



The European Union’s “Support to Migration Policy Development and Relevant Capacity Building in Armenia” Programme

Եվրամիության «Աջակցություն Հայաստանում միգրացիոն քաղաքականության և համապատասխան կարողությունների հզորացմանը» ծրագիր

Policy Brief Համառոտագիր



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International Center for Human Development
Մարդկային զարգացման միջազգային կենտրոն



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How to Respond to Challenges of Intolerance and Discrimination?



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The new patches of the old world

In the West the issues of migration are already inseparable from the issues of xenophobia, intolerance and discrimination. To address the shortage of labor force many countries have opened up their borders to economic migrants, and new communities, with their unique features and lifestyle, have started to shape there.

Perceptions of differences between the 'old-timers' and 'newcomers' provided a rich soil for expansion of intolerance. The issue acquired even sharper edges with launching the global fight against terrorism. The gap between locals and Muslims and even non-Muslim communities grew at incredible speed. Issues of intolerance entered the agenda of western societies and international organizations. If in the previous century the West was addressing these challenges through fighting against racism and discrimination, the major remedy for the present millennium has become the promotion of tolerance. However, this remedy has quite a sizeable defect: if discrimination can be defined legally and it is possible to develop international and domestic procedures and instruments for fighting against it, in case of tolerance, the means and outcomes are not always tangible and visible, especially if exercised within a short period.

The Armenian rainbow in the 20th century

Armenia has joined all the international conventions regarding elimination of discrimination and has ratified almost all the relevant major international legal instruments. Still, in the greatly homogenous Armenian society the issue of discrimination has never been discussed seriously. However, Armenia should definitely be interested in protection of the rights of its citizens and Diaspora Armenians in foreign countries, since it is a country that 'exports' migrants. In this regard, the issue of fighting against intolerance and discrimination and in the same context against Armenophobia is becoming a pivotal issue in the foreign policy of the country. The challenge, however, is the reality that there cannot be a clear demarcation between the domestic and foreign policies in this respect. Therefore, it is vital to develop a perception of multiculturalism in Armenia. Multicultural Armenia will include both the cultures of various minorities in the country and the continuous impact of a large variety of world cultures, which are represented by different Armenian diasporas.

What have to be done?

Obviously, the Armenian society has to critically reflect on the issues of intolerance and discrimination against religious minorities and perhaps less intensively, against ethnic minorities, as well as against different social groups. It is crucial to develop functional mechanisms for a proper response to practice and prevention of discrimination, intolerance and xenophobia. First and foremost, this refers to hate crimes. Though such phenomena are mainly being treated within the criminal legislation framework, it is crucial to build adequate

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capacities in responding to such cases within law machinery and Prosecutor General's Office and to ensure coordination of their activities and the cooperation between state agencies. Another urgent issue is the improvement of governance of relevant information regarding such crimes, in particular, availability of regular statistical data, which will allow analyzing the incentives and trends of such practices, as well as prevent and persecute such crimes.

It is indisputable that every individual should have legal opportunities to defend his/her rights legally in case of illegal discriminative treatment. Subsidiary of legal assistance by the state or the legal assistance of non-governmental organizations can considerably help a person facing such a situation. Incidentally, it is exactly the representatives of vulnerable social groups that are most prone to become victims of discrimination.

State agencies and institutions providing public services have a crucial role in fighting against intolerance. This is particularly true of educational institutions and the Ombudsman's Office. The culture of tolerance should become part of the educational curricula. It is critical to develop a sense of equality and dignity among students, regardless of their ethnicity, social background and religion. A consultative body can be created adjacent to the Ombudsman's Office, which will serve as a quick response mechanism in cases of instances of intolerance demonstrated in the society.

Finally, it is important that the political elite of the country, both in government and in opposition, learn to criticize and accept criticism without perceiving such critiques as personal attacks and such critics as personal enemies. The political elite should be aware that each person decides individually what should be tolerated in his/her social life. If such a decision does not turn into a threat against physical safety and the lives of other people, if it does not eventually become a criminally persecuted case and there is no *corpus delicti* then it is quite legal and can at least be worth to be tolerated.

This paper has been developed based on the opinions passed by the participants of a round table organized within the framework of the project "Support to Migration Policy Development and Relevant Capacity Building in Armenia". The event took place on December 23, 2008. The roundtable was attended by independent analysts, government officials, and representatives of the international organizations. The project is financed by the European Union.