

**Debating Eastern Partnership:
A comparison of perspectives and expectations
Report on Armenia**

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Executive Summary

As a global player, the EU promotes its standards, values, and interests through the use of various instruments, ranging from the Common Foreign and Security Policy, assistance and trade, to the external dimension of the EU's internal policies. In particular, the EU strives to promote prosperity, solidarity, security, and sustainable development worldwide.

A combination of country-specific, regional, and global strategic objectives shape the EU's approach to cooperation with Armenia. Early on, the EU and Armenia committed themselves to friendship in the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, which came into force in 1999.

The next stage was the 2004 inclusion of Armenia in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The ENP was designed to prevent the emergence of new dividing lines in Europe by offering neighbouring countries closer political, security, economic, and cultural cooperation. However, Armenia's implementation of the ENP Action Plan revealed certain problems. The main one concerned the focus on formal, institutional changes, which did not necessarily result in real improvement of people's daily life. During this stage the EU received criticism from Armenian's opposition groups as well as civil society for being insufficiently consistent in promoting reforms in the country. The level of accountability for both the European Commission and the Armenian government regarding the formation of an agenda and implementation of the program remained very low throughout the six years that have followed the commencement of the ENP.

The 2009 launch of the Eastern Partnership (EaP), an ambitious initiative for six post-Soviet countries, not only contributed to the overall strengthening of EU-Armenian relations through the perspective of an Association Agreement and a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, but it also envisaged correction of the shortcomings of the ENP. Inclusion of parliamentary and civil society forums in the EaP promises better public awareness concerning the details of the program – and thus, improved regard for the public interest.

Nonetheless, there is still uncertainty as to the priorities of EaP, as well as controversy in the perceptions of the initiative both in the partner countries and in the EU itself. This fact raises the concerns of those who expected the EaP would significantly foster the processes of de-

mocratization in the EU's Eastern neighbourhood, at the same time as it stifles interest in the new initiative within the societies of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

Despite the existing problems, one of the obvious achievements of the EaP is the Civil Society Forum (CSF), which was established as an institutional component of the initiative and is now spreading to the national levels of the partner countries. The CSF promises to become a motor for effectively advancing the Eastern Partnership's democratization agenda, for surmounting public distrust, and cultivating hope for an optimistic scenario of EaP's development.

1. Introduction

This report describes the history of EU-Armenian relations, and analyzes Armenia's priorities within the frameworks of various initiatives, especially the Eastern Partnership. It presents perceptions of the EU and EaP in Armenia, and not only at the governmental level, but also on the part of the opposition, civil society, the media, and the general public.

This report provides an assessment of the progress achieved by Armenia through the implementation of joint programs with the EU, comparing EU documents with alternative opinions. Such analyses permit an assessment of the efficiency of the policies initiated by the EU.

A separate section of this report is dedicated to the involvement of Armenian civil society in the Eastern Partnership. The role of the Civil Society Forum and its National Platforms is assessed, and the prospects for these new institutional partners (e.g., the possibilities for their productive interaction with other stakeholders) are analyzed.

This paper also offers a forecast regarding the future of the Eastern Partnership based in part on criticism of the current situation, along with recommendations that could help improve things and overcome shortcomings.

2. The current policy of Armenia as a partner-country towards the EU – priority areas in relations with the EU

Armenia and the EU first established contractual relations in 1996 through their Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, which entered into force in 1999. On May 1, 2004, the enlargement of the European Union took place with the accession of ten new Member States. This brought changes to the EU's political geography and offered new opportunities for deepening existing relations between the European Union and its neighbours to the east and to the south. On June 14, 2004, following a recommendation made by the Commission, the EU Council decided to offer Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia the opportunity to participate in the European Neighbourhood Policy. On this basis, the EU-Armenia ENP Action Plan was approved in November 2006 for a period of five years. The Country Strategy Paper for Armenia covers the period from 2007 to 2013. Assistance to Armenia over that period will principally be provided under the new European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). The prin-

cial objective of EU-Armenia cooperation at this stage is to develop an increasingly close relationship between the EU and Armenia, going beyond past levels of cooperation to a deepening of political cooperation accompanied by continued economic growth and continued results in reducing poverty.

EU assistance over the period covered by this strategy will help to achieve the above policy objectives. Under the National Indicative Program 2007–2013 this translates into priority support for three strategic categories:

The strengthening of the EU Delegation in Yerevan, established in 2008, has further facilitated the enhancement of EU-Armenian relations. Armenia welcomed the idea of establishing the EU Advisory Group to the Republic of Armenia, which started its activities in April 2009 with the aim of supporting the Armenian authorities in the implementation of the key areas of the ENP Action Plan. This included strengthening democratic structures and human rights, anticorruption measures, trade and customs, and fiscal policy including debt management. Armenia also expressed its readiness to start an EU-Armenia Human Rights Dialogue, and the first such meeting took place in December 2009.

The Armenian authorities and civil society representatives have actively participated in the multilateral framework of the Eastern Partnership launched at the Prague Summit of May 7, 2009. This participation manifested itself through open dialogue and contribution to the working programs of the four thematic platforms. Together with the bilateral elements of the Eastern Partnership, this contributed to the overall strengthening of EU-Armenian relations and reinforcement of the follow-up on the priorities of the ENP Action Plan.

On May 10 the EU Council discussed an annotated draft agenda for a European Council meeting to be held on June 17, 2010, and approved mandates for the negotiation of association agreements with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia aimed at upgrading relations with those three countries. Finally, the negotiations between Armenia and the EU on an Association Agreement started on July 15, 2010.

In July 2003, the EU Council appointed the first EU Special Representative (EUSR) for the South Caucasus. Armenia welcomed his appointment. The mandate of the EUSR is to assist the Council in developing a comprehensive policy towards the South Caucasus, to contribute

to conflict prevention, and assist in the cessation of conflict in the region. The diplomats occupying that position visit Armenia regularly and pay particular attention to the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Armenia has demonstrated its deep interest and enthusiasm in all the above mentioned stages of relations with the EU. At the same time, in a few instances Yerevan and Brussels have had certain problems in achieving full understanding and consensus.

The issue of the *Metzamor* Nuclear Power Plant (MNPP) has been an important item on the EU-Armenian agenda for a number of years. Early closure of MNPP was identified as a key EU objective, in line with its general policy towards such first-generation Soviet-built plants. In 2001 the EU offered to organize a donors' conference to create a fund to finance alternative energy production and to contribute up to €100 million if a binding agreement could be concluded on a closure date for *Metzamor*. To date no agreement has been found within EU-Armenian dialogue. Armenia has pointed out to the EU that energy production capacity must take account of the future expected energy needs of Armenia, the need to strengthen energy security, and the need to offset the impact of the closure of MNPP on electricity tariffs. The EU has indicated that it will take this position into account in considering Armenia's access to the benefits opened up by its inclusion in the ENP. In October 2009 Armenia adopted a law on constructing a new nuclear power plant. A tender to select the plant's constructor is under preparation. Armenia plans to close the MNPP by 2016 and is prepared to close the plant before the design lifetime, provided that alternative capacity is available. Armenia has continued to build up the Nuclear Decommissioning Fund and to explore, jointly with the Russian Federation, uranium reserves. This issue remains the subject of EU concerns.

Another issue where potential controversies between Yerevan and Brussels should be considered is that of Armenia's relations with two of its neighbours: Azerbaijan and Turkey. Armenians appreciate the stance of the European Parliament towards the genocide of 1915 in the Ottoman Empire, and especially the resolution of 1987 recognizing this historic fact. The statement by the spokesperson of the High Representative, Catherine Ashton, on the normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia of April 6, 2010 was positively received in Armenia. However, Armenians expressed certain disappointment with the fact that overcom-

ing certain historic problems and the opening of Turkish-Armenian borders were not set by the EU as preconditions for accession talks with Turkey.

Armenia displayed a quite negative reaction to the adoption by the European Parliament on May 20, 2010, of a Resolution on “The Need for an EU Strategy for the South Caucasus”. On May 21 the President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia Hovik Abrahamyan sent a letter to the President of the European Parliament Jerzy Buzek, wherein he expressed his concerns. In particular, they referred to the “wording that runs contrary to the negotiation process on peaceful settlement of the conflict, and to the position of the OSCE and EU concerning Nagorno-Karabakh”. The controversies regarding Nagorno-Karabakh also emerged in the preparatory stage of EURONEST, the Parliamentary format of EaP.

3. The approach to the EU – Armenia’s political opposition and Armenian society

There is consensus among the major political forces in Armenia regarding the need of upgrading relations with the European Union. None of them, however, has openly presented a strategy for joining the EU in the future. Nonetheless, there is controversy on whether the European Union should exert pressure on behalf of democratic reforms in Armenia, as well as on the efficiency of EU structures in promoting such reforms.

Several times the Armenian opposition has expressed its disappointment over the inconsistency of EU institutions in their assessment of the political situation in Armenia. This disappointment sharply worsened after the presidential elections of 2008 and the tragic events of May 1-2, when the EU was expected to take a more critical stance towards the Armenian authorities. The oppositional Armenian National Congress (ANC) continuously criticises European institutions for being insufficiently demanding on the issue of political prisoners. The ANC insists that the EU should impose preconditions before offering Armenia the opportunity to join new programs and providing aid to the country.

During the visit to Armenia on March 2, 2010 of the European Union Ministerial Delegation (Troika), headed by the Foreign Minister of Spain Miguel Angel Moratinos, the leader of the ANC Levon Ter-Petrosyan passed him a letter addressed to the Spanish Presidency in EU,

and another to the High Representative of the EU for foreign affairs and security policy, Catherine Ashton. In those letters he raised the issue of political prisoners. On March 10, the European Union issued a statement on the situation in Armenia, wherein it demanded a solution of the problem of political prisoners. The response of Catherine Ashton to Levon Ter-Petrosyan was received on May 6, and thus did the ANC learn about the March 10 statement. The ANC welcomed the positions of the EU and its high-ranking officials on the issue. However, they requested explanations as to why the EU delegation in Yerevan did not distribute the document in a timely fashion.

Some local civic groups also believe that EU involvement in building democracy in Armenia has been insufficient. Therefore they are cautious in their positive expectations regarding the new EU initiatives such as Eastern Partnership. In the opinion of watchdog organizations the EaP will reflect positively on democratic changes in Armenia only if the European structures place very serious demands before the authorities.

Many in Armenia think that the litmus test of the EU's efficiency will be the upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections in 2012 and 2013. As stated by the EU delegation in Yerevan, assistance will be provided for the improvement of the electoral code and for training the members of the election commissions. However, Armenian opposition groups and civil society representatives believe that such programs in Armenia will not address the root causes of the country's increasingly entrenched culture of electoral fraud. They say that the problem is not so much in flawed legislation, but in practice. Thus, they believe that even if members of an election commission know electoral legislation perfectly, if they get an order from above to turn a blind eye to fraud, they will duly comply.

The common perception is that US officials have been more vocal (at least in public) in criticizing the Armenian government's 2008 post-election crackdown on the opposition that involved the use of deadly force and mass arrests. The dominant sense among local opposition and civic groups is that EU pressure on the Armenian authorities has so far been too weak to generate any meaningful democratic change. They regard as practically fruitless Armenia's participation in the European Neighbourhood Policy.

In a recent assessment report, the European Commission determined that Yerevan has made “progress in several areas” of an ENP Action Plan aimed at bringing the country’s political and economic systems into greater conformity with European standards. Watchdog organizations are quite disappointed with this, as well as with previous reports insisting that the EC’s definitions in most cases are too soft. One of the most important complaints towards the ENP is that it has been too focused on institutional or formal reforms such as the adoption of laws and structural improvements, although that thrust is only a partial solution. If people see no serious changes in their relationships with state institutions and in their lives in general, then those formal changes become not only meaningless, but could also be harmful, as they discredit the very idea of reforms. There is no serious “institutionalized” resistance to pro-European politics in Armenia, nor is there a generation-specific attitude. However euro-scepticism and ignorance about EU policies is present in public opinion and perception. According to a survey conducted in Yerevan by the Armenian-European Policy and Legal Advice Center (AEPLAC) in October 2009, the idea of European integration enjoys broad public support overall. Respondents are also strongly convinced that Armenia will benefit from EU-Armenian cooperation. An overwhelming majority of Yerevan residents (86.3%) think Armenia should integrate with the European Union. The level of trust that citizens have in European institutions is rather high (43% vs. 33% of those who tend not to trust); moreover, it is 2.5 times higher than the trust placed in national institutions.

Against this background of positive attitudes, there are however concerns among people in Yerevan regarding Armenia's European integration. This especially pertains to the possible loss of cultural identity and to overvalued religious and sexual minority rights, something mentioned by 21% and 12% of respondents, respectively. It is worth noting that such concerns exist among both the older and younger generations.

Another conclusion drawn from the survey is that further effort is needed to enhance public awareness of European integration. Every eleventh respondent (9%) mentioned the name of one or more EU institutions, 13.4% of respondents have heard about the Eastern Partnership, and about one-fourth of respondents claim to have heard of the European Neighbourhood Policy (25.9%). When asked five “quiz questions” on their knowledge of the European Union, 67.3% of respondents gave at least one correct answer, yet only 0.8% gave correct answers to all five questions.

4. The perception of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) – the most important advantages and shortcomings of the EaP

The perception of Eastern Partnership in Armenia could be characterized as “positive uncertainty”. At almost all levels it has received positive feedback: however, its priorities have been understood differently. The proportions of enthusiasm and scepticism are also different. Nor are the incentives for joining this EU initiative the same.

The government is interested in cooperation with the EU in general, and with the EaP in particular, for three main reasons: 1) the geopolitical situation of Armenia is highly complex (land-locked country, closed borders to the west with Turkey and to the east with Azerbaijan), and this compels its foreign policy to be based on the pursuit of “multidirectional complementarity”, whereby the country seeks to maintain strong relations with relevant partners like the EU, Russia, and the US; 2) having limited possibilities to attract investments, Armenia has to appreciate any and all international financial aid, and amounts provided by EU mean quite a lot for economic and financial stability (re: the national currency). In 2007-2010 the ENP envelope for Armenia stands at €98.4 million. An Indicative ENPI envelope for 2011–2013, as announced by the Commission, will be €157.3 million. About €40 million more are available through other EU programs; 3) for the government the main and the most important component of the EaP is the EU-Armenia Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). In fact, the DCFTA does not add much advantage in comparison with the EU Generalized System of Preferences Plus (GSP+), which Armenian already enjoys. However GSP+ is envisaged for 2009–2011 only, while DCFTA will provide longer-lasting stability in trade relations with EU.

Thus, for the government the “added value” of the EaP *vis-à-vis* the ENP is, first of all, that it upgrades the level of cooperation with the EU through the Association Agreement; secondly, it opens new opportunities for receiving EU funding; and, thirdly, it allows Armenia to ease the burden of relative economic isolation.

Within Armenia’s expert community there is an extensive debate regarding the goals and perspectives of the EaP. The two dominant concepts are: 1) the EaP is just a slightly modified version of the ENP, the EU is not ready to offer a strong political component in its content,

and thus the “purely” economic expectations of the government are fully relevant; 2) the EaP is a chance to foster real democratic reforms, and the political component of the new initiative should be prioritized.

To a certain extent these differences in the perception of the Eastern Partnership stem from controversial statements made by EU officials themselves.

In the report to the European Parliament on his April visit to Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, the Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle stressed: “In Armenia I urged all political leaders to advance political reforms, to improve electoral standards, and to speed up the process of addressing some of the political issues emanating from the post-presidential elections of March 2008 allowing for national reconciliation and thus unblocking the full potential of society”.

On the other hand, the President of the European Commission José Barroso in his statement following his meeting with the President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan in Brussels on May 26, 2010, made quite a different message. He mentioned various aspects EU-Armenia relations, but not once did he use such words as “democracy”, “elections”, or “human rights”.

The experts and civil society groups who are expecting a new approach from the EaP are analyzing the possibility for improving EU-Armenian relations. And since it is not quite clear just what new procedures might be envisaged within the EaP, their analyses are focused mainly on the shortcomings of the ENP that require improvement. These include the following matters:

- The Action Plan is not viewed as a binding document either by the European Commission or by the Armenian government. It is viewed as a “whatever the government decides to pick, and however thoroughly it decides to implement it” paper;
- The Action Plan, being a political document, is not and cannot be a real plan of action inasmuch as such a plan must be concrete, timed, and have benchmarks to measure progress and deliverables to be evaluated in mid-term progress reports;
- A workable plan of action, called the Implementation Tools (IT), is perhaps even less concrete in Armenia’s case, as the AP does not provide a timeline, benchmarks and/or deliverables;

- These ITs are developed unilaterally within the Commission (or are said to be a commission non-paper), and as such are not open documents for the public. The Armenian government publishes its own yearly programs based on the ITs. These documents contain all the problems mentioned above;
- Mid-term (annual) assessments of the ENP's progress are purely technical and do not provide for any reflection on the impact of the "actions" undertaken, but simply and mechanically compare the "action" to a vague and general line in the AP or IT. There is no mechanism and/or intention from the Commission to place the "actions" into Armenia's context (which might have dramatically changed) and assess the result in a somewhat wider context than the pure "comparison of lines". The above flaws make assessment largely meaningless, as it does not provide insight and guidance for thorough and expedient reform, and it does not ensure real compliance and thus cannot measure how well and effective the EU taxpayers' money was spent;
- Funding is "dumped" into the country's budget as direct budgetary assistance, which fact makes it impossible to monitor. The funding comes with a general descriptive document with a few singled-out concrete "actions" in the AP. The rest of the AP is viewed as secondary or even unnecessary for implementation since there is no funding from the EU and the approach of the government is "we act if we want to".

5. Government engagement in EaP activities

The first elections to appoint the Mayor and Council of Elders of the City of Yerevan were held in May 2009. This was to comply with the commitments of Armenia to the Council of Europe. International observers concluded that while the organizational framework of the elections had been broadly in line with European standards, the improvement of the electoral process and the fostering of a genuinely democratic culture remained unaddressed by the authorities. Irregularities during the conduct of the elections occurred, including pre-election violence, instances of ballot stuffing, multiple voting, and voter intimidation.

The authorities took a number of steps to address the political crisis linked to the 2008 presidential elections and the subsequent violent events of March 2008. An amnesty was adopted by the National Assembly in June 2009, which impacted a large majority of cases related to the March 2008 events, but ten persons detained on charges linked to those events still remain in detention, some of them being considered political prisoners. The monitoring of trials re-

lated to the March 2008 events identified various shortcomings regarding the right to a fair trial and the right to liberty, including excessive use of pre-trial detention, the lack of impartiality and independence of judges, the use of incriminating police testimonies and of unlawfully obtained evidence, and the holding of a number of trials in absentia. The investigations into the ten deaths have yet to lead to any indictments.

An Anti-Corruption Strategy and its action plan for 2009–2012, which includes the establishment of a monitoring and evaluation system, was adopted in October 2009. In September 2009, Armenia became a signatory to the OECD Astana Declaration on Good Governance and Fighting Corruption. However, despite a positive assessment by the EU of the legislative progress, no reduction of perceived corruption was reported by international surveys in 2009.

International organizations expended enormous effort on behalf of the independence of the Human Rights Defender (HRDO) within the political system, and strongly supported its role for the protection of human rights. However, the general impression of the initiatives, reports, and statements of the HRDO over the last year is that the HRDO has become more cautious and compromising than during the previous period.

Legislation was amended in the area of freedom of expression and the media. In April 2009 a package of laws was adopted to amend the statutes of the National Commission of the Television and Radio and Public Television and Radio Council. However, the composition and the means of appointing members of the broadcasting regulatory bodies still do not provide for their independence and impartiality. Following the 2008 moratorium on the issuing of radio and television licenses until July 2010, and using the excuse of the ongoing process of digitalization of TV and radio broadcasting, the Government released in November 2009 a Draft Concept on Switching to Digital Broadcasting, covering only a few technological and economic aspects of the digitalization process and completely undermining the issue of ensuring the diversity of content and ownership.

The Law on Rallies and Demonstrations still contains provisions allowing the authorities to broadly interpret the grounds for prohibiting public assembly. The applications to organize rallies submitted by the opposition are still being rejected by the authorities. Also numerous

cases were recorded of refusals to provide conference halls to the opposition and to watchdog NGOs, purportedly for political reasons.

The global economic downturn, and particularly the rapid deterioration of the Russian economy, had a deep impact on the Armenian economy in 2009. Economic activity, which had started to fall in the last quarter of 2008, contracted by around 15.4% in 2009. The official unemployment rate was estimated at 7.1% at the end of 2009. Young people and women continued to be particularly affected, with 20.7% and 70.7% respectively of official unemployment. EU exports to Armenia declined by 20.6%, while exports of Armenian products to the EU decreased by 49.3% in 2009. The EU is Armenia's main trading partner, with a 1/3 share in its overall external trade. The crisis also forced the Armenian government to temporarily suspend the Sustainable Development Program on poverty reduction. The introduction of the new pension system was postponed to 2011.

Since Armenia is isolated from regional projects on energy supply and energy security because of existing problems with its neighbours, its engagement in the third Thematic Platform of the EaP is focused on the issues of the Nuclear Power Plan. With regards to EU assistance in the area of Nuclear Safety, projects providing on-site assistance and supply of equipment to the MNPP worth €11 million are currently being implemented within the framework of the Instrument for Nuclear Safety Cooperation (INSC) Action Program. Two other projects aimed at improving the safety culture of the Armenian Nuclear Regulatory Authority for the overall sum of €2.3 million are still underway.

In the area of people-to-people contacts and youth exchange Armenia continued its active participation in the Erasmus Mundus scholarship program, as well as in Tempus IV. Thirteen Armenian students and one scholar were awarded scholarships for Erasmus Mundus. Masters Courses for the academic year 2009–10 under Erasmus Mundus Action 1 were important, while academic and student mobility was further facilitated under Erasmus Mundus Action 2 during the same period through the award of 35 mobility grants.

6. The response of civil society to the EaP

Armenian civil society is more determined towards the prospect of EU membership for Armenia than the government, political parties, or the general public. And it considers the EaP

as a viable opportunity for getting closer to the European Union. Civil society organizations wish to play an essential role with regard to fostering reforms aimed at democratization and a liberal market economy in the context of the Eastern Partnership.

The first EaP Civil Society Forum (CSF) conducted in Brussels on November 16–17, 2009 encouraged Armenian Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to formulate their institutional role in the Eastern Partnership, and in particular to ensure their participation in the oversight of public services and strengthen public confidence in them.

Twenty-one Armenian CSOs took part in the Civil Society Forum 2009 and contributed to the development of recommendations by the working groups formed according to the four thematic platforms of the EaP. Upon their return back home the Armenian delegates established an initiative group aimed at founding the CSF National Platform (NP). The mission of the Armenian NP was formulated as developing recommendations for the EaP Action Plans, ensuring compliance of the solutions offered for domestic issues to the EU standards, including all groups of society, and raising social awareness. The importance of holding governments accountable for the progress of reform is stressed.

The idea was properly promoted and widely supported by Armenian CSOs. Whereas only 50 organizations applied for participation in the CSF in 2009, the initiative group of the National Platform received more than 170 applications to join the NP. The founding meeting of the Armenian NP took place on June 7, 2010, and it appeared that Armenian CSOs were ahead of their colleagues in the five other EaP countries in the formation of their National Platform.

The NP Initiative group established contacts with the relevant governmental structures seeking cooperation and coordination of efforts with the other two formats of EU-Armenian relations – the governmental and the parliamentarian. The interest to cooperate was expressed during all meetings. At the same time the Armenian NP of the CSF also embraces organizations that are known as watchdogs, and they are planning to conduct thorough monitoring of reforms in Armenia in the context of the EaP, as they did during the previous five years.

7. The EaP in the future – prognoses

As described above, the approaches of the government, the opposition and Armenian civil society towards the Eastern Partnership are quite different. And the success of the policy in Armenia will depend on whether they all become partners or at least interested stakeholders. Civil society is expected to be the moving force in this process. Armenian NGOs made significant progress in identifying their mission and role in the EaP.

At the same time there are factors speaking both in favour of the EaP's success and against optimistic expectations. According to the assessment of the situation by watchdog organizations, the current state of human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, good governance and justice in Armenia is not conducive to deepening a relationship that is based on values.

Despite some negative developments in the past year, the upcoming years will breed opportunities for steady democratic development in Armenia. This is primarily due to the huge pressures the incumbent authorities are currently facing from within the country due to social-economic tensions – as well as from the international community. There is also an understanding that increased authoritarianism and “firm grip” policies are not well received by Armenian society and the general public.

Thus, the outcome for the EaP will strongly depend on how active, involved, and interested the general public will be in the nearest future. And the role of the media is extremely important here. Until recently the media remained quite indifferent towards the Eastern Partnership – and even to EU-Armenian relations at large. A brief survey of 15 leading Armenian newspapers conducted by the Yerevan Press Club in March and April 2010, revealed that only 91 publications in all reviewed media during those two months were dedicated to the EU (most of them brief news reports). Moreover, only 20 of those 91 mentioned the Eastern Partnership. Therefore, one cannot expect the public to be aware and interested in the EU initiative. On the other hand the start of negotiations on the Association Agreement, as well as raising the involvement of Armenian civil society in the EaP (especially the public nature of such involvement) will most probably result in an increase of media coverage and its quality. In this way

the Eastern Partnership has a chance to become one of the key issues in Armenia’s socio-political life, and this could promote an optimistic outcome.

8. Closing remarks

EU-Armenian relations have witnessed continuous progress during the last 15 years, and have achieved the Eastern Partnership stage. They enjoy official, political, and public support.

All players on Armenia’s socio-political scene have certain incentives and interests (though different and sometimes even contradictory) regarding the Eastern Partnership: this includes the government (both executive and legislative branches), the opposition, civil society, etc.

The EU and its representatives exhibit a very cautious and sometimes quite controversial approach towards the Eastern Partnership. This creates a measure of uncertainty and hence diverging interpretations and expectations of the goals of and prospects for the EaP.

At the same time, coordination of the efforts and the expectations surrounding the EaP among the main players in Armenia and their development of a mutually agreed agenda for the EaP may convince the EU to support such an agenda and be more engaged in bi-lateral relations. Armenian civil society should be the one who pushes for such a “national consensus” on the reform agenda and demand commitment and accountability on the part of the government.

References

In this report the author used official documents of the European Commission on Partnership and Cooperation Agreements, ENP, EaP, documents on EU-Armenian relations such as the Country Report, Action Plan, Country Progress Reports on Armenia, statements of EU officials on Armenia. Various materials on the Civil Society Forum were used for writing respective sections of this report.

The documents adopted in this connection with the EU by Armenian governmental structures served as a basis for presenting the Republic of Armenia's official positions on cooperation with the European Union.

Statements and reports on research conducted in the context of EU-Armenian relations by European and Armenian consultancy groups, think tanks and NGOs, as well as press-releases of political parties were the main sources for covering the diverse assessments, approaches, and perceptions existing in Armenia. A number of media publications allowed an enrichment of the content of some sections of the reports.

The general information regarding EU initiatives where Armenia is involved may be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/documents_en.htm. More specific data about the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership, statements of EU officials are available at; http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/eastern/index_en.htm; http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/index_en.htm http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/114367.pdf and in http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/enp/index_en.htm.

The information about specific programs implemented within the frameworks of EU-Armenian relations as well as their assessment can be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/armenia/index_en.htm; www.delarm.ec.europa.eu. Armenian approach towards its relations with the EU is reflected in the following website: www.president.am; www.mineconomy.am/en/ www.parliament.am.

Materials on civil society's involvement in the EaP are available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/eastern/civil_society/second_csfen.htm. For civil society's input into EU-Armenian relations, including initiatives, statements, and assessments, the following websites can be recommended: www.ypc.am (section "studies") and www.partnership.am