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Մարդկային զարգացման  
միջազգային կենտրոն  
International Center for  
Human Development

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# Policy Brief

## Համառոտագիր

**Աջակցություն քաղաքացիական  
հասարակության զարգացման  
քաղաքականության, կարգավորման և  
ինստիտուցիոնալ բարեփոխումներին  
Հայաստանում**

**Supporting Policy, Regulatory and  
Institutional Reforms for Civil Society  
Development in Armenia**

Սույն հրապարակումը հնարավոր է դարձել իրականացնել Զառնաբանության ինստիտուցիոնալ ձևաչափի իրականացման և տեղական կողմից իրականացվող քաղաքացիական հասարակության և տեղական ինքնակառավարման աջակցության ծրագրի, և Ամերիկայի Միացյալ Նահանգների բնակչության առատաձեռն աջակցության շնորհիվ՝ ԱՄՆ Միջազգային Չարգացման Գործակալության No AID-111-LA-10-00001 համագործակցության պայմանագրի DFD-A-00-09-00141-00 պայմանագրի շրջանակներում Մարդկային զարգացման կենտրոնի միջոցով: Սույնի բովանդակությունը, արտահայտված տեսակետերը և կարծիքները պատկանում են հեղինակներին՝ Մարդկային զարգացման միջազգային կենտրոնի պատասխանատվության տակ, և հնարավոր է, որ չհամընկնեն Զառնաբանության ինստիտուցիոնալ ձևաչափի իրականացման, ԱՄՆ Միջազգային Չարգացման Գործակալության և ԱՄՆ կառավարության տեսակետերի հետ:

This publication was made possible by the support of Counterpart International's Armenia Representation and the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under Associate Cooperative Agreement No. AID-111-LA-10-00001, under Cooperative Agreement Number DFD-A-00-09-00141-00 through the International Center for Human Development. Content, views and opinions expressed herein are those of the authors, and the responsibility of the International Center for Human Development, and do not necessarily reflect the views of Counterpart Armenia, USAID or the United States Government."

# Policy on the development of the civil society in the Republic of Armenia: the current platform for the satisfaction of political interests



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a Think Tank

## **The present environment for the development of the civil society: the wash-tab<sup>1</sup> we have**

Nowadays the development level of the civil society in transitional democracies is measured by the number of non-governmental organizations (NGO). According to this measurement the institutionalization of the civil society in Armenia - a country with a population of three million and 5000 registered non-governmental organizations - may be considered a fact. It will be difficult to challenge this statement, taking into account the activities of the civil society organizations (CSO) for the last years, among which the most telling achievement was prevention of the ratification of the recommended amendments to the Law on Non-Governmental Organizations. This experience can be considered a benchmark for the establishment of the civil society. However, establishment does not mean focalization, but new perspectives and horizons instead, and consequently new needs and challenges. It seems that it is high time to define new developmental challenges for the civil society and to seek for long-term solutions. These solutions need to be the foundation for the realization of comprehensive and long-term goals.

At the moment the priorities of the development of the civil society organizations and specifically of the NGOs, are the development of a targeted public policy and establishment of an adequate legal environment regulating the activities of these organizations. The legitimate question then is: "Does the current policy provide beneficial opportunities of the development?" In a number of strategic policy documents such as the Government's Programme for Sustainable Development, the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Armenia, the ENP and ENPI documents, including the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument/ National Indicative Programme 2011-2013, the involvement of the civil society in the development and implementation of the sectorial policies has been recognized as a key factor for success. However, among the strategic documents it is only the List of Actions for 2009-2011 ENP RA-EU Action Plan to Ensure Implementation of Annex to RA President Order NK-68-A, 6 May, 2009 that identifies a clear mechanism on how this involvement should be ensured, namely, through the development of a concept paper on the participation of the civil society in public governance.

On the policy dimension there is an overall impression that the Armenian authorities have one day started a dialogue with the CSOs, following the logic of integration with the European community, and today this external requirement is being followed through inertia, without transforming into a real ownership. As a consequence, CSOs have been able to identify their interests, development opportunities and challenges more clearly and are ready to form a new power in order to positively change the dynamics of the current relations.

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<sup>1</sup> Reference to A. Pushkin's fairy-tale "The fisherman and the golden fish"

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## **The need for a new wash-tab**

The key difference between the current and new relations is the clear realization of the development needs by the CSOs, and perhaps it is high time to change the work style: stop being reactive and become more proactive. Essentially such work style needs to be aimed at bilateral development of the development agenda. Regardless the differences in the missions of the CSOs, each developed civil society organization should be able to consistently carry out functions relevant to its mission, without external interventions impeding and even preventing targeted activities. Such an organization should be able to develop sustainably, as well as seek and recommend creative and innovative approaches.

In order to engage in such activities one of the essential prerequisites should be the change in the perception of both the general society and the government regarding the CSOs. It is crucial that the state authorities understand and recognize CSOs as full members of the development processes in all the sectors and the process of addressing the national interests. To incite change in the perceptions it is necessary to ensure clear and functional mechanisms, including formation of the institute of state orders and establishment of state-funded foundations in order to support the activities of the CSOs which support the development of the Armenian state.

## **Between the old and new wash-tubs**

Transition from the old wash-tab, i.e. the “forced” and inertia-driven policy to a qualitatively new one, in the framework of which the civil society and the state will act as partners, is an evolutionary process. It needs to be supported both by the present and coming governments, excluding any politicization of such support and ensuring accessible, transparent and equal conditions for the operation of the CSOs. Currently the financial instability of the CSOs and the absence of a long-term strategy push CSOs from one “fire” to another, i.e. from international donors to the government, or compel them to act as the most flexible tightrope walkers who need to perform between sometimes contrasting ropes of realization of their missions on one hand and on the other, the satisfaction of the contractor’s interests.

It seems obvious that CSOs will not be able to manipulate for too long: they will continue tightrope walking, gradually securing the rope of the state. It needs to be so strong as to ensure equal performance conditions for all the walkers who depending on the proficiency of their skills will compete for success. The security of the rope should be guaranteed by the clear and long-term policy of the state and not its short-term biased approaches that satisfy momentary political ambitions.

*The paper is elaborated based on the opinions passed by the participants of the discussion “National policies on the development of the civil society in Armenia”, which took place on June 30, 2011. The roundtable discussion was attended by independent analysts, government officials, and representatives of the civil society and international organizations.*

*The round table was organized within the framework of the project “Supporting Policy, Regulatory and Institutional Reforms for Civil Society Development in Armenia” supported by the Counterpart International.*