

EU-Armenia Mobility Partnership: the pledge for success of support initiatives



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The wheel of partnership moves faster

It is not a secret that the relations between Armenia and the European Union lately have been developing with an unprecedented pace. Perhaps one of the tangible results of this development for the Armenians will be the improved access and facilitated travel to EU member states in the coming year. This is the goal of the negotiations between Armenia and the European Union regarding the Mobility Partnership and visa facilitation. It should be noted that both Armenia and the EU are rather interested in the outcomes of the negotiations and their pace. Indeed, the Conclusions on Eastern Partnership by the Council of the European Union as of October 25, 2010, the clauses of the Joint Communication "A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood," published on May 25, 2011 by the European Commission and the European External Action Service, and the EU Council's conclusions on the European Neighbourhood Policy as of June 20, 2011 provide sufficient evidence to such a claim.

Already in the Commission's communiqué on the Eastern Partnership signed in December 2008 the core issue of negotiations on Mobility Partnership between Armenia and EU was the joint management of migration flows, which would take into account the interests of the European Union, its partners and migrants. The activities proposed within the framework of the partnership aim at developing a more beneficial environment for people's mobility and legal migration, specifically including measures such as building Armenia's capacity in migration management, raising the awareness of migrants and returnees, assisting the latter to reintegrate and providing protection. Mobility Partnership is essentially a tool for a practical dialogue and cooperation between the EU, its members and Armenia.

Political decisions and technical solutions

It should be noted that the partnership negotiations and the process of its confirmation occur in two interconnected dimensions: political and technical. Political decisions certainly prevail at the negotiations table. Unfortunately, the governments being too much concerned with the process of political decision making, at times underestimate the necessity of finding effective solutions to technical issues. Meanwhile it should be noted that a demanding approach to technical issues will not impede the fast pace of the negotiations process. Adequate care and attention to designing and implementing technical solutions will contribute to the successful negotiations. Such an approach is natural, since targeted technical initiatives are undertaken only in the result of political decisions. Moreover, the care and consistency of the Armenian government towards the technical solutions will only strengthen the country's positions at the negotiations and will contribute to increasing its reputation, which is a considerable advantage during negotiations on visa facilitation.

Challenges of the initiatives to support return and re-integration

One of the key issues of the partnership is supporting the reintegration process of Armenian returnees from EU member states. This includes development of both public and non-governmental capacities required for effectively meeting the needs of the returnees. To tackle this issue the EU has expressed readiness to provide technical assistance to Armenia within a targeted initiative. This can play a significant role in sustainable development of relevant capacities in our country. We believe that several factors are crucial to the success of such initiatives.

First, it is necessary to ensure that the initiative complies with the realities in our country and has taken into account the specificities of the migration of Armenians and the reintegration needs of the returnees. We are certain that local approaches in this regard are far more adequate than the general, clichéd "panaceas". A "McDonalds" approach to finding solutions and undertaking actions may eventually lead to wasting the resources of both the European and Armenian tax payers and to inefficient use of the window of unprecedented opportunities for our country.

Second, taking into account the current experience within the overall process of Mobility Partnership is crucial. The EU has already established partnerships with Georgia, Moldova and Cape Verde. In this regard the experience and the lessons learnt from Georgia are of particular interest, as a large number of issues both Armenia and Georgia are currently facing are quite similar. The Georgian experience shows that it is extremely important to provide a choice of possibly wide range of players involved in providing reintegration assistance. Indeed, monopoly granted to one or another organization to

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implement such an initiative and the narrow range of players involved seem to breach the very logic of the assistance scheme. At the same time it drastically decreases the level of responsibility required for proper implementation of the initiative.

Moreover, inadequate involvement of local non-governmental institutions in the implementation process seriously jeopardizes the sustainability of the system aimed at addressing reintegration needs, once the financial support of the EU is removed. Eventually, it is the state and non-governmental institutions in our countries that take the long-term responsibility for addressing these needs. Whereas, international organizations, even in case of significant experience, are usually unable to provide for the sustainability of reintegration support unless local institutions have been the ones to take ownership and play a key role in the process of implementation. At the same time it is very important to ensure the active and possibly wide involvement of the relevant state agencies of the EU member states in the implementation of the initiatives through proper distribution of roles and responsibilities.

Third, wide and comprehensive participation of the institutions active in this field both from Armenia and the EU member states in the elaboration of the initiative is another important dimension. Such an approach will allow avoiding serious challenges, which otherwise will emerge during the implementation of the initiative. Moreover, only in this case will it be possible to successfully overcome the inevitable or surprising challenges.

Finally, in the result of cooperation in a number of EU member states in the past a practice of supporting returnees from the European countries and enhancing their reintegration process has developed. Several local and international organizations are the ones who are key practitioners in this area. Including such an experience and the lessons learnt, in addition to involving the relevant institutions with adequate knowledge and expertise can become determinant for the success of the targeted initiative and the overall Mobility Partnership.

Attentive towards solutions; participatory in the process and responsible in actions

Taking into account the above-mentioned factors, it is crucial to ensure several principled and clearly feasible actions in order to develop viable warrants for the success of the initiatives in supporting the reintegration process of Armenian returnees from the EU countries and other similar targeted initiatives planned within the EU-Armenia Mobility Partnership. Firstly, officials on both Armenian and European sides responsible for the negotiations and the establishment of partnership should pay equal attention to both the political issues of the negotiation process and the need to address subsequent technical issues.

Secondly, it is necessary to enlarge the number of local institutions that participate in the development and implementation of targeted initiatives, specifically through encouraging the participation of consortiums that involve local institutions in the process of elaborating and implementing targeted initiatives. In particular, the role of relevant local NGO's should be emphasized before the implementation of the project.

Thirdly, it is necessary to ensure a clear distribution of roles and responsibilities of various European players involved in the targeted initiatives, and to secure accountability for individual outcomes of the initiatives.

Fourthly, the design of the re-integration assistance offered to returnees should be well balanced: self-employment, social re-integration (education for children) and medical assistance are equally critical dimensions. Especially medical assistance is of the utmost importance as many of the Armenian migrants face medical problems, from psychological problems to kidney failure and hemodialysis. It must be noted that the profile of the Armenian migrants differs from one member state to the other.

Fifthly, given the different profiles of the Armenian migrants a needs assessment should be developed before the start of the technical assistance intervention. In these countries the development of the technical interventions is already some time underway that can provide very useful information for the intervention in Armenia. The following elements can be considered in the needs assessment: the profile of returning Armenian migrants and their needs; medical problems specific to each target groups; the lessons learnt from the interventions in Moldova, Cape Verde and Georgia; relevant projects being implemented (or finalized) at this moment and what we can learn from them.

Finally, the target group of the technical intervention should be defined and limited. For example, the target group could consist of Armenian returnees from the EU member states. Otherwise significant and realistic risks for fraude would emerge that should be addressed carefully.

The paper is elaborated based on the opinions passed by the participants of the discussion "EU-Armenia Mobility Partnership", which took place on 28 June, 2011. The roundtable discussion was attended by independent analysts, government officials, and representatives of the international organizations. The project is financed by the European Union.