

# European Targets as Milestones of Political Guarantees for Reforms



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## **From the margins of the agenda towards the axis**

The policy aimed at improving governance in Armenia gradually is shifting towards the axis of the country's political agenda. Essentially, this shift is accompanied with changes in both the conceptual glossary and content, which obviously contributes to the comparative evaluation of the level of governance in the country both in dynamical and regional terms. It is even more important that the state policy aimed at the improvement of governance is gradually transforming into an results-based content and format. These shifts have created prerequisites for shaping public administration reforms on the foundation which embraces the logic of European integration and the clear, tangible and measurable demonstration of political will by the political leadership in the country.

## **European target at the sharp end of reforms' arrow**

Thus, the most salient guarantee for the implementation of anti-corruption policy in the country is the demonstration of political will, which has been reflected through clear political guidelines and targets for promoting good governance and fight against corruption. In this regard, for the first time in the country's history choosing clear and measureable targets for the development of the governance system in Armenia for the presidential elections in 2007 was providential. One of these targets is the following: by 2012 Armenia will reach the current level of the new members of the European Union in accordance with the international standards of good governance. The latter political commitment served as a foundation for the design of the objectives and outcomes of the state anti-corruption strategy in 2008. It is quite telling that the good governance, specifically fight against corruption, has been recognized as a national security priority for Armenia already in 2007, a step initiated by the acting President of the country.

Accordingly, the major goal of the state anti-corruption policy should be the significant reduction of the overall level of corruption in Armenia, which means that by 2012 the systemic nature of corruption need to be overcome, its practice should be considerably reduced, the quality of public services should be improved, perceptions of social justice among households and entrepreneurs should be significantly improved, the political stability should be strengthened and prerequisites should be created for the increase of productivity levels, thus raising the competitiveness of the country and its economic attractiveness for investments. In general, achievements in planning and implementing public administration reforms are obvious. However, the to-do list is growing in parallel to the achievements. Indeed, the closer the governance ship sails to the European horizon, the further this horizon gets, which indeed is quite natural, since good governance is not some concrete system, but a pool of principles - an ideal. Therefore, the to-do list will keep growing in the future and the issues to be addressed will become more complex and will require will, mind, language and then only an action.

## **A dialog 'déjà vu'**

One of the most significant challenges at this stage of public administration reforms in Armenia is actually initiating a productive dialog regarding policy issues. It is interesting to note that in the past dialog on public administration reforms was deficient between the state authorities and the civil society and the business sector. In this respect, however, the situation has considerably improved and continues to do so, though there is still a lot to do and the challenges on the way keep changing in nature. On this background the necessity of extensive professional and conceptual discussions between state agencies, as well as challenges reflected in occasional

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concessions to limitations of agency-focused mentality or clashes between agency interests become more clearly defined. The process of developing an anti-corruption policy proves this. This process which has started with the initiative and ‘blessings’ of the state authorities, involves civil society institutes and the business sector. Significant conceptual discussions are being held with the support of development partners and participation of state agencies. Moreover, the development of the draft paper on state anti-corruption strategy is assigned to the representatives of the civil society – experts. The more intensive the pace of the development of the draft and the more frequent the various public discussions become, the more urgent the issue of juxtaposing conceptual discussions between state agencies, institutional solutions and agency interests appears. Indeed, the sharp end of the public administration reform arrow: the anti-corruption policy requires a unique quality of inter-agency coordination and cooperation already in its developmental stage. However, anti-corruption policy discussions at the level of state authorities are almost exclusively held within the framework of the Council on Fight against Corruption, which at this stage bans the opportunity to engage in effective dialogs regarding conceptual and institutional issues.

### **Hectic solutions for the closing move?**

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Certainly, both conceptual and institutional issues arising during the draft development will be addressed during the final revision stage of the strategy development; however, the experience and logic compel us to express a serious concern regarding the effectiveness and adequacy of such hectic solutions. Isn't it more sensible to initiate professional and conceptual discussions between state authorities and executive agencies before being forced to come up with political solutions to interagency interest clashes? In the present situation the undesirable scenario, when the principles and instruments developed in the result of active and productive partnership between individual agencies and the civil society can be trampled in the clash of agency interests and the quest for political solutions by the “knights” defending the agency interests, is not absolutely excluded, is it? In the result, the outcomes of policy implementation will be jeopardized, as well as the probability of demonstrating the political will promulgated at the highest ranks and the political commitment to reach European clear targets will be shrunk.

### **Participatory responsibility for the European targets**

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In such a situation possible solutions are different. Actually, at the final stage of the policy development it is possible to move the discourse to the purely institutional-political dimension, thus putting the exceptional, political responsibility of conceptual solutions on the shoulders of the state agency, in the case of anti-corruption strategy this being the Council on Fight against Corruption. However, the best solution may be the organization of effective conceptual and institutional, professional and policy debates between state agencies already in the development stage with the participation of all the stakeholders. Non-governmental organizations with their analytical capacities can be very useful in this regard. Thus, we will end up with not only a participatory process, but a participatory outcome as well. In addition, there will be a wide spectrum of agents bearing political responsibilities and most importantly, prerequisites necessary for jumping over the European ‘bar’ of governance efficiency.

*The paper is elaborated based on the opinions passed by the participants of the discussion “The European Good Governance Targets for Armenian Anti-Corruption Policies”, which took place on December 9, 2008. The roundtable discussion was attended by independent analysts, government officials, and representatives of the international organizations.*

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