development that one can see within civil society. It was about the magnification of grants by international donors. It was explained that currently international donors instead of funding many small CSOs give funds to some major ones in order to be able to control them easily. The result is that those small CSOs stay without funding and fall into oligarchic influence. So it would be much more efficient if international donors deal with many different CSOs instead of cooperating with some major ones. It will lead to the creation of network of CSOs that will cooperate with each other upon different programs and issues in order to escape double work in the same field.

## **Chapter V Conclusion**

According to some international measurements like Freedom House Nations in Transit, Counterpart International CIVICUS Civil Society Index or Caucasus Barometer, civil society in Armenia has a long way of development to pass.

For the first RQ the following findings can be presented: according to Counterpart International CIVICUS Civil Society Diamond out of four factors, comprising the diamond, two

are far underdeveloped which are civic engagement and perception of impact. This means that no matter how CSOs work, public perception of their impact on state affairs is low. While NGOs remain concentrated in the capital and major cities, the legal and political environment for CSO activity in Armenia is generally favorable (Freedom House, 2010).

According to CRRC CB, the percentage of membership of any local NGO is very low in Armenia- 2,5% based on public opinion survey (CRRC, 2006). This can be linked to the statement proposed by Counterpart International CIVICUS SC index about the low level of civic engagement in Armenia.

For the second RQ the following findings are worth mentioning: in-depth interview results state that though professionalization and role distinction occurs within civil society, it is still underdeveloped. Based on the findings of the second RQ, civil society is considered to be even less detached from ordinary people than the state. At the same time foreign aid also contributes to the detachment of civil society through making CSOs responsible to them rather than to ordinary citizens. While the tasks of civil society are changing with time, its main function remains the same: representation of ordinary people.

Among conclusions that one can draw out of interviews for the third RQ is that international donors underestimate Armenia's needs and specifics as well as real capacities at the moment.

It is worth mentioning that international donors are seen as important for Armenian civil society development. However, it is not that simple because as interviewees state sooner or later international donors will be gone. Regardless everything, the role of the US is highly appreciated

among CSOs representatives in the sense that it is perceived as more important actor than the EU in helping civil society to develop.

The findings for the forth RQ imply that besides many positive developments international contribution leads to, it is considered to be the reason for some obvious problems such as the lack of CSOs ability to affect on authorities, low level of public engagement etc. According to primary data analysis, the status of international donors is important. It implies that they should be unbiased and willing to help taking into consideration the state's real needs and capacities deeply.

When trying to help any state, the contributing state has to consider what the chances of that state to become democratized are. What works in European states or in America, may not work in Armenia and there may be many different reasons for this. So when helping Armenia, its real current historical condition and capacities must be taken into consideration in the sense that whether this country is really able to achieve that successes not in general but at the current period of time. In short, every planning should be done to the countries capacities accordingly.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

Taking into consideration all these issues, the following recommendations can be done to Armenian CSOs:

- Educate young generation
- Raise public engagement, including dynamic civic education in the regular curriculum, from the very outset of child education in the country

- The competition between CSOs needs to be resolved and ceased. This competitiveness needs to be transformed into cooperation and coalition building, creating potential for collaborative action and joint effort

To foreign donor organizations:

- Use network approach in funding local NGOs
- Consider the state's real needs before funding a project
- Reevaluate funding and the goals consistently

### **5.3 Limitations of the Study**

As any other research, this one also has limitation. Among limitations is the small number of interviews conducted which speaks about the fact that it cannot be considered to be a representative sample.

The type of CSOs chosen can be considered as another limitation as only most famous and large ones were chosen so that the views of small and unsuccessful CSOs are not reflected in the paper.

Since civil society concept is a general one having different explanations, the ways of measuring it are also different so that the selection of such measures as FH and CIVICUS CSI are somehow different: one may not agree to draw a comparison between them.

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## **Appendix A**

### List of CSOs interviewed

1. ICHD- International Center for Human Development
2. CI- Caucasus Institute
3. CSI- Civil Society Institute
4. RSC- Regional Studies Center
5. ICSRD- Institute for Civil Society and Regional Development

**Appendix B**  
Questionnaire for the Topic  
International Contribution to Armenian Civil Society:  
A view from Civil Society

1. What is “civil society” for you? How do you understand the term?
2. How would you describe Armenian civil society today? Is it different from what it was 5 years ago? 10 years ago? How?
3. Do you think in Armenia there is a danger of civil society becoming too politicized? In what way?
4. Is Armenian civil society detached from ordinary people? Is that a problem? Why?
5. There is an argument among the scholars that the development aid promotes only the central government and strengthens its positions in a country. What do you think is this the case for Armenia? Why yes? Why not?
6. How would you assess the US contribution to civil society in Armenia?
7. How would you assess the EU contribution to civil society in Armenia?
8. What is the aim of these donors in contributing to Armenian civil society?
9. Can you, please, name one success story of international contribution to civil society development in Armenia? Was it a US initiative or an EU initiative?
10. Can you, please, name one failure story of international contribution to civil society development in Armenia? Was it a US initiative or an EU initiative?
11. What would be your policy advice to international organizations interested in civil society development in Armenia? What policies should or should not they implement for civil society development?
12. Is there anything US or EU should do differently from what they are doing now in terms of civil society support in Armenia?
13. What is the possible future of the international contribution to the development of Armenian civil society?
14. What do you think will happen to Armenian civil society, if international aid is withdrawn?