

## ***Towards the ENP Action Plan***

*The common ground for civic society-  
government cooperation*



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“The European Union is a family of the European democratic countries”, and in light of the directive to develop a new world order, a significant role has been assigned to the Southern Caucasus. Given the new state of affairs, unprecedented issues regarding security, economy, and politics are evolving. These issues concern Armenia as well, and to address them, a process of developing an action plan has already been launched.

Naturally, Europe will support only those countries that will demonstrate unhesitating readiness and will foster credibility in complying with the commitments. Nowadays we are facing the urgency of developing a competitive action plan. Certainly, in the range of possible approaches one solution is the “copy/paste” approach: the use of sources such as the experiences of different countries and existing reforms. This will simply ensure the mere existence of the action plan, and instigate a hope to dig in further, with the illusion of implementing what has been undertaken. However, if there is a will and a desire not to stay isolated, then there is a real need to develop and implement a competitive action plan. European values are anchored in cooperation. Thus, the development of an action plan based on the principles of multilateral inter-regional cooperation, as well as cooperation between the government and the non-governmental sector, can serve as an important prerequisite for designing a competitive action plan.

### **Is Europe’s “new neighbor” Armenia, or only the Armenian government?**

A number of state officials are seriously engaged in the significant process of developing an Action Plan. The minimum requirement, according to the European Neighborhood Policy, is that the action plan must be developed by a body that is largely representative in nature. The legitimate question is this: is the development of such an action plan exclusively the function of the government? Is the Armenian government ready to open up its doors to the NGOs already specialized in such areas, or will those advocating “closed door” politics still outnumber? This is not a rhetorical question, nor an issue of the interests of a particular sector, namely the NGO sector. It merely refers to the same mutual gains, the perception of which will contribute to both the development of Armenia’s Action Plan and, in the future, its accountability for accomplishing the responsibilities in compliance with the Action Plan.

### **Cooperation: an illusion or a real possibility?**

The representatives of the NGO sector see the necessity of cooperation at the highest possible degree. They are well aware of instances of imitating cooperation, thus they express a concern over such a possibility regarding the prospect of this particular cooperation. The non-governmental sector has expressed willingness to contribute to the development of the Action Plan in all its stages. The attitude of the state is still embryonic: on one hand there is willingness to cooperate and an awareness of the possible benefits that such cooperation will yield. On the other hand, there is apprehension that the government may lose direct control over the process.

However, it should be noted that:

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1. not everyone, either in the society or the state institutions, is well informed enough about the possible gains and opportunities resulting from an enhanced partnership with Europe;
  2. though the process is of paramount importance, the goal of completing it rapidly and without much “headache” may only be attained if quality is sacrificed; and
  3. meeting the previous liabilities/obligations will also affect the process.

Still, it should be taken into account that:

1. the “new neighbors” will be regarded strictly individually, and there will be strong competition among them;
2. the extent of EU cooperation with Armenia will be based on real, and not illusionary, processes; and
3. the previous liabilities entail both positive and negative potential. For instance, the elections of local authorities in the near future can have crucial significance.

The ENP Action Plan should not ignore the “hot” topics. It is high time to embark in a collaborative attempt to discuss the hot topics and other pressing issues on the agenda. Promises will be easier to fulfill if society has its say in their formulation. The principles highlighted for cooperation are as follows:

1. the aggregation of resources and capacities at all the stages of drafting the Action Plan;
2. ensuring real and functional feedback mechanisms;
3. transparency and broad collaboration with mass media;
4. raising awareness and ensuring better information channeling: the public should be clear about its liabilities, goals and interests; and
5. active involvement of the Armenian Diaspora in Europe

Eventually, the path to Europe is the path of developing public demand and initiatives.

*The paper is elaborated based on the opinions passed by the participants of the discussion on The European Neighborhood Policy: from a country report to an Action Plan. What are the possibilities of cooperation between the government and the civil society?”, which took place on April 25, 2005. The roundtable discussion was attended by independent analysts, government officials, entrepreneurs, and representatives of the international organizations.*

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