

Adopting Experience of Bilateral EU-Moldova and EU-Georgia Civil Society Platforms to Armenia

Report on Armenia



The project benefits from the support through the EaP CSF Re-granting Scheme. Within its Re-granting Scheme, the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) supports projects of the EaP CSF members with a regional dimension that contribute to achieving the mission and objectives of the Forum.

The donors of the Re-granting Scheme are the European Union and National Endowment for Democracy.

The overall amount for the 2017 call for proposals is 290.000 EUR. Grants are available for CSOs from the Eastern Partnership and EU countries.

Key areas of support are democracy and human rights, economic integration, environment and energy, contacts between people, social and labour policies.

This report has been produced with the assistance of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of Eurasia Partnership Foundation, Foundation Liberal Academy and Promo-LEX Association and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.

Authors

Mikayel Hovhannisyan (EPF Armenia)

Julya Sahakyan (EPF Armenia)

Content

Project Summary.....	3
List of abbreviations	4
Armenia Executive Summary.....	6
Background.....	7
EU-Armenia sectoral cooperation and financial assistance.....	9
Civil Society.....	11
Recommendations.....	14

PROJECT SUMMARY

The aim of the project is to analyze the experience and current situation in the EU-Georgia and the EU-Moldova bilateral civil society platforms and developing recommendations for the decision makers on both making changes and improvements in these platforms as well as using their experience in forming of similar platform between Armenia and the EU. Three organizations from Armenia (Eurasia Partnership Foundation), Georgia (Foundation Liberal Academy) and Moldova (Promo-LEX Association) jointly examined the existing experience, used the expertise of Armenian, Georgian and Moldovan civil society organizations, meet with respective stakeholders in all three countries and the EU, developed recommendations for all three countries, as well as presented and advocated these recommendations to the decision makers.

The project consists of series of meetings and interviews with the representatives of national authorities, civil society actors, as well as representatives of the EU Delegations to develop country reports and recommendations addressed to Armenian, Georgian and Moldovan governments and the EU.

As a result of the project consolidated report and set of recommendations covering three countries were developed as a civil society input to the institutionalization of the bi-lateral relations between the three EaP countries and the EU.

List of abbreviations

AA-Association Agreement

ANP- Armenian National Platform

CEPA- Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement

CS-Civil Society

CSO- Civil Society Organization

CSP- Civil Society Platform

DCFTA- Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area

EAGGF- European Agricultural Guarantee and Guidance Fund

EaP CSF- Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

EaP- Eastern Partnership

EC- European Commission

ECHO- European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

EEU-Eurasian Economic Union

ENP- European Neighbourhood Policy

EU DEL- European Union Delegation

EU- European Union

GSP- Generalised Scheme of Preferences

HRD- Human Rights Dialogue

MDG-Millennium Development Goals

NGO- Non Governmental Organization

NP-National Platform

OGP-Open government Partnership

OSGF- Open Society Georgia Foundation

PCA- Partnership and Cooperation Agreement

SCC-State Constitutional Commission

TACIS-Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States

TAIEX- Technical Assistance and Information Exchange

UNDP-United Nations Development Program

UN-United Nations

USSR- Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

WTO- World Trade Organization

Armenia

Executive Summary

Relations with the EC, EU and other European institutions have been of extreme importance for Armenia ever since its independence. Both politically and economically, Armenia has always been searching for a multipolar foreign policy, which is natural for a landlocked country that has closed borders with two out of four of its direct neighbours. In this respect, integration and cooperation with Europe was also important from the point of view of the cultural and systemic transition that many post-Soviet countries have declared after gaining independence. Thus, relations between Armenia and the European Union are perceived in Armenia not only within the context of international relations, but also from the point of view of internal institutional development in the country.

The importance of EU-Armenia cooperation is also crucial for Armenian civil society for several reasons. The financial and political support of the EU to Armenian CSOs and other civil society actors has a strong positive effect on the level of their involvement in the key processes taking place in the country. Moreover, thanks to the support of the international community and the EU in particular, civil society plays multiple roles in this process, such as monitoring the activities implemented by the authorities, civic education, protection of human rights, etc. The existence of a framework agreement such as the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) and involvement of Armenia in EU-supported regional initiatives such as the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and Eastern Partnership (EaP) has allowed Armenian civil society to interact with the authorities not only directly through particular reforms and programmes, but also through the EU, using the latter as a mediator or facilitator in case of the most problematic and confrontational issues, such as elections, violations of human rights, etc.

The role civil society plays in EU-Armenia relations is also important in terms of providing opinions, expertise and evaluations alternative to the official ones. This allows the European Union to tailor its support to Armenia to the real needs of the country and address priorities more properly.

It should be mentioned though that the involvement of civil society in EU-Armenia relations is lacking stability and institutional structure and there is significant room for improvement in that respect. All three parties—the EU, Armenian authorities and civil society entities—should make additional efforts to improve the quality of cooperation, since it will allow the potential of the relations to be used more effectively.

Background

The chronology of EU-Armenia relations started immediately after Armenia's independence and has included several milestones that brightly illustrate the growing potential of bilateral cooperation.

Since 1991, the EC has supported Armenia through various programs, such as ECHO and Food Aid Operations through the European Agricultural Guarantee and Guidance Fund (EAGGF), as well as the TACIS programme that was aimed at contributing to the transition towards a market economy, notably through assistance in the fields of legal and regulatory reform, approximation of Armenian legislation to that of the EU and support for Armenia's WTO accession. TACIS has also contributed to Armenia's economic recovery through support to the private sector and small and medium enterprises. The Agricultural Cooperative Bank, funded through TACIS and the EAGGF food aid counterpart funds, has been highly rated and has contributed to improvements in agricultural production. TACIS has also supported Nuclear Safety.¹

The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement² (PCA) between the EU and Armenia was concluded in 1996 and entered into force in 1999. The PCA was the first framework agreement between the two parties that regulated multiple aspects and sectors of bilateral relations, such as political dialogue, promoting development of democratic institutions and economic development, as well as social, financial, cultural cooperation between Armenia and the EU and its member states.

In 2004, Armenia joined the ENP, which was established to share the EU values of security, stability and prosperity with EU neighbours. This framework of the ENP offered close political, security, economic and cultural cooperation. The ENP Action Plan of Armenia was adopted in 2006 and envisaged a wider framework of close cooperation with the EU.

With the launch of the Eastern Partnership, Armenia together with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine negotiated an Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with the EU, which was supposed to be signed in fall 2013. However, on 3 September 2013, Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan unexpectedly announced the decision to join the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union, which made the signing of the AA and DCFTA impossible.³

The 3 September U-turn was shocking for both EU officials and a significant part of Armenian society, including many people involved in the establishment and development of the AA/DCFTA negotiations. However, the natural demand of the situation was to develop a new format of

¹ http://www.partnership.am/res/General%20Publications_Eng/Armenia_cr_0503%5B1%5D.pdf

² https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eu-armenia_partnership_and_cooperation_agreement_en.pdf

³ European Commission, Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Armenia Progress in 2014 and recommendations for actions, 2014 http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/enp/pdf/2015/armenia-enp-report-2015_en.pdf retrieved 13 October 2017

relations, since the PCA was already outdated and there was a need to replace the AA with a new framework agreement that would regulate bilateral relations.

After around 2 years of reflection, the EU and Armenia announced the launch of negotiations over a new agreement, the so-called “AA-minus” that would contain all the provisions of the already negotiated Association Agreement excluding those components that conflicted with the new obligations of Armenia in light of its membership in the EEU. These components mainly related to customs and trade relations, since Armenia had granted that authority to the supranational EEU.

In parallel with the negotiations over a new framework agreement, the EU-Armenia Partnership Priorities were also discussed and were aimed at setting the agenda of EU assistance to Armenia in 2017-2020 through a single support framework. The Recommendation of the EU-Armenia Cooperation Council on the EU-Armenia Partnership Priorities⁴ published in October 2017 outlines 4 major areas prioritised by the parties:

1. Strengthening institutions and good governance
2. Economic development and market opportunities
3. Connectivity, energy efficiency, environment and climate action
4. Mobility and people-to-people contacts

The indicative amount allocated for the implementation of the priorities for the 2017-2020 period is €144 million-176 million.

Negotiations on the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA)⁵ were successfully concluded on 26 February 2017 and signed in November 2017 during the EaP Summit in Brussels. The new document is based on the previously negotiated Association Agreement; however, it excludes provisions that conflict with Armenia’s obligations in the Eurasian Economic Union, which mainly relate to the customs sector. The CEPA envisages cooperation in a wide variety of sectors including democratic reforms, cooperation in the energy sector, security, economy, etc. Similar to the Agreements signed with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, the CEPA envisions the creation of a bilateral civil society platform (Article 366) that will involve civil society actors from both sides in order to “keep them informed of, and gather their input for, the implementation of this Agreement.”⁶

⁴ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52017JC0024&from=EN>

⁵ <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-12525-2017-ADD-1/en/pdf>

⁶ Ibid, p. 337

EU-Armenia sectoral cooperation and financial assistance

As a part of the ENP and EaP, Armenia benefits from cooperation with the EU in a wide range of areas. The EU has been supporting justice sector reforms in Armenia since 2009. The EU-Armenia human rights dialogue was established in December 2009, takes place annually and serves as a platform for discussing human rights-related issues in Armenia and the EU.⁷ In 2014, the Human Rights Action Plan was adopted, which is an essential achievement in the sector. Nevertheless, the Action Plan does not cover many priority areas including the UN Convention against Torture (CAT).⁸

In 2011, the EU and Republic of Armenia signed the Mobility Partnership, which aims at the control and better management of migration flows between Armenia and EU, as well as the fight against illegal migrant flows and regulations for legal entry allowances for citizens of Armenia.⁹ Besides the migration policy, the partnership covers various fields of policy such external security, the labour market as well as development policy.¹⁰ In this context, the EU-Armenia Visa Facilitation Agreement was signed in 2012. The main purpose of the agreement was the facilitation of short-stay visa issuance for citizens of Armenia, the simplification of documentations for several categories of travellers to EU, reduction of fee and visa processing time.¹¹ In 2016, the Government of the Republic of Armenia officially initiated a visa liberalisation dialogue, but did not get a positive response.¹²

In the scope of economic cooperation with the EU, Armenia benefited from the EU Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) in 2006-2008, which meant that Armenia had preferential access to the EU market with zero duties on 3300 products and special reduced tariffs for another 3900 products. In 2008, Armenia qualified for a special arrangement of the GSP which is the special incentive arrangement for sustainable development and good governance (GSP+), which means that there are zero or special tariffs for more than 6200 products produced in Armenia. Under this

⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, Press Releases EU-Armenia Human Rights Dialogue, 17.03.2016 http://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/item/2016/03/17/arm_eu_humrig/ retrieved 13 October 2017

⁸ European Commission, Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Armenia Progress in 2014 and recommendations for actions, 25 March 2015, http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/enp/pdf/2015/armenia-enp-report-2015_en.pdf retrieved 13 October 2017

⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, Press Releases Joint Declaration on a Mobility Partnership between Armenia and the EU, 27 October 2011, http://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/item/2011/10/27/a_eu/ retrieved 13 October 2017

¹⁰ Stefan Brocza, Katharina Paulhart, EU mobility partnerships: a smart instrument for the externalisation of migration control, European Journal of Futures Research, December 2015, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40309-015-0073-x#Sec1> retrieved 13 October 2017

¹¹ The European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument for the Republic of Armenia, EU Visa Facilitation for Armenia, retrieved 13 October 2017

http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/delegations/armenia/documents/eu_travel/eu_visa_facilitation_booklet_en.pdf

¹² Hrant Kostanyan and Richard Giragosian, EU-Armenian Relations: Charting a fresh course, 04 October 2017 http://www.3dcftas.eu/system/tdf/HKandRG_EU_Armenia_CEPA.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=377&force= retrieved 13 October 2017

scheme, the EU commission monitors Armenia's compliance and implementation of 27 international conventions on areas such as human and labour rights, environmental protection, good governance etc.¹³ Referring to the latest GSP+ report of the Commission, despite the fact that Armenia puts efforts in this regard, there are still gaps in the implementation of international conventions mainly in the sphere of human rights, specifically a lack of judiciary independence, legislative and implementation framework and mechanisms against the use of torture, corruption. Other shortcomings relate to the labour code, which does not address discrimination in workplaces, health and safety requirements, abuse of contracts. However, the major issue is corruption.¹⁴

In the cultural sector, Armenia is in the process of negotiating its participation in the Creative Europe Programme starting in 2018. In this regard, the EaP CSF Armenia National Platform adopted a statement addressed to the Armenian authorities to adhere to the programme. Three EaP countries—Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine—are already part of this programme. Armenia, as a partner country can join the participating countries in a consortium.¹⁵

As a part of the European Neighbourhood Policy, Armenia benefits from the European Neighbourhood Instrument which has primary concentration on three main areas – private sector development, reforms in the public administration and judiciary sectors. The overall support for the period 2014-2017 amounts to 140-170 million EUR.

Public sector support includes civil service development, public finance management, local governance and the fight against corruption. Public finance management reform aims at supporting transparency and accountability in fiscal governance, enhancing accountability and oversight. 8 million euros has been allocated for the budget support component. The total cost for Public Finance Management is around 45 million euros.¹⁶

Besides the mentioned financial assistance, Armenia benefits also through the Neighbourhood Investment Facility (NIF), where the EU provides complementary support in several areas such as energy, transport, water, public private partnership.¹⁷

¹³ Delegation of the European Union to Armenia, Armenia and the EU, 11 May 2016

https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/armenia/896/armenia-and-eu_en retrieved 13 October 2017

¹⁴ Hrant Kostanyan and Richard Giragosian, EU-Armenian Relations: Charting a fresh course, 04 October 2017

http://www.3dcftas.eu/system/tdf/HKandRG_EU_Armenia_CEPA.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=377&force= retrieved 13 October 2017

¹⁵ GOLDEN APRICOT INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL, Creative Europe Forum: Creative Europe Programme and

EaP-EU Co-Operation Model, 22.09.2017 <http://www.gaiff.am/en/1506069906> retrieved 13 October 2017

¹⁶ European External Action Service, European Commission Directorate General For Development And Cooperation – Europeaid, Programming of the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) - 2014-2020 Single Support Framework for EU support to Armenia (2014-2017), http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/enp/pdf/financing-the-enp/armenia_2014_2017_programming_document_en.pdf retrieved 13 October 2017

¹⁷ "ibid"

Another area of EU assistance through funding reform processes has been electoral reform. The EU, together with the UNDP and the United States, assisted in the implementation of the reform. The EU's support has been calculated at about 7 million euros. The EU's support together with Germany and United Kingdom comprises 90% of the overall assistance in the election reform initiatives.¹⁸ The CS sector is supported through the Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility.¹⁹

Besides the mentioned financial assistance, Armenia has benefited also through other tools. Before the Eastern Partnership Instrument, Armenia was supported under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Initiative in 2007-2013, when the EU allocated 281.5 million euros. After 2013, the EU partially reviewed its assistance to Armenia in relation to the free trade area due to Armenia's decision to join the Eurasian Economic Union. Already planned programmes with the EU relating to trade promotion with the European Union were dropped or directed to other cooperation priorities.²⁰

Civil Society

Initially, the EU's approach towards civil society in Armenia was interaction through the third sector, the Government. At the beginning, it was mainly interaction and building relations with the state.²¹ However, this changed with the launch of the ENP and EaP projects, thus establishing multi-level contacts between the EU, its member states and Armenian CS.²²

In 2012, Armenian Civil Society was involved in the Single Support Framework preparation consultation processes. The Armenian CS was largely engaged in the discussions of EU sectoral assistance, budget support, regional development etc. Besides the above-mentioned consultation process, CSOs in Armenia were invited to contribute to the ENP Progress report annually on various sectors such as Human Rights, Justice, Freedom and Security, as well as social, economic and environmental issues. However, there were no clear mechanisms that would ensure the reflection of the civil society contribution to the ENP progress reports and receipt of the feedback provided by civil society actors regarding sectoral policies, priorities, etc.

¹⁸ European External Action Service, Local EU Statement on electoral reform in Armenia, 01 December 2016, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/16231/Local%20EU%20Statement%20on%20electoral%20reform%20in%20Armenia retrieved 13 October 2017

¹⁹ European Commission, European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Armenia, 06 December 2016 https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/neighbourhood/countries/armenia_bg retrieved 13 October 2017

²⁰ *Ibid*

²¹ Raika cited in Valentina Gevorgyan, Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Revisited, Open Society Foundations – Armenia, March 2014, http://www.osf.am/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/EaP-CSF-Revisited_English.pdf retrieved 13 October 2017

²² *Ibid*

Besides the consultations, the EU also funds various projects (thematic instruments). Since 2008, over 5 million Euros have been allocated to various projects implemented by NGOs. Under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, approximately 11 projects were funded to address the issues of fundamental rights and freedoms, women empowerment, children's rights, elections etc. Armenian CSOs are engaged in the ENP Civil Society Facility. In 2013, 1.7 million Euros was allocated to CSOs in the field of enhancing CSO capacity in budget monitoring and acting as a watchdog to fight against corruption. It should be mentioned though that many experts and civil society representatives were considering the level of involvement of civil society in the process of implementation of the EU-Armenia agenda insufficient. Major gaps that were constantly pointed out by the Armenian civil society related to the lack of clarity in the formulation of deliverables, poor level of transparency in implementation of the direct budget support programmes, low level of involvement of civil society in the process of monitoring of the reforms implemented within the framework of EU-Armenia cooperation, as well as lack of conditionality in the process of evaluation of the activities undertaken by the Armenian authorities.

Currently, the EU reinforces CSOs engagement in budget support operations in agreement with the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Economy. The idea of CSO engagement was put forward and, as a result, 6 NGOs—Oxfam, Transparency International, Open Society Foundation, the Armenian Young Lawyers' Association, Union of Armenian Government Employees and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry—are already involved in the processes of drafting and monitoring the Budget Support Conditions in the following areas: Public Finance and Management, Anti-corruption and the reform in the sector of Civil Service.²³

As can be seen from the above-mentioned, prior to the launch of the Eastern Partnership, Armenian civil society has been actively involved in EU-Armenia cooperation through both monitoring of the PCA and ENP and implementation of various projects aimed at raising public awareness about the EU in Armenia, contributing to ENP implementation, or strengthening civil society involvement in the EU-Armenia agenda. However, the launch of the EaP has made a qualitative change in the perception and understanding of the role and participation of civil society in EU-Armenia cooperation. One of the major reasons for that was the establishment of the Civil Society Forum that was an unprecedented platform for participation of the civil societies of 6 EaP countries in the shaping and implementation of the EaP priorities.

The process of forming and institutionalisation of the Armenian National Platform (ANP) of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) was launched simultaneously with the beginning of the EaP as an official initiative. Several Armenian CSOs took part in the first

²³ Armenia-EU Country Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society 2014-2017, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/20141027_eu_armenia_cs_roadmap_en_0.pdf retrieved 13 October 2017

conference organised in Prague in spring 2009 and, after the event, gathered in Yerevan to discuss the participation of Armenian civil society in the EaP.

Since the CSF was the first of its kind as a mechanism for the involvement of civil society, the initial period of institutionalisation was difficult and problematic both on the regional and national levels. In this respect, it should be mentioned that, so far, the history of the ANP in this respect can be conditionally divided into 4 major phases. The first phase was mainly focused on the institutional development of the ANP. During this period, the structure and internal rules and procedures of the Platform were formed. The second phase can be perceived as the most effective one due to the fact that negotiations between Armenia and the EU, with the AA and DCFTA, were in an active phase and thus the relations between the Armenian authorities and the ANP were quite cooperative. During this period, there was an informal mechanism of cooperation between sectoral ministries and the ANP, which played an important role in terms of collecting and submitting sectoral expertise from the ANP member organisations to line ministries. This phase was followed by the disappointing U-turn when Armenia joined the EEU, and for almost two years there were very few cases and opportunities of cooperation between the ANP and the Armenian authorities. During this period of time, the quality of cooperation between the two sides turned from cooperative to confrontational.

Armenia's decision to join the EEU revealed several gaps and problems both in terms of the fragility of internal decision-making in the country as well as the lack of wide public support towards European integration in Armenian society at large. The low level of public trust towards the authorities and lack of positive changes despite the declaration of large-scale reforms has resulted in a transfer of mistrust from the Government to its donors and partners, which in its turn has caused low expectation from EU-Armenia cooperation. This means that the communication strategy of the EU in Armenia should be rethought and tailored to local specifics. This, in parallel with a strong Russian informational presence, creates significant obstacles for the more effective implementation of the EU-Armenia cooperation agenda and forms ground for manipulative actions aimed at discrediting the reforms implemented within the framework of the EU-Armenia cooperation. In this respect, the role of the civil society as an effective communicator and an alternative information provider should be considered.

The low level of trust towards the authorities and discredited essence of the electoral processes in Armenia have put Armenian civil society in a position where, apart from regular activities carried out by "classic" civil society, Armenian civil society actors should also take upon themselves certain political functions as well, such as forming and promoting an alternative political agenda aimed at stimulating the political plurality in the country.

In this respect, the institutional mechanisms of involvement of civil society in the process of reform implementation provided by the Eastern Partnership and the CEPA should be used to the maximum extent possible.

Recommendations

General recommendations

1. In case of a particular process such as CEPA implementation, there is a strong need to define a Civil Society subject that will be able to become the institutional entity to represent civil society in the process of communication and cooperation between Armenian authorities and the European institutions in the process of the implementation of the CEPA. At the current stage, the ANP is the main civil society subject that has the institutional strength, history and formulated mission that coincides with the philosophy of civil society engagement in the process of implementation of the CEPA.
2. In terms of the possible functions of civil society, there are three major functions that civil society can perform:
 - a. Monitoring of the implementation of the CEPA, which can include monitoring of sectoral reforms, legal approximation, as well as overall strategic monitoring with a special focus on defining priorities, developing action plans for implementation and formulating deliverables and outcomes.
 - b. Formulation and delivering of sectoral expertise to the decision makers, which is an ongoing process that will need a certain institutional framework for engaging civil society in dialogue with the line state institutions responsible for particular sectors, directions or processes.
 - c. Raising public awareness on the CEPA and wider format of EU-Armenia relations. This function needs intensive communication with the EU as well as various EU-funded projects and should aim at addressing specific issues, successes or expected results that are within the framework of EU-Armenia cooperation. This function includes both raising awareness within civil society itself and using civil society as an information channel to reach society at large.
3. It is necessary to involve the ANP in the process of making the CEPA more instrumental, namely in the process of developing detailed priorities in each sector, monitoring mechanisms, identifying deliverables, cross-cutting themes and working formats. It is also important to ensure a single instrumental framework for the CEPA similar to the Association Agenda in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, since it will allow to ensure conditionality and the more precise formulation of deliverables, as well make the process of monitoring of the implementation more effective.
4. In order to make sure that the bilateral civil society platform envisioned by the CEPA is effective, there is a strong need to link it with the ANP. There can be several mechanisms for this:

- a. Ensure that there is a significant presence of the ANP in the bilateral platform through a quota for the ANP in the bilateral platform.
- b. Make the bilateral platform a horizontal structure of the ANP with an opportunity to nominate WG members upon necessity and based on particular topics discussed in the given period and ensure room for participation of CSOs that are willing to contribute to the implementation of the CEPA but do not want to be involved in any institutional framework.
- c. The EU-based CSOs of the bilateral platform should include the CSOs actively working in Armenia with a strong knowledge of the country situation. It is important to ensure the sectoral variety of these CSOs. ANP members as well as the EaP CSF can be a valuable source for the identification and involvement of relevant EU-based CSOs.

Recommendations to the Government of Armenia

1. Armenia needs a strict format of internal bilateral agreements between the ANP and the Armenian authorities, not only outlining the principles of cooperation but also formulating the duties and responsibilities of the parties and stating the mechanisms and the timeline of cooperation.
2. The Georgian experience in holding periodic sectoral dialogue meetings between the line ministries and NP Working Groups is very much applicable to Armenia and can ensure an ongoing and content-based participatory process.
3. In order to ensure transparent implementation of the CEPA, it would be useful to develop a www.cepa.am website similar to <http://aa.ge/en/> developed by OSGF, where all the legal acts that are envisaged for approximation with the EU Acquis will be placed and room will be available for providing feedback and receiving answers. On top of this, the Armenian version of the website can include information on other activities implemented within the framework of the CEPA, provide details on Direct Budget Support, etc.
4. During the past decade, Armenia has been involved in several integration frameworks (ENP, EaP, MDG, OGP, etc.) that are aimed at supporting a country to define its development priorities and identify the mechanisms for their implementation. According to many civil society actors, this process was more an imitation rather than a real one and resulted in huge discrepancy between the regulatory framework and vision of people. The CEPA gives the Armenian society and state an opportunity to initiate deeper and more conceptual discussions on reforms, legislation, the process of development of legal acts and ways of simplification of the regulatory frameworks. This should be used to compensate the enormous amount of lost opportunities for doing so.

Recommendations to the EU institutions

1. Decision making on EU funding to civil society needs more transparency and clarity. Often, the principles behind funding decisions are unclear. This can be achieved through more

significant capacity building for CSOs so that they can successfully apply to the EU for funding. The ANP can become an important platform for these activities.

2. There is a strong need to intensify and institutionalise the communication between the EU Delegation and the ANP. The interactions of the ANP and CSOs in general with different sections of the Delegation often create miscommunication in case there is no institutional involvement of both the political and operational sections of the delegation.
3. There is a strong need to establish a tripartite format for periodic communication between the EU, Armenian authorities and civil society that will allow the discussion of issues in all their complexity with the involvement of all interested parties.
4. It is important to build the capacities of the Armenian CSOs regarding the process of applying to EU calls, evaluation of applications, major principles in reading EU announced calls, etc. The ANP can play the role of a major platform for such activities.

In order to do that, it is recommended to develop a document which clarifies the elements in PRAG that are applicable to Armenia or to a group of countries, such as the EaP. The areas that need clarification or other issues can be mentioned such as:

- a. The background of NGOs applying: when did they register or start operation, do they have sufficient experience etc.?
- b. The verification process for NGOs approved for funding: what kind of inquiries should they expect?
- c. Capacity-building for NGOs that are the recipients of funding: what type of activities does the EU envision for them to enhance their performance?
- d. The level of flexibility in tendering: what is the threshold for allocation of funds for services with no open tenders?
- e. The level of engagement of EU project managers: what are their mutual rights and obligations, i.e. which actions can be done only after approval by EU DEL and which ones can be done with no approval?
- f. The level of flexibility in budget reallocations: what are the most appropriate rules for the conditions of Armenia/EaP?

Such issues and others are important to be clarified for local circumstances, since PRAG provides only very general guidelines, which in some cases are too flexible for local conditions. In case the EU has restrictions in implementing these kind of initiatives, the sub-grantees that are implementing capacity building projects should be navigated by respective EU institutions to address these issues and to work closely with the ANP and other civil society entities working in the sphere of EU-Armenia relations.

It is also advisable to study more carefully the background of EU applicants and their partners in Armenia: those applicants who have not worked in Armenia should have strong and well-known

partners, to make up for the lack of expertise. If the EU applicants have worked in Armenia and have a positive history, this is not so relevant.

Also, it is advised to arrange meetings between EU evaluators and failed applicants for direct personal feedback, or to provide a comparison between winning proposals and those who did not pass, in order for the authors of the latter to understand better what have been their deficiencies.

There is an opinion that this may create a conflict of interest. However, for NGO development in Armenia, the best way is as much openness as possible.

1. Decision making on direct budget support should also be made more participatory and involve civil society through the ANP. This can be implemented by delegating it to ANP representatives in the Steering Committees of the direct budget support projects.
2. There should be steps ensuring at least partial synchronisation of communication strategies between the ANP, the Government of Armenia and the EU Delegation regarding the CEPA and broader EU assistance and cooperation with Armenia. The communication strategy should be aimed at opposing the misinformation on the processes initiated within the framework of the EU-Armenia cooperation and beyond. More user-friendly and strategically long-term awareness raising activities should be undertaken on the real outcomes of EU-Armenia cooperation.
3. Communication between the ongoing EU-funded projects and the ANP can be important for both increasing their transparency and accountability and raising awareness on EU support to Armenia for a broader audience.

Recommendations to the ANP and Civil Society

1. There should be significant structural reform adapting the ANP to the new situation, namely:
 - a. Strengthening Working Groups and making their work more result-oriented and sustainable
 - b. Development of horizontal cross-cutting structures that unite ANP members' activities in the spheres of monitoring, advocacy and awareness raising.
 - c. Developing the ANP communication strategy and plan.
 - d. Initiating internal and public discussions of the CEPA content and developing proposals for making the CEPA more instrumental at the stage of its implementation.
 - e. Implementing capacity building activities aimed at familiarising CSOs on various content-related aspects of EU-Armenia cooperation (CEPA, HRD, GSP+, Creative Europe, etc.) on one hand and developing monitoring, advocacy and awareness raising capacities on the other.

2. The ANP should undertake steps to ensure the involvement of a wider spectrum of society in the Platform through business associations, labour unions and regional CSOs.
3. The ANP should play the role of disseminator of its members' products. In order to ensure the more effective utilisation of products developed by its members, the Platform can develop a mechanism for uniting the products of its members under one format. This can be implemented particularly with monitoring reports and policy recommendations.
4. In order to ensure more effective circulation of information throughout the country, the ANP should establish regional representations through mandating this function to its strong regional members.
5. There should be intensive communication between the ANP and other civil society entities involved in the EU-Armenia dialogue. Particularly, communication of the ANP with the CSOs that are implementing various EU-funded projects can ensure the additional flow of EU-related information. The ANP can also act as a platform for EU-funded capacity building projects to connect these projects with ANP member CSOs both in terms of institutional capacity development and building the capacities related to EU policies and procedures (see point 2 of the recommendations to EU institutions for more details).
6. Representation mechanisms should be more actively utilised by the ANP in terms of delegating Platform members to the Steering Committees formed within the framework of Direct Budget Support projects. This will allow to increase the circulation of information both raising awareness of CSOs on the processes and allowing them to deliver recommendations to the decision makers regarding particular programmes and activities.