

## ***European Neighborhood Policy: from the Walk to the Talk***

On May 3rd, 2006, the third phase of the negotiations regarding Armenia's Action Plan for the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP AP) took place in Yerevan. According to the representatives of the Armenian delegation, this phase might suffice to complete the whole process, since there are no issues left which are either impossible to pursue or solve. At present solutions have been found to the issues that have required additional discussion after the second phase of the negotiations.

Thus, the document steps into a new phase; a phase of final completion. This document implies that within the next five years Armenia clearly commits to following the European standards regarding almost all the aspects of social life and implement such reforms which will bring Armenia closer to Europe, or would approximate the rules of the game called "social life" to the European standards.

Armenia is a part of Europe. In fact, this is already a political reality clearly promulgated as a high status political declaration. This is quite a serious statement, which considerably changes how the other countries view Armenia's status within the international value system.

### **A Successful Example of Cooperation**

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Discussions regarding the ENP AP took rather long. Given the closed nature of the negotiations, the details and even the whole document were not available to the public. Still, the cooperation of the RA Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the public sector within the framework of the process should be considered as rather effective. It is difficult to measure how useful the comments and suggestions made by various NGOs were for the Armenian delegation participating in the negotiations. However, one thing is obvious: demonstrating sincere willingness to cooperate within the existing restrictions, the RA state agency responsible for the implementation of the country's foreign policy has acquired partners ready to contribute to the process of ENP AP implementation, namely the Armenian NGOs. This is truly a significant achievement, which will bear fruits in the future.

### **The Challenges of ENP AP Implementation Process**

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Thus, the ENP AP is transferred from the dimension of foreign policy to the internal one. Armenia-EU *external, closed* and *principled* negotiations are approaching the completion phase, thus announcing about the necessity of initiating *internal* and *open* negotiations. There is only one question left to float in the air – will the internal negotiations be as *principled* and will we approach them with due *consistency*?

First, it is obvious that the time is ripe for starting a serious and systematic work with the public in order to achieve the objective of forming a society, which is a convinced follower and a strong supporter of the most important process of European integration.

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Second, soon a need will appear to target those institutions and realities which, being resistant to change will obviously impede the implementation of the ENP Action Plan. Their number is not small and they are being discussed at almost all levels: unhealthy competition, faulty elections, corruption, etc. In addition, we should mention about the dysfunction and the ineffective activities of all those institutions which are called to contribute to the establishment of democracy and free market economy in the country. Though ENP AP will be a document signed by Armenia, it does not mean that all the internal players will accept it without any reservations. It has yet to pass through a phase of domestic negotiation and be internalized by all.

Neither the Armenian team negotiating with the EU, nor the RA Government is the owner and promoter of the ENP AP (the internal negotiator). The included provisions address Armenia's interests and any power supportive of these provisions should contribute their two cents to the process. In these terms, it is important to ensure an *open* and transparent process where the media and public organizations will play an essential role.

Individual and sectoral interests will always result in double standards and consequently, the common interest, i.e. the interest of Armenia, will suffer. Adopting a *principled* approach towards the implementation of the program means refusing compromises, avoiding attempts of imitation and demonstrating readiness not to give in to pressure, i.e. not preferring the interests of a smaller part of the society to the common rules. Actually, this will be the biggest challenge of the new process.

*The paper is elaborated based on the opinions passed by the participants of the discussion "The Third phase of ENP AP negotiations", which took place on May 17, 2006. The roundtable discussion was attended by independent analysts, government officials, and representatives of the international organizations.*

*The round table was organized with the support of the UK Department for International Development /DFID/.*