POLICY brief

Building Democratic Institutions:

How far we are from Europe

Point of Arrival

By saying "Europe", one might conceive of a system anchored in the European values system (at the heart of the system - Roman law, Greek culture, Christian morality and Protestant ethics) and the primary principles of human and property rights factual protection that have proved to be viable and attained outstanding achievements for the time being.

Point of Departure

During the period following the privatization process, Armenia first entered the criminal capitalism stage that exposed the clannish nature of capitalism. The trend toward bureaucratic capitalism is also observed at present.

Social life is based chiefly on personal, and not social, values. In many cases there is a domination of a perception of a state inherited from the Soviet period. There is no de-facto division in the power branches. Also, the issue of ownership legitimacy is still pending. The court system doesn't draw near to the bowling point in order to be able of efficient development.

Political environment, in its classical form, doesn't exist. Subsequent to each election, the elections institute damages its reputation in society's view more and more. The political parties merely resemble a number of people grouped around a "leader", rather than forces endorsing a political ideology. The leaders of the many political parties don't even comprehend the environment in which they act. Very often the decision-makers, from the same party, present contradicting viewpoints. Society isn't keenly interested in the political spectrum they implicated. The struggle of the opposition is waged purely for grabbing "the economic recourses".

Armenia today faces the problem of internal integration. The existing opinions in Yerevan and the regions can differ entirely. Public opinion doesn't exert influence on government actions. The NGOs gradually resemble clubs with their opinions rarely related to the topic.

The printed press resembles a specific message deliverer between the clans. As for those 3-4 TV companies broadcasting throughout Armenia, they are seriously lacking in terms of quality or pluralism promotion.

Hence, society nowadays is completely detached from the state government processes. Nonetheless, as a result of inter-clan competition, certain layers of society are gradually becoming involved in those developments.

The Process

When considering the issue of "how close are we to Europe" from a legislative standpoint, it should be stated that with the laws adopted, in all probability we can be considered closer. Yet with the way they are enforced - we are still far from Europe. We take a selective approach to breaking the laws, i.e. it's obvious what laws can be broken, what is forbidden, those who are allowed to break the law, and those who are not. This is a road to self-destruction.

Hitherto, the countries in the geographical-political part of Europe became members of the European Union. Armenia is not on this list. What forces us to choose the direction of Europe? Possibly the political decision made has nothing to do with the decision society will/can arrive at? A serious public debate should be conducted to ascertain the societal trends, either to understand the ways to influence those trends, or to identify any influence as ridiculous.

Working groups could be formed with the aim of formulating what our values system and mentality are; what are the dynamics they have achieved until now and the way they have developed. If not Europe, then towards where? If nowhere, then how to go it alone?

The process, and not the goal definition and achievement, are imperative here. The integration process is quite essential by itself.

The European Union has announced the concept of "European Neighborhood Policy" as Europe steps towards the East. Now, even if we turn around, we have to resist.

The road to Europe is a road to public demand and initiative formation. To expect the government's initiative to accelerate this process sounds senseless enough. Every step will go no further than a plain announcement.

This process would be highly supported, conditioned with truthful highlighting of our delegates' activities that are involved in European structures. Society should be honestly presented with "what is Europe?" Hiding any single thought will lead to further problems. Our society has no idea of what Europe is or the European way we have chosen. Europe also, by itself, has its own gaps. Everything should be openly presented. Failure of presenting and realizing the whole thing in time will cost shocking consequences after any further drastic decisions, even if it was designed to walk closer to Europe.