

How to Promote and Facilitate Armenia's European Integration

Harmonizing the Ends and Means

By working out various development projects, signing different international conventions, adopting new laws and norms we secure the rules of the game called 'public life.' These are the rules that will materialize the vision of the future which we choose as our goal of development. It seems that now far fewer people dispute that Europe is our final destination, and at least it is accepted as such in the context of high-rank declarations. As a result, it appears that on one hand we already have a final goal – Europe, which has set up its own rules of the game, and on the other hand, we keep developing our own rules of the same game. Naturally, one cannot help but wonder whether we have a clear mechanism which can sort out the decisions which are being made, direct those towards the goal and ensure their compliance with the latter. If the goal is Europe, the rules of the game should be European as well: this is a logical outcome.

Instead of Re-inventing the Wheel

Under such circumstances, we actually have two options:

1. All the decisions, laws and norms that are being accepted should undergo a thorough inspection through expert lenses of a specially created body, in order to monitor whether they are in compliance with the European legislation.
2. We should expose the differences between Armenian and European legislation, consolidate these and put the harmonization process on fast track. Simultaneously, we need to develop the institutional capacity necessary for their implementation.

Of course, it is possible, and as a matter of fact preferable to integrate these two options, in order to avoid the potential repetition of one and the same action more than once in the transition phase.

The first (*extensive*) option becomes urgent since each and every day we continue accepting numerous new normative acts, which not having undergone an adequate expert investigation may face the necessity of revision in a rather short time. For instance in Ukraine, which is moving in the direction of Euro-integration, in the Parliament there is a special committee on Euro-integration, which presents an expert perspective on any legislative initiative on the agenda, comparing it with the EU legal acts.

The second (*intensive*) option implies a fast and targeted imitation. It is true that such a process will require a large-scale effort to research and compare Armenian and EU legislations, to reveal the differences and develop a timeline for bringing these laws in line with the EU legislation. However, the encouraging news is that in Armenia such an activity has already been carried out.

The National Program for Meeting the Commitments to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement

In Armenia the development of the National Program (NP) for meeting the commitments to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement started in January – February of 2004. AEPLAC was chosen as an organization providing technical assistance. A coordination board and 24 task forces have been established, which are responsible for the development of corresponding themes of the NP. In total, 250 people have participated in the development of the program and 50 experts have been involved on various stages of this process.

As a result, a comprehensive document has been developed where the corresponding legislative acts of both Armenia and the EU have been considered and compared. The comparison resulted in the development of NP objectives and a list of activities that will allow meeting these objectives. Thus, the prepared program is in no way inferior to the Actions Plans of the countries that have already become EU members within the last decade. In a sense, it is even a step forward for a simple reason that it has taken into consideration the experience of the countries that have already moved in a similar direction.

EU legislation is characterized by very concise provisions, so compliance means the introduction of similarly clear provisions into the Armenian legislation. The National Program simply defines these concise rules. Consequently, the sooner it is adopted, the sooner the need for frequently making legislative changes and creating certain committees will disappear. The NP, in fact, will serve as a coordination system for the whole field.

Moreover, the NP can serve as a unique coordination mechanism, the fast and effective operation of which will turn into an incentive and a locomotive that will pull forward the whole field.

The paper is elaborated based on the opinions passed by the participants of the discussion “National Program Chapter on Social Policy and Employment”, which took place on November 11, 2005. The roundtable discussion was attended by independent analysts, government officials, and representatives of the international organizations.

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