

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ARMENIA

CORRUPTION IN ARMENIAN HIGHER EDUCATION: STATE AND UNIVERSITY  
POLICIES VS. STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of the study is to provide an understanding of the nature of corruption as a whole, and corruption in higher education in particular, to emphasize its impact on the society and social life, to analyze the possible mechanisms used to fight corruption in Armenia, to see the role of the international actors and civil society in the process, to evaluate the perceptions of the students studying at different state universities of the RA, and to provide recommendations in the final stage of the study based on the analysis.

For the purpose of the study three focus group discussions were conducted to understand perceptions of the students on the issue of corruption in education and evaluate their awareness of available mechanisms. Two short interviews were conducted with the activists and leaders of social movements: activists of “Future is Yours” social and charitable NGO and the director of the “United Youth League”, to understand their initiatives and roles in fighting corruption in education.

As a result of the analysis of the students’ perceptions on the issue of corruption, it became clear that although de jure there are solid frameworks to combat corruption in higher education in Armenia, de facto corruption still exists and is of systemic nature.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACSIAP - RA Anti-corruption Strategy and its Implementation Action Plan

ACC - Anti-Corruption Council

ASPU - Armenian State Pedagogical University

CRRC - Caucasus Research Resources Centers

ENP - European Neighborhood Policy

FIY - Future is Yours

FSRs - Former Soviet Republics

GRECO- Group of States against Corruption

IAP - Istanbul Action Plan

MC - Monitoring Commission

MCC - Millennium Challenge Corporation

MAAC- Mobilizing Action against Corruption

NGO - Non-governmental organization

OSCE- Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

OECD -Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

RA - Republic of Armenia

RQ - Research question

SEUA - State Engineering University of Armenia

TI - Transparency International

UNCAC - United Nations Convention against Corruption

USAID - United States Agency for International Development

UNCAC - United Nations Convention against Corruption

YSU - Yerevan State University

YSLU - Yerevan State Linguistic University

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Introduction: .....  | 7  |
| 1. Literature review:  |    |
| 1.1. General Theories.....   | 10 |
| 1.2. Armenia: Chronology of Reforms, Signed Treaties, Government Decisions .....           | 14 |
| 1.3. Review of Policies at Universities.....   | 19 |
| 1.4. Armenia: Previous Empirical Studies (CRRC, OSCE).....                                 | 22 |
| 2. Methodology.....  | 26 |
| 3. The Role of Civil Society in Fighting Corruption in<br>Higher Education in Armenia..... | 28 |
| 4. Interview Results:  |    |
| 4.1. FIY NGO .....   | 29 |
| 4.2. United Youth League.....  | 31 |
| 5. Focus Group Results   |    |
| 5.1. Types and Behavior of Corrupt Practices vs. Students' Perceptions.....                | 32 |
| 5.2. The Role of Bologna System vs. Students' Perceptions.....                             | 34 |
| 5.3. General Elaboration on the Term Corruption in Education in Armenia.....               | 36 |
| Answering the RQs.....   | 40 |
| Conclusion.....  | 43 |
| Policy Recommendations .....   | 44 |
| References.....  | 47 |
| Appendix.....  | 49 |

## INTRODUCTION

“Education is a service that transforms fixed quantities of inputs (i.e. individuals) into individuals with different quality attributes” (Hanushek, 1979).

Twenty years after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, it is safe to assume that widespread corruption has been a lasting legacy of Soviet rule. Except for Baltic republics and Georgia, in recent years all FSRs, including Armenia, are considered countries with systemic corruption (OSCE, 2010). Based on the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index for 2011, Armenia, with its 2.6 score (where 10 means very clean and 1 means highly corrupt), is sharing 129 -133 positions, ranking with Dominican Republic, Honduras, Philippines and Syria.

Within the framework of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) field surveys were held in universities of Yerevan and Gyumri in 2010. Main survey group included 1st to 3rd year students with the general population of individual students and a sample of 1200 students. According to the results of the surveys the majority of the respondents considered that there is a high level of corruption within university system in Armenia (68.6 %). Thus, the problem of corruption as such and corruption in education in particular is still a challenge for the RA (Transparency International, 2010).

In fact working within an organization presupposes a clash between the individuals' loyalties and obligations and their personal ethical preferences. There can be highlighted different factors for the existence of this gap between good intentions and actual practice. Some of them may be individual selfishness, the increase of the consumer demands etc.

Thus, although sometimes many factors become the causes of corrupt practices, consequentialist thinking is needed for preserving the ethical component of the action. This consequentialist approach will presume whether the goal of an action can justify the means

undertaken to achieve it. As the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia in his recent visit to Brussels told: “Armenia is not going to replicate the revolutionary road of its neighboring country Georgia, instead Armenia is going to opt for a safer path” – evolutionary, but safer path (Hetq.am, 2012, June 6).

The aim of the study is to provide the understanding of the nature of corruption as a whole and corruption in higher education in particular, to emphasize its impact on the society and social life, to analyze the possible mechanisms used to fight corruption in Armenia, to see the role of the international actors and civil society in the process, to evaluate the perceptions of the students studying at different state universities of the RA, and to provide recommendations in the final stage of the study based on the analysis.

The *Hypothesis* of the study is the following:

Albeit the existing mechanisms of the government of the Republic of Armenia to combat corruption, there is no visible improvements in corruption related perceptions.

The study also aims at answering following Research Questions:

*Research Question 1:* What mechanisms are currently used by the RA to combat corruption in higher educational system?

*Research Question 2:* What are the perceptions of students on corruption in the system of education of the Republic of Armenia?

*Research Question 3:* What role does civil society have in the process of fighting corruption in higher educational sector of Armenia?

For the purpose of the study two methods of data collection have been used. First, focus group discussions were held among students of three state universities of the Republic of Armenia; Yerevan State University, Yerevan State Linguistic University after V. Brusov and Armenian State Pedagogical University after Kh. Abovian. Short interviews have been held

with the activists of “Future is yours” Social and Charitable NGO in Yerevan, as well as with the director of the “United Youth League” center. University policies were reviewed. Furthermore, books, articles, on line-journals have been reviewed for collecting data.

Literature review is covering general theories for the term corruption; perspectives from different scholars, the chronology of reforms in Armenia, signed treaties and government decisions as well as the review of university policies directed to the reduction of corrupt behavior. It also covers the role of the civil society in the reduction of the risk of corruption; steps taken so far to combat corruption in the system of higher education. Analysis based on previous empirical studies conducted at different periods of time by CRRC and OSCE is provided to highlight the perceptions and measurement of corruption in Armenia.

There can be singled out two limitations of the study. First, focus group discussions were held only among the students from three State Universities of Armenia. Second, the data is mostly based on public perceptions in tackling corruption; no recorded numbers were used because the practice of corruption as such is a covert behavior, and there can be no real recorded numbers.

### 1.1. General Theories

“Quality is not ‘here to stay’, if only for the self- evident reason that across the centuries of the university’s existence in Europe, it never departed.” (Newve, 1994)

Hallak and Poisson argue that the phenomenon of corruption in education may take different forms. For instance, it may take the form of illegal use of public resources: misappropriation, diversion of funds, leakage, embezzlement, or just any kind of corrupt practice - fraud. In addition, the payment of bribes to be recruited as a teacher/lecturer may also occur in the system of education as a corrupt behavior. In this case it is not taken into consideration whether he/she is eligible for that position or not. Moreover, it is considered a corrupt behavior when illegal preference is given to a person (favoritism) or when the lecturer gives preference to a person who is his/her relative or a close friend (nepotism) (Hallak and Poisson, 2007).

Hallak and Poisson also extend the definition of corruption in the educational sector to “the systematic use of public office for private benefit, whose impact is significant on the availability and quality of educational goods and services, and, as a consequence, on access, quality or equity in education.” (Hallak and Poisson, 2007, p. 29)

Nevertheless it is sometimes hard to estimate which behavior is corrupt and which is not, because of cultural and other matters. For instance, in one country giving a gift to the lecturer may be considered corruption, whereas in another country it may be just a part of their socio-cultural relations. This argument may lead to the belief that corruption is a cultural phenomenon. But depending on the monetary coverage (how much expensive that gift is) there may be different opinions whether the person who gave that gift to the official is expecting something in return. Another example may be private tutoring, which if considered

from the point of view of ethics in education, may seem normal, as private tutoring may contribute to the rise of students' knowledge. But if the lecturer or the teacher forces their students to participate in private lessons for having higher grades or for having access to the materials, it by all means will be considered a corrupt behavior.

Some authors argue that the choice of leaders of a particular country may have a direct impact on the fairness of any functioning system. If there is no equal access to educational opportunities, no fair distribution of educational materials and curricula, no fair and transparent criteria for selection of students for higher education, no fair judgment of institutions by professional standards equally applied and open to public scrutiny, no fair acquisition of educational goods and services; and professional standards of conduct by administrators and teachers than there is a huge malpractice in the system which obviously speaks about the inability or unwillingness of the authority to control the massive misbehavior of the system. Hence, leaders chosen on merit will perform better rather than those who are chosen based on privileges (Heyneman et al, 2006).

In a report called "The Effectiveness of Anti-corruption Policy: What has Worked, What hasn't and what we don't Know" Hanna and others highlighted two types of policy prescriptions in the pursuit of breaking the roots of corruption in a particular system: monitoring and incentives programmes and programmes that change the rules of the system (Hanna, 2011, pp. 8-9).

The first type implies "*the principal – agent model*" meaning that the principal is the top level policy maker: the principal who trusts the agent to implement certain goal is not sometimes capable to see the end result sought, because during the process the agent may have his/her own goals and violate the principal's expectations. Thus, in such cases policy interventions are carried out within that particular system to monitor the agent's behavior and provide incentives for the agent to pursue the principal's goal rather than his or her own.

Specifically, this type of strategy may be used for the purpose of reducing possible ways to corruption and to increase the risks and costs of taking bribes or illegal actions for their private needs.

The second type of policy intervention is aimed at establishing programmes that change “*the underlying rules of the system*”. This model presupposes that in any case the interventions aiming to achieve the principal’s goal through the application of increased monitoring and incentives will be useless. The latter argument is supported by the fact that sometimes the monitors themselves may be corrupt or the bureaucrats may create new methods for breaking the rules. Hence, the essence of the model lies in changing the way government delivers services to decrease the risk of corruption or to make it unjustifiable the attempts to engage in corruption (Hanna, 2011, p. 8).

From the above noted two types of policy prescriptions it can be assumed that there are two factors to be taken into consideration simultaneously when making policies: external and internal. Internal factors presuppose the way and the means the actors within the system interact and behave, while external factors are about the malfunction of the system as a whole because of the lack of proper rules and regulations established. Among the internal factors may be highlighted the absence of clear norms and regulations that witness the lack of clear procedures in supervision and disciplinary matters. In fact, the absence of professional norms makes the system function in an environment where there is no code of conduct for the teachers and they do not know what they are entitled and what they are not entitled to do. Furthermore, low salaries and weak incentive systems, absence of professional development perspectives, lack of opportunity for individual promotion and poor prospects after retirement are among those demotivating factors that may further become incentives for corrupt practices. Whereas the external factors witness the lack of political will to coordinate and control the situation.

It is essential to have a thorough understanding of the forms of corrupt behavior in the system of education to know where to focus attention more when tackling against corruption. For instance, in his study David Chapman indicates several forms of such behavior. The first form is the blatantly illegal acts of bribery or fraud which assumes the fact that education officials at all levels demand some form of payoff for themselves in return for their help in shaping the outcome of contracts, implementation efforts, distribution systems, etc. (Chapman, 2002, pp. 3-4).

The second type of behavior, the actions taken to *secure a modest income by people paid too little or too late*, is sometimes regarded as a way of living for those bribe takers and thus people tolerate this type of behavior as they know the teacher cannot go along if not for those outlaw money taking. Another type of behavior is *the differences in cultural perspective*, gift giving etc. as in some cultures it is customary and expected that gifts are given even in return for small favors which is common particularly in China and Russia. Finally, the last form results from *incompetence of key actors or the inadequacies of the infrastructure they work in*. That is to say, the system within which lecturers work does not provide all the necessary elements, let them be logistical or psychological, for the latter to work respecting the rules of the game (Chapman, 2002, pp. 3-4). Those forms of behavior were also endorsed by the students participating in the focus group discussions, conducted within the framework of this study.

Except for the different types of behavior corruption may have in the system of education in the Republic of Armenia Anti-Corruption Strategy and its Implementation Action Plan for 2009-2012 it is stated that the most prevalent forms of corruption in Armenian can be grouped as follows: transactional corruption, administrative corruption and political corruption. Transactional corruption is defined to aim at accelerating various processes and official procedures and reducing costs for citizens or legal entities to receive public services

particularly within a shorter period of time than it is provided in the RA legislation. Administrative corruption takes place when existing legal norms are violated or applied selectively. Based on the Human Rights Defender's 2006 report the risk of administrative corruption is especially high in the areas of healthcare, education, labor and social security, as well as the police, prosecutorial bodies, the RA ministries of justice and defense, the Yerevan municipality, marzpetarans and local self-governance bodies. In the last grouping of the corruption- political corruption, corrupt practices are aimed at changing legal or regulatory norms in the interests of an individual or a group of individuals, and public policy is made to serve private interests, which as a consequence may lead to distortions in the competitive environment and the civil society development (Government of the Republic of Armenia, 2009, pp. 13-14).

## **1.2. Armenia: Chronology of Reforms, Signed Treaties, Government Decisions.**

Due to the deliberate understanding of the negative consequences of corruption on the development of the Republic of Armenia from different sectors, a number of measures have been taken in order to fight corruption since 2000. In 2001-2003 the state anti-corruption policy was completed which outlined the main legislative and institutional frameworks within which the anti-corruption strategy was to be implemented. The RA Anti-corruption Strategy and its Implementation Action Plan for 2003-2008 (ACSIAP) aimed at overcoming corruption, removing reasons and conditions contributing to the emergence and spreading of corruption, establishing a healthy moral/psychological climate in the country. More than 50 laws and by-laws were passed during that period, as part of anti-corruption measures, several institutions (such as the Anti-Corruption Council and Anti-Corruption Strategy Implementation Monitoring Commission) were created, international anti-corruption conventions and agreements were signed and ratified (Hug, 2011, p. 29).

In order to coordinate the activities of the relevant state bodies aimed at comprehensive and effective implementation of the RA anti-corruption policy, to eliminate the causes of corruption and to improve the state policy aimed at preventing corruption, the RA President signed an order to establish an Anti-Corruption Council (ACC) chaired by the Prime Minister. In accordance with ACC regulations, Anti-Corruption Strategy Implementation Monitoring Commission (MC) was also established. Nevertheless, both in the RA Anti-Corruption Strategy and Its Implementation Action Plan for 2003-2007 and the international indicators confirm the fact that the level of corruption in Armenia is still high and it is of systemic nature and needs deliberate changes and recovery activities (Government of the Republic of Armenia, 2009, pp. 13-14).

The current such strategy, for 2009-12, was adopted in September 2009 seeking to ensure that Armenia implements the anticorruption commitments it has made to international bodies such as GRECO and the OECD. One common criticism of the previous strategy (which covered the period 2003-07) was that even if it resulted in improvements to anti-corruption legislation, it failed at the implementation stage (Hug, 2011, p. 27).

Based on the Republic of Armenia Anti-corruption Strategy and Implementation Action Plan 2009-2012 the prevalence of corruption is evident in the higher and post-higher education systems, in the admission exams, recurrent exams, graduation exams, admission to post-higher programs (master's programs, post-graduate studies, and the like), procedures of university licensing being the main links in the chain of corruption. Thus, it presupposes that comprehensive measures are needed to overcome the pitfalls or malfunctioning of the system such as taking preventive-administrative measures in addition to legislative amendments, particularly, expansion of the autonomy of educational institutions, establishment of a transparent, lawful and reasoned payment system in public educational institutions, replacement of the present university admission procedure with a system of “assessment

centers” in order to minimize the impact of the human factor in the admission system at the maximum level, etc. (Government of the Republic of Armenia , 2009, pp. 13-14).

It is essential to note the role of the ‘outside’ frameworks in the process of fighting corruption in the Republic of Armenia. Specifically, in January 2004, within the framework of the Council of Europe’s anti-corruption body, Armenia became a member of GRECO (Group of States against Corruption). Then in June and December of 2004, respectively, it signed and ratified the Council of Europe’s Criminal Law Convention and the Civil Law Convention on corruption. Based on the 2008 report on the implementation of the GRECO recommendations 12 out of the 24 recommendations have been implemented fully, 9 – partially, and 3 – not implemented at all (Government of the Republic of Armenia , 2009, pp. 13-14).

Armenia is also a member of Istanbul Action Plan (IAP), a sub-regional programme launched in 2003 within the framework of the Anti-Corruption Network, the objective of which is to support anti-corruption reforms in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan through country reviews and continuous monitoring of the implementation of recommendations, that promote international standards and best practice. Since its membership to this plan two rounds of monitoring have been implemented; the first was conducted from 2004 to 2007 and the second round has been implemented from 2008 to 2009. The structure of this plan mainly presupposes reviewing the legal and institutional framework for fighting corruption, implementing the recommendations endorsed during the reviews and monitoring progress in implementing the recommendations (OECD, 2012).

The very last report of Armenia within the framework of IAP was the Progress Report of 2012. According to the Progress Report of the RA 2012 almost all of the public sector is regulated by the internal audit field, which is fully consistent with international leading

practices. On 11 August 2011 by the Government's Resolution No. 1233 - N (Ն) there "The standards of the internal auditors" activity and rules of internal audit professional conduct has been developed and adopted, which fully comply with internationally recognized standards and establish an internal audit activity and the basic principles of conduct of the internal auditors (OCED, 2012, pp. 1-2).

The latter particularly highlighted the adoption of new Law on Public Service by national Assembly on 26 May 2011 and signed by the President on 14 June 2011. The Law entered into force on 1 January 2012. Having much broader scope than the Civil Service law the chief focus of the Law on Public Service is to provide rules on ethics, prevention of corruption and declaration of assets and mechanism to implement them. According to the Report the subject of this Law are not only civil servants, but also high-level officials, staff in National Assembly, Constitutional Court, Central Banks, National Security Council, Judicial Department, Prosecutor's Office, Yerevan Mayor's Office and bodies of local self-governments (OCED, 2012).

Hence, through the creation of such solid frameworks both public servants and the high-ranking officials are to obey the rules of ethics. Moreover Article 29 prohibits taking gifts and provides a clear understanding of what should be understood by saying a "gift" while Article 28 clearly distinguishes the list of the rules of ethics which are not exhaustive. Article 22 of the Public Service Law introduces an obligation to public officials to report on breaches of law, including corruption, in relation to public service. According to the Presidential Decree of 9 January 2012 Ethics Commission for High-Ranking Officials has been established which will foster the control of such unethical behavior as corruption making the system accountable from the up to the bottom (OCED, 2012, pp. 1-2).

Article 312 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia states that "giving a bribe to the state official in the form of money, property, property right, securities or other property

benefit, so that this state official performs or does not perform actions in favor of this person or the ones he represents, within his authority, or by using one's official position this person would commit or not commit actions favoring or permitting or conniving, is punished with a fine in the amount of 100 to 200 minimal salaries, or correctional labor for 1-2 years, or with arrest for the term of 1-3 months, or with imprisonment for the term up to 3 years. ” Furthermore, based on the provisions of Article 313 bribery mediation by abuse of official positions is punished with a fine in the amount of 200-400 minimal salaries, or arrest for 1-3 months, or imprisonment for 2-5 years (National Assembly of Armenia, 2003). Thus, so far discussed solid mechanisms are designed to make corruption punishable even if one has been a mediator not the exact giver or taker.

Within the framework of the EU European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), the European Union and Armenia ratified an Action Plan in 2006, in which fighting corruption was included as a priority area. Furthermore, in 2005, the RA signed the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), which was ratified by the RA National Assembly in 2006. Under the 2006 agreement between the RA Government and the Millennium Challenge Corporation of the United States of America, the RA Government was to retain its commitments related to MCC criteria. Their implementation was monitored by evaluating the RA Government's performance in the areas of political rights and civil liberties, control of corruption, government efficiency, rule of law, and voice and accountability (Government of the Republic of Armenia, 2009, p. 8).

Based on Republic of Armenia Anti-corruption Strategy and its Implementation Action Plan for 2009-2012 the following necessary factors are to be highlighted in the pursuit of the reduced corruption in education: ensure continuous identification and prevention of corruption risks in education development policy, increase management effectiveness and accountability in the education sector, increase the transparency, openness and lawfulness of

the selection of personnel, appointment, promotion and regulation of work relationships in educational institutions, ensure the transparency and lawfulness of knowledge evaluation systems (Government of the Republic of Armenia, 2009, p. 30).

Thus far it became obvious that the legal frameworks within which the rights of the citizens are being protected in the RA are properly designed and are constantly being improved to have maximum leverage in protecting the human rights of the citizens of the RA at the same time to provide the right path for them to fight against corrupt practices at any sector through the legal provisions and requirements.

### **1.3 Review of Policies at Universities**

The guidebook of the “Future is Yours” NGO called “Anticorruption Training Courses and Event Organization”, published by the FIY NGO in 2011, provides clear information on the actions of each university within the framework of fighting corruption. Namely, it illustrates the policies of each university in fighting corruption. For instance, after having reviewed the guidebook it became clear that in recent years at Yerevan State University particular rules were enrolled in order to control the cases of corruption and at the maximum level minimize the occurrences of such behavior. As the existing anticorruption positions of the Yerevan State University show, beginning from 1995 the system of grading was reviewed and now the constant checking and grading multifactor system is in place. Since 2003 surveys are being conducted among the students from different faculties on this issue trying to incorporate them at the center of the solution. As well as, events are being constantly held with the alumni in order to estimate the level of satisfaction with the knowledge received during the studies and regard their achievements after graduation. Furthermore, in “Development Strategy Program 2010-2014 of Yerevan State University” corruption risk

reduction and the promotion of further development of moral, psychological environment are seen as of priority policies for the University. Besides, taking into account the considerable role of the social conditions of the employees the latter program also aims to make the average salary of lecturers' equal 150% of the official average salary of the RA up until 2015, by also creating social aid foundation (USAID, 2011).

Thus the latter were some of the indicators that there exist solid frameworks and mechanisms in YSU to prevent the possible enlargement of corruption and to possibly minimize its risks of its frequent occurrence.

Based on the project of "Overall Events to Fight against Corrupt Practices in Yerevan State Universities 2011-2012" possible corruption risks are conditionally being divided into four groups: the first group entails the entrance into the university; the entry process to the state universities, the exams for Master's degree entrance, PHD entrance, in the system of postal tuition and the entrance for the second profession, foreign citizens' entrance.<sup>1</sup>

The second group entails the interrupted education and the problems connected with the continuity of education; transition from one university to another, inter-university transitions, the choice of students for exchange programs in foreign countries.

The third group embodies the working relationships; the way lecturers are enrolled, official promotion, assigning official positions and competitions, missions, professional advancement and trainings in foreign countries. Finally the last group for the possible corruption risk occurrence is the economic activity: purchasing activities, constructions etc.

Similar logic is used by the Armenian State Pedagogical University after Kh. Abovian to combat corruption: up until now the main significance is given to the preventive and illustrative means against corruption with the involvement of as many students as possible. The document of anti –corruption strategy for 2011-2012 of YSPU after Kh. Abovian

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<sup>1</sup> [http://documentation.y-su.am/wp-content/themes/easel/uploads/199\\_EPH\\_Hakakorupcion\\_cragir.pdf](http://documentation.y-su.am/wp-content/themes/easel/uploads/199_EPH_Hakakorupcion_cragir.pdf)

presupposes that such means as the reduction of ventures in educational field by means of procedure changes, the promotion to the advantage of united procedures, formation of intolerant attitude among students against corruption and implementation of moral punishment are directed to the reduction of corruption. For that purpose according to the corruption strategy for 2011-2012 they are going to create an informational page on anticorruption strategy program in ASPU website and “Pedagogical University” newspaper with interpretations for students on possible ventures and results of studies carried out among the students (continual, accomplishing by the department of Information and Public Affairs), as well as they will form monitoring committee on anticorruption strategy adjacent to Rector etc. The strategy also involves the recalculation of salaries for the purpose of reducing corruption risks and increasing the quality of transparency, accountability and public knowledge in educational sphere.<sup>2</sup>

All the three universities have web pages on the internet open to public scrutiny. Interestingly enough both YSU and YSLU have their pages on Facebook where they keep in touch with the students presenting the news and events taking place in the universities. And each department has created its own group. Both YSLU’s and YSU’s web pages provide everyone the opportunity to see all their financial activities starting from the annual budgets, rectors’ reports and estimates, the results of the audits which is not even enforced by the legislation but in order to raise the level of transparency of the institution all the financial documents are uploaded there by the content of the officials.<sup>3</sup> Thus, through making its financial documents available to public scrutiny the university tries to make its activities transparent.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://armspu.am/upload/file/New%20PDF%20haka%20engl.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://documentation.yasu.am/%D5%AE%D6%80%D5%A1%D5%A3%D6%80%D5%A5%D6%80/http://www.brusov.am/hy/about-university/strategical>

#### **1.4 Armenia: Previous Empirical Studies (CRRC, OSCE)**

Three household surveys were conducted by the Caucasus Research Resources Centers, commissioned by the USAID Mobilizing Action against Corruption (MAAC): the Corruption Surveys of Households in Armenia. The survey included 1,549 respondents in 2008, 1,515 in 2009 and 1,528 respondents in 2010. The surveyed group represented the voting age population in Armenia (18 years and older) across all regions/marzes of the country. The results of the last survey in 2010 showed that a very high percentage (over 80%) of Armenia's citizens continues to believe that corruption is a serious problem (CRRC, 2010, pp. 3-5).

By frequency of answers that corruption is common and very common in 2010 the education system was second (31% of respondents) to healthcare (45% of respondents), and the electoral system was the third (28% of respondents). In 2009 the picture for education was the same, only healthcare was in first place (CRRC, 2010, p. 25).

Both the surveys of 2009 and 2010 endorse the fact that only 24% overall respondents knew which institutions they could approach to report a case of corruption by a public official. Nevertheless, many of the respondents confessed that they are unwilling to report corruption stemming from different reasons. Even though the unwillingness of respondents to report corruption can be partially explained by lack of information about how and to whom they can report, there are other factors that hinder the process of reporting. For instance, the most widespread reason that people did not want to report corruption in 2010 was disbelief that something would be changed after reporting it and the notion that reporting corruption was socially undesirable. Majority of the respondents in 2010 said that they do not report corruption because Armenian society does not reward those who report and that those who report corruption would be subject to retribution/retaliation (CRRC, 2010, p. 35).

As the results of the surveys illustrate the public awareness of NGOs that are involved in anti-corruption activities is rather low which may lead to the belief that people are either not interested in NGOs' activities or they are not sure about their capabilities in fighting corruption. But the results of 2010 survey also show that the half of the respondents sees particular anticorruption potential in NGOs in general. So that people have different opinions concerning the possible perspectives from NGOs in fighting corruption (Hug, 2011, p. 35).

About half of the survey respondents did not see themselves as agents of change. Most of their answers reflected the idea that there is nothing they can do. The number of respondents who think that way has increased over the course of three years the surveys were conducted. So that the possibility to reach better outcomes steadily decreases while misleading the course of fighting corruption (Hug, 2011, p. 33).

As a result of the survey from 2008 to 2010 the number of respondents who considered the Armenian Government was "very ineffective" has doubled (from 13%-26%) whereas the number of those who considered the Government effective in its fight against corruption steadily decreased over the course of time (41% - 32%). Hence, it can be assumed that there are considerable changes in responses from 2008-2010. Those changes are mostly evident in the increase of distrust and disbelief of any positive change that may occur in the process of fighting corruption and, consequently in the decrease of the belief that still there is a perspective for better outcomes (Hug, 2011, p. 33).

Another survey was conducted by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Yerevan in 2010 to assess the Student Perception on Corruption in the Armenian Higher Education System. The survey was designed for the students of state universities in Yerevan and Gyumri (1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> year) with the general population of individual students and a sample of 1200 students (OSCE, 2010).

As the results of that survey illustrate, the majority of the respondents considered that there is a high level of corruption within the university system – 68.6%. Less than half of the respondents (almost 40%) thought that corruption at university level is of systemic nature inherent to the imperfection of the education system. Whereas the rest expressed self-criticism considering the main reason of corruption at universities generating from the laziness of the students themselves. Hence, students accept their share of responsibility for corruption, but at the same time are inclined to blame the system rather than themselves. Perhaps it may sound somewhat strange but less number of students considered that the causes of corruption in education are the unfavorable economic living conditions of the university teaching staff and (only 8-9%) a very small part of the respondents considered that it is because of the unawareness of students of their rights and lack of interest in it (OSCE, 2010, pp. 11-14).

Even though student councils can be powerful tools to protect the rights of the students and make their voice heard, the results of the latter survey show that only the SEUA Student Council has the highest trustworthiness among the students of that university (76%) (as compared to 20.7- 49.5% of the student councils of other universities) (OSCE, 2010, p. 18).

Interestingly enough both the Student Perception on Anticorruption Survey by the OSCE and the results of focus group discussions conducted within the framework of this study were somewhat alike. For instance, for the question “What would you advise to the Ministry of Education and Science?” The responses of the OSCE survey were the following: making admission exams stricter and better, either giving up Bologna reforms returning to the former education system or maximally implement Bologna reforms program, implementing significant reforms in education system and administration (including staff), providing better access to internet in universities, having more specialized exams during the entry process, improving school education quality, increasing scholarships, changing and updating the curriculum etc. Similar to the results of the surveys conducted by CRRC, most students considered that “Even if I offer anything nothing is going to be changed.” (OSCE, 2010, p. 25)

The review of the literature leads to the formulation of the following research questions and hypothesis.

**Hypothesis:** Albeit the existing mechanisms of the government to combat corruption there is no visible improvements in corruption related perceptions.

**Research Question 1:** What mechanisms are currently used by the RA to combat corruption in higher educational system?

**Research Question 2:** What are the perceptions of students on corruption in the system of education of the Republic of Armenia?

**Research Question 3:** What role does civil society have in the process of fighting corruption in higher educational sector of Armenia?

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

For the purpose of addressing the above mentioned questions and hypothesis the data were collected in two ways.

First, three focus group discussions were held. In order to provide a diversity of approaches, representatives from three State Universities of Armenia have been involved in the focus group discussions: 6 students from Yerevan State University (YSU), 6 students from Yerevan State Linguistic University after V. Brusov (YSLU) and 5 students from Armenian State Pedagogical University after Kh. Abovian (ASPU).

Each group discussion lasted from 15 to 20 minutes (with 19-22 age groups). Focus group discussions were conducted according to pre-designed questionnaire with open-ended questions (see Appendix) and one knowledge question to evaluate the level of students' awareness of any local or international NGOs or any international organizations that are currently engaged in anti-corruption policies of Armenia. Each focus group discussion was recorded in order not to omit any comment or opinion.

When doing the research on the topic and reading news from different news agencies “United Youth League” center and “Future is yours” Social and Charitable NGO are currently engaged in the process of fighting corruption in education and are taking measures to stop such practices. Thus a short interview was conducted with a representative of the “Future is Yours” NGO who told about their projects at different universities as well as about the framework within which they are now working to decrease corrupt practices in the educational sector in Armenia. After the interview the activists provided two brochures which are considered among their recent chief achievements on the issue of corruption. Also a short conversation was carried out with the director of the United Youth League center Sevak

Hovhannisyan on Facebook to understand their initiatives and to see what their approaches in combating corruption in higher education are.

Second, for the purpose of study secondary data have been collected - books, reports, publications and journals were reviewed; some theoretical materials were used to provide the general understanding of the universal criteria of corruption, particularly, what is understood by corrupt behavior in the system of education.

### **3. The Role of Civil Society in Fighting Corruption in Higher Education in Armenia**

Armenia ratified its membership in the United Nations Convention against Corruption on 8 Mar 2007 according to the Art 13(1) of which it is a duty for each state party to take appropriate measures, within its means and in accordance with fundamental principles of its domestic law, to promote the active participation of individuals and groups outside the public sector, such as civil society, non-governmental organizations (UN, 2004, p. 15).

Indeed the involvement of civil society in the process of combating corruption is crucial in the sense that they function at grassroots level. The fact that they are non-profit organizations presupposes that they may be funded by different sources including international inter-governmental organizations, businesses, donor agencies, governments, individual donations or others, making them independent from the governmental finance. Thus, via outsource financing NGOs may raise the voice of the citizens (their complaints on certain policies) to the Government, monitor policies and encourage political participation at the community level, as well as while working on the grassroots level they can make the information on their activities public and open for the public's scrutiny. Thus the potential of civil society organizations in pushing the fight against corruption is unquestionable in any public sector.

As already noted in the methodology, to see what role NGOs have in the risk minimization of the corruption in the system of education in Armenia, the role of "Future is Yours" Social and Charitable NGO is reviewed via interview results and the distributed brochures (see in the section Interview Results).

#### **4.**

#### **Interview Results:**

##### **4.1.**

##### **FIY NGO**

Since 2003 "Future is yours" Charitable, Social NGO has been implementing projects in such spheres as education, culture, social, civil society, human rights, environment and others with the collaboration between the Ministry of Education and Science and the National Institute of Education.

According to the representatives of the FIY NGO there are several chief initiatives of the organization. They are implementing wide range of educational, informative and cultural projects in Yerevan and in regions of Armenia on developing legal consciousness of the youth, enhancing democratic principles within the country, protecting human rights and developing anticorruption education etc. As the project called “Education Against Corruption” (had good results, MAAC also decided to fund the second initiative of FIY to strengthen anti-corruption education at schools and further promote anti-corruption education in vocational and higher education institutions of Armenia.<sup>4</sup> This new project, called “Education as a Means to Prevent Corruption,” launched various anti-corruption trainings and awareness raising events. At the end they published the guidebook called “Anticorruption Training Courses and Event Organization”. The latter is composed of four parts; the first part is about the existing anticorruption positions at vocational and higher education institutions, the second part represents the theoretical materials on corruption and its prevention methods, in the third part thematic lesson samples are introduced, and finally, the fourth part is about the anticorruption event programs and scenarios presented by vocational and higher educational institutions (USAID, 2011).

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<sup>4</sup> The project called “Education against Corruption” of 2009 (funded by the USAID - Mobilizing Action against Corruption) aimed to introduce anti-corruption education program into Armenia’s secondary schools.

To reach their objectives the organization is trying to raise the awareness level of the youth and increase education via commencement of educational and informative projects for high school and University students. Thus, within the framework of “Education as Means to Prevent Corruption” project 5-day anticorruption trainings were organized at 19 educational institutions of Yerevan and RA regions, 9 vocational and 10 higher education institutions with the overall of 1000 number of students. The “Education as Means to Prevent Corruption” project was concluded by the final event on “Aware Youth is the Fundamental of Incorrupt Society”. During the event 200 most active participants from 19 educational institutions of RA regions and Yerevan received certificates.

When speaking to the representatives of the FIY NGO it became clear that they are keeping in touch with the heads of the Student Councils of each university in Armenia engaging them in process of fighting corruption.

The methodological handbook for teachers by the Future is Yours NGO called “Education against corruption” clearly illustrates the impact corruption may have on economic and social development, on the state government and on the social- political development (USAID, 2010, p. 17). This handbook is a guide for those interested in this issue which clearly illustrates the negative consequences the term corruption may have on the development of nation as a whole, publicizing all the events designed for the purpose to minimize the risks of corruption.

## **4.2. United Youth League**

Another movement that is currently engaged the process of fighting corruption in education is the United Youth League center, an active youth movement in Armenia, which asserted in news that “corruption is taking place not only in a secret way, but has also in a legal way, started to strengthen its roots in our society” emphasizing the fact that in private universities students are obliged to pay money for being able to pass the exams again. So the youth movement is also engaged in the problem that is at stake and is going to collect facts and propose its solution to the problem (Tert.am, 2011, December 5).

During our short interview with the director of the League it became clear that they were aware about specific cases and names of corrupt professors and school teachers. Hence, they are collecting particular facts of corruption in education (both at schools and universities) in order to make them public one day. According to the director’s words they have also requested the Minister of Education and Science Armen Ashotyan to permit them to organize monitoring at universities but the latter denied their request for two times.

## **5. FG Results:**

### **5.1. Types and Behavior of Corrupt Practices vs. Students' Perceptions.**

As discussed in the literature review, David Chapman mentions the following four types of behavior for corruption: blatantly illegal acts of bribery or fraud, actions taken to secure a modest income by people paid too little or too late, the differences in cultural perspective – giving gifts etc., and the incompetence of key actors or the inadequacies of the infrastructure they work in. Similar ideas were expressed by FG discussion participants.

For instance, according to the students' opinion now it is not necessary to give money directly to the lecturer to call it corruption. Instead, some lecturers make the students buy their lectures or books to receive grades. A student from YSU stated that *“now the corruption has taken another form of behavior in education, it is much more covert.”* Moreover, another student from YSU told that one of their lecturers has announced that he is selling his lectures and no any other additional literature is possible to use during the exams and that each of the lecture costs 1000 AMD. This case confirms the fact that a blatantly illegal act of bribery is a common behavior in YSU. Similar cases were told by other students as well: in APSU instead of lectures the lecturer was selling books for giving grades during the exams.

According to the students more often the lecturers are engaged in such illegal activities because they are afraid of not affording their livings with the amount of money they receive each month. Thus, this idea also supports the fact that secure modest income by people paid too little or too late may also be regarded as a way of living for the bribe takers in the Armenian reality:

*“Nowadays, living properly is an expensive pleasure. So, the higher the salaries the less will be corruption so that to increase the quality of transparency; accountability in educational sphere recalculation of salaries is needed. (a female student from YSPU, 21 years old)*

There was another type of argument made by the students that also corresponds to the type of corrupt behavior Chapman stated in his study- the difference in cultural perspective. Namely, a female student from YSU spoke about what she perceived by saying corrupt behavior noting that *“it is not the direct action of giving money to the lecturer, but also giving gifts – gold ornaments etc., to the lecturers or asking their relatives to call the lecturer demanding higher grades etc”*. According to her words when a child sees her/his mother bribing the teacher still at school it steadily becomes a common practice for that child and takes a continuous, chained form. Moreover, students perceived that corruption at classroom level can contribute to the development of the culture of corruption as sometimes, human beings are learning on their own actions; we become brave by doing brave acts. Thus when an official distorts his/her position it becomes a habit and the latter starts to repeatedly take that action.

The next form of corrupt behavior in education that Chapman stated in his study and that was also endorsed by the students as another means to corrupt behavior in Armenian reality is *the incompetence of key actors or the inadequacies of the infrastructure they work in* was. Specifically, some of the students argued that for the system to be more efficient, transparent and the agent within it more accountable first of all abusers of power should be punished. For that reason the control apparatus of the university must function properly and the government must provide finance for those monitoring activities that are organized by public or private organizations instead of waiting for an international organization’s funding projects.

As noted in the project of “Overall Events to Fight against Corrupt Practices in Yerevan State Universities 2011-2012” transition from one university to another or transition within the university, also embodies cases of corrupt behavior. These types of behavior were endorsed by the students during focus group discussions. For instance, a female student from YSLU (21 years old) told a related story. When they were second year students a new student

joined their group from YSU and they were wondering why she had changed the university. Later on it turned out that she decided to withdraw from the previous university because of not being able to study there any longer with low grades. And, due to the fact that her relative had a position in YSLU she decided to shift the university to be more confident that she will get the diploma.

As for the types of corruption from the stories told by the students it turned out that currently nepotism prevails among other types of corruption. A female student from YSU told that they currently mostly encounter such cases of corrupt behavior that do not merely refer to giving money, rather those cases refer to calling friends or relatives to have higher grades. The following words give the approval to the idea of nepotism:

*“I remember a case when one of our friends wanted to pass the exam but she hadn’t participated to classes. She was looking for someone to help bribe the lecturer being sure that if she approached the lecturer and asked it herself she would have been withdrawn from the university immediately. It took her a long time to find someone who is a close friend or a relative of that lecturer. After all she gave 300 US dollars and passed the exam.”(a female student from YSLU, 20 years old)*

## **5.2. The Role of Bologna System vs. Students’ Perceptions.**

To the question “What would you tell about the Bologna program that was implemented in the higher system of education? What can you say about its role in tackling corruption in higher education in Armenia?” some students stated that they are confident in the success of Bologna system in the sense that now they have a week for only modules and each student is responsible to be prepared properly in order to receive a grade. Besides now they are working from the beginning till the end of each semester before the exam period begins unlike the old

system when no one studied before the final exams waiting for a miracle to happen and help them pass the exams:

*“Now the students have the opportunity to move from paid system to free (or vice versa) if the student doesn’t prove to be a hard worker and an excellent student.” (a female student from YSLU, 21 years old)*

A student from YSU told a story when a new student joined their group from the group of free system of education. According to her words everyone believed that she was an excellent student since she had entered the university with high grades: *“everyone was sure that if this girl is among those students who received scholarships and studied in free system of education she must be a hard working girl with excellent grades.”* However, what they saw in reality contradicted to their expectations: *“she couldn’t speak English properly, while speaking she made a lot of grammatical mistakes.”*

On the one hand from the latter case it can be assumed that Bologna process succeeded in its endeavors of not letting those students unless they maintain good grades who entered with free education to continue studying within the same system. On the other hand others argued that Bologna system does not make the students have more reliance on the transparency of the system. Even they considered this new program to have more negative impact because according to them now the ways and means of the corruption took other forms and became more covert. Students endorsed the idea that because of this new system now there are more “civilized” ways of corruption. A female student from YSU (20 years old) stated that *“even though one of the aims of the Bologna system is to create a common educational sector this will not happen in our country as here each university functions on its own, independently which can be regarded both as a positive and negative factor. For fighting corruption in education Bologna system may succeed if only it is implemented correctly.”*

According to students' perceptions the system as such makes it possible to go against corrupt behavior but it did not have a positive impact on the process of tackling corrupt practices in education because even though Bologna process seems to be de jure in place, de facto universities are still not implementing it completely. Correspondingly de jure the latter paved the way for good results whereas de facto not. *"We have some lecturers who use the old system on their own saying "you get 5" (a female student from YSU, 20 years old).*

### **5.3. General Elaboration on the Term Corruption in Education in Armenia.**

The fact that there exists corruption at Armenian Universities was not disputable: all the students participating in the focus group discussions agreed that corruption is there just the occurrences and the techniques used differ from one university to another. Student considered that corruption at universities mainly prevails during the admission exams, mid-term and final exams. Besides, sometimes students pay for their absentees which mainly occurs when they are absent during the courses and are not able to pass the exams. And as a way to better outcomes and less corruption they brought some examples; "through the lessons on corruption, raise the public awareness about the phenomenon of corruption as in most cases people don't know which one is corrupt and which one not a corrupt behavior." In terms of time period for the possible changes to occur a student from YSU remembered a story:

*"Recently a rather weird incident happened, when a group of people from "Miasin" NGO glue on the walls of sever public places within Yerevan the pictures of those lecturers who were considered corrupt. And what was the result? Some of them were withdrawn from the universities, but after some time others continued their corrupt practices, only their tactics became different".*

Students considered the latter case to have a temporal impact on the system to function fairly, as after several months the same situation came back. They even didn't believe that the

real target for this incident was to stop corruption; rather it was considered to be organized for leaving rooms for others to enter.

A girl from YSLU who was coming from a marz told that while in bus on her way to the University she is used to hear such phrases as “again exams came, we have to collect money”. She was speaking in such an exhausted way that it seems to happen continuously. Another girl from the same university who had relatives in Georgia told that she was astonished with the success of Georgia in terms of fighting corruption and that Armenia is instead of going forth goes back.

To the question “How do you feel about the possible changes in the level of corruption in education in Armenia? What do you think how it can happen and when?” students considered the changes to start from bottom to up: “it starts from every individual who lives in this country.” Although they also considered the fact that in the sector of education students receive knowledge but the lecturers earn their livings as well and if they are not satisfied with the amount of the salary and cannot afford living they have to go against the rules. All the students were consistent in their responses that among the major incitement that makes the lecturers to take such illegal and immoral measures is their social economic conditions. Some of the students at YSLU also considered that because most of their lecturers are private tutors teaching many students at home, they already have other sources of money and are exempt from any other type of incidental income.

Most of the respondents also highlighted the fact that corruption takes a systematic nature in our country and in order to stop it education is the right place to start with.

*“Even if various mechanisms are formally designed to combat corruption at Armenian Universities it is of systemic nature and we are powerless unless the system entirely will change.”(a female student from YSU, 20 years old)*

To the question “What do you think is the existence of corruption in education in Armenia tolerated by the students?” all of the students participating said there is toleration among the students for the existence of corruption, because otherwise no one could ever force them to do so. It seems they do not care whether someone bribes the lecturer or not. And, moreover, if there are lecturers who insist on giving money they are giving because otherwise students believe they will not get diplomas. They consider toleration to be rooted still from the childhood. This view point was more pessimistic, they considered in Armenia sometimes civil anger on the issue of corruption is self motivated and they regard not the exact phenomenon but the fact that now someone has a greater portion of wealth than they.

To the question “What do you think does the corrupt system of education have any impact on the motivation of the students to study” students mostly argued that corruption generates lack of competition which latter causes lack of motivation among the students. Consequently a lack of trust is generated among them towards both the overall system and the government; they lose their belief for the probable future achievements. Some of the students believed that this may even later increase the rate of emigration. In order not to get there we should start from ourselves, try to change our mentalities. A student from ASPU noted that they study well the courses of those lecturers who do not insist on paying before the exams. Thus, according to their answers there is a negative relationship between the quality of education and the level of corruption, in other words widespread corruption breaks the link between personal effort and anticipation of reward in the educational sector.

Students from Armenian State Pedagogical University told some interesting stories concerning corrupt behavior of their lecturers: there were some cases when the professor entering the classroom said: “*Students are you “ready” for the exam?*” - ‘ready’ in this sentence has a connotational meaning referring to the students’ financial readiness not whether they have prepared for the exam properly. Those students blamed the system instead

of trying to find some ways to combat the abuse of power saying: *“if the system is corrupt what we can do.”*

To assess the level of the students’ awareness of any international organizations or NGOs that are currently engaged in the process of fighting corruption in higher educational system, at the end of the questionnaire there was also included a knowledge question; 7 out of 17 participators in FG discussions knew about at least 2 NGOs that are engaged in this process.

Whereas there was an interesting answer to the question “What do you think about the ability of the RA government to combat corruption? Could you, please, note some particular steps that you have heard of so far?” no one was aware of any steps taken by the Government:

*“Even if the Government of the RA does anything Government’s measures go hand in hand with the demands of the international community. In other words, if the international community didn’t insist on the creation of such anti-corruption mechanisms that comply with the international standards and norms, the government of Armenia would have never done it on its own.”* It is worth to mention that no one knew about the initiatives of the government of the RA.

## **Answering the RQs**

**RQ1:** What mechanisms are currently used by the RA to combat corruption in higher educational system?

As noted above, the initial stage of combating corruption in public sector started from the Anti-corruption Strategy and its Implementation Action plan for 2003-2008, which although improved the legislation, failed on its implementation stage. Armenia is a member of GRECO since 2004 (Council of Europe anti corruption body). It has signed and ratified the Council of Europe Criminal Law Convention on Corruption and Civil Law Convention on Corruption in 2004. Since 2004 the Anti-Corruption Council and its Monitoring Commission coordinate the implementation of anti-corruption Strategy of the RA. Armenia signed and ratified United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) in 2006. Currently, the Anti Corruption Strategy and Implementation Action Plan for 2009-2012 is in process trying to ensure Armenia's compliance with the international frameworks: GRECO, OCED etc. In 2011 the Law on Civil Service was adopted, which aimed to make the subject of this law not only the civil servants but also higher public officials.

Even though the government of Armenia has initiated a number of mechanisms – Anti Corruption Strategy and Implementation Action Plan for 2009-2012, cooperation with both international and regional bodies, the promotion of the local NGOs and others, the phenomenon of corruption is still a major problem for Armenia.

**RQ 2:** What are the perceptions of students on Corruption in the Armenian Higher Education System?

According to the results of focus group discussions the government is the prior source of corruption. Students perceived that the government's measures on the issue of corruption go hand in hand with the insisting obligations of the international community "the government of the Republic of Armenia will not take such measures as the latter will go in contrast with the financial gain via illegal means it will have." Thus, students perceived that there is a lack of political will to combat corruption. Moreover, such factors as the social- economic hardships that hinder the professors from the legal path, and tolerance towards corruption within the society and national mentality, still foster the occurrences of such practices in Armenian higher educational system.

Most of the students from focus group discussions considered that corruption at university level is of systemic nature inherent to the imperfection of the education system and that it is an unpunished practice in Armenia.

**RQ3:** What role does civil society have in the process of fighting corruption in higher educational sector of Armenia?

According to the representatives of the FIY NGO among the chief initiatives of the organization is to implement wide range of educational, informative and cultural projects in Yerevan and in regions of Armenia on developing legal consciousness of the youth, enhancing democratic principles within the country, protecting human rights and developing anticorruption education etc. Among the chief achievements of the NGO was the publication of the guidebook "Anticorruption Training Courses and Event Organization" which represents all the activities carried out in 2009-2011 for fighting corruption. The latter is composed of four parts; the first part is about the existing anticorruption positions at

vocational and higher education institutions, the second part represents the theoretical materials on corruption and its prevention methods, in the third part are thematic lesson samples.

And, finally, the hypothesis of the study was supported as albeit the existing mechanisms of the government to combat corruption there is no visible improvements in corruption related perceptions, moreover, there are some trends of growing disappointment and detachment.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, throughout the thorough examination of the peculiarities of corruption in higher education in Armenia, its forms and behavior, different ways of the government of RA to combat corruption, and the role of the civil society engaged in this process and the perceptions of the students on corruption the following points are to be highlighted:

- De jure there are solid frameworks to combat corruption in higher education in Armenia, de facto corruption still exists. Sometimes even the most rigorous laws and regulations and effectively run institutions may not be enough to prevent corruption. Thus, besides the declarative political will on the national and institutional levels, there is a need for transposition of that will into a reality.

- In Armenian reality there exist the following types of corrupt behavior which were stated by Chapman and were endorsed by the students participating in the focus group discussions conducted within the framework of study: blatantly illegal acts of bribery or fraud, actions taken to secure a modest income by people paid too little or too late, the differences in cultural perspective – giving gifts etc. and the incompetence of key actors or the inadequacies of the infrastructure they work in.

- Among the students corruption in education is perceived as a systemic and unpunished phenomenon

- Civil society is known to the students as an anti-corruption “actor”, while the government is not.

- Social conditions of the lecturers is positively related to the frequency of corrupt behavior within universities

- Corruption in universities distorts the motivation of the students to study, because it creates an uncompetitive environment

- Corruption in higher education and elsewhere in public services in Armenia will not be hard to tackle if any of the three social actors- the public at large, the government and the civil society, were in a strong position to initiate change and steer the country towards corruption-free environment.

- The mere belief that success may only be if children believes that personal effort and merit do not count and that success can be granted only via manipulation, favoritism and bribery is a value that is highly destructive to social and economic development of a country.

## POLICY RECCOMENDATIONS

- Considering the fact that Student Councils are the main engines within Universities that can foster the rights of the students raising their voices to the authorities and that they are engaged in different activities and events it is essential to emphasize the role of Student Council in fighting corruption in higher education. For instance during the conversation with an activist of FIY NGO, she said they are working with the Student Councils of each university for fighting corruption. And each of them is considered to involve the most active students. It would have been more efficient and would generate a productive outcome if there was a student council website, which can be accessed by all students. This website may incorporate in itself the official representation of each Student Council from different Universities. News and events would be frequently updated and the students would be able to see what is going on in the university they study at the same time having the opportunity to see what is going in other universities; what policies are put on the agenda etc. The latter would further generate trust and promote transparency.

- Among the major factors that facilitate corruption at national level is the corruption in government which as a consequence contributes to the corruption in the infrastructure. The government should generate trust among its citizens on its accountability and transparency for them not to believe that the only engine forcing the government to fight against corrupt practices are the international organizations. This generates lack of trust between the students and the government which may guarantee that the positive outcomes are at stake because this process needs *a two-fold willingness and active participation*- the government and the students. Students should stand their rights pondering about the future generation and the development of the country they are going to live and strive together with their families. Thus in the implementation of any strategy to combat corruption in the sector of education the presence and active participation of students is highly recommended.

- Fostering attitudes that do not tolerate corruption should be one of the priority tasks of education. Thus, it is highly recommended that attitudinal surveys be conducted among the students at annual bases to get understanding of what public at large thinks about the phenomenon of corruption and its occurrences.

- All the professors should be evaluated periodically by the students through a questionnaire (incorporating in the questionnaire the point of corrupt behavior of the lecturer) and the results of the evaluation are to be shared with both the faculty and the students to guarantee the transparency and generate trust among the students and lecturers.

- In order to take measures against corruption and minimize its risks in the sector of education at all levels a more deliberative attention is needed to be taken in the areas of both planning and management controlling all the observed malpractices, maximum taking off the involvement of human factor during the exams: make the letter take place via technologies- computerization of exams.

- Both external (about the environment in which the system operates) and internal factors (that deal with the decision-makers and administrators) promoting the development of corrupt practices in the system of education are to be taken into consideration simultaneously when designing comprehensive strategies to improve transparency and accountability in education.

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## APPENDIX

### FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

1. How do you feel about the level of corruption in education at Armenian Universities?  
What could you tell about this as a current student?
2. How do you feel about the possible changes in the level of corruption in education in Armenia? What do you think how can this happen and when?
3. What would you tell about the Bologna program that was implemented in the higher system of education? What can you say about its role in tackling corruption in higher education in Armenia
4. What do you think is the existence of corruption in education in Armenia tolerated by the students? Could you please tell some stories concerning the issue of tolerance?
5. What do you think does the corrupt system of education have any impact on the motivation of the students to study? How do you feel about its impact on the system as a whole and on the upcoming generation?
6. What do you think about the ability of the RA government to combat corruption?  
Could you, please, note some particular steps that you have heard of so far?
7. How do you feel about the cases when the students are forced to give money in order to pass an exam? Please, tell some stories connected with those cases if you have come up with during you study.

8. What do you think who is to blame it on that there exists corruption in the system of education in Armenia? Please, name the exact actors.

9. What are the exact steps that you could recommend for the government to take in order to combat corruption in the system of education in Armenia?

*And a separate knowledge question on a sheet of paper that was distributed at the end and they just wrote the answers on it.*

10. What international organizations do you know or local/ international NGOs that are currently engaged in the reduction of corruption in the system of education in Armenia? Please, bring examples and tell from where did you get the information?