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External Democratization Efforts of the European Organizations in Armenia: Unintended Side Effects?

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Abstract:

The paper investigates the achievements and challenges of European organizations as external factors in promoting democracy-oriented reforms and democratic institution building in Post-Soviet Armenia. Several European organizations – such as Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Council of Europe (CoE), and European Union with the Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and Eastern Partnership – have already been actively engaged in the process of democratic transition in Armenia for years. There have been many achievements so far, such as constitutional and electoral reforms, however challenges still persist. Accordingly, the present paper will scrutinize the achievements and challenges of European organizations in the country. By comparing the activities, recommendations and projects implemented by these organizations, this paper explains where their projects overlap or hinder each other, and where unintended side effects occur. With exploring the possibilities and limits of external democratization, the paper gives the Armenia's perception on the work done by the European organizations.

Key Words: External democratization, European organizations, Unintended Side Effects, Deficiency of democracy promotion

I. Introduction

After the collapse of Soviet Union and the end of the socialist bloc, European organizations have been actively engaged in democracy promotion within post-Soviet countries. In some countries their activities produced faster results like in Central and Eastern European countries, in others relatively slower ones, mainly in post-Soviet states. The European organizations tend to have socialization-based or normative-based influence. Armenia is one of the former Soviet Union countries which became a member of several European organizations, such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) since 1992, the Council of Europe (CoE) since 2001 and later the EU's European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) since 2006 and Eastern Partnership (EaP) since 2009. These organizations promote democracy by recommending reforms and giving technical assistance. However, besides positive achievements based on their recommendation and assistance, also unintended side effects occur which might be regarded as negative by either the political, societal or private sector of the society. This paper explores what the unintended side effects of the European organizations are while promoting democracy in Armenia. First the paper explains what could be considered as negative side effects and then gives real examples on the Armenian case. The research is mainly based on personal interviews conducted in Armenia (as well as in Berlin) with Armenian opposition groups, politicians, NGO members and activists from 2008-2010. It gives the internal perspective of the external democratization efforts.

A. Democratic History and European Organizations in Armenia

A short historical background about Armenia's political and democratic history will make it easier to understand the situation of the Armenian political culture in the country. Armenia did not have a long democratic past, because it was under the rule of Persian, Ottoman and Russian Empires, respectively, until the beginning of the 20th century. Only in 1918, the eastern part of Armenia, which is almost the same territory of current Armenia, gained its independence from the Russian Empire. This independence lasted for only two years and these two years were not enough to establish a full-fledged democracy, although a democratically elected parliament was established and a constitution was adopted. Then

Armenia became one of the Soviet Union countries for 70 years. Under the Soviet Communist system, the level of democracy was always questioned, and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Armenia regained its independence in 1991. A couple of years before and after independence, Armenia was in conflict with Azerbaijan about the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast. The war lasted until 1994, when a cease fire was established between Armenians and Azeri. It is important to mention that Russia's influence in Armenia is very strong especially with regard to the conflict issue. Why is it important to emphasize? It is because in Armenia the dilemma between security vs. democracy is persisting (Danielian 2008). The issue of security hinders the democratization process in the country and thus affects on the effectiveness of different democracy promotion strategies that are either domestic or external.

Concerning the political developments, after independence bilateral and multilateral relations developed, and Armenia became member of European and many other international organizations. These organizations have been very active in promoting democracy in Armenia. The major part of their work consisted of recommending new reforms, monitoring the elections and strengthening the civil society.

The three European organizations, i.e. the OSCE, Council of Europe and EU with the ENP and EaP, which are the focus of current research, have their own strategies and policies towards promotion of democracy in Armenia. Each of them has various fields of activities and change their priorities according to the country's domestic development.

After independence in 1991, Armenia's membership in European organizations was crucial for its future strategic political, economic, and democratic developments. In 1992, Armenia joined the CSCE/OSCE which has also been the chief mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict's peaceful settlement process since then by the OSCE Minsk Group. In Armenia, the OSCE established an office in the capital Yerevan in February 2000. The office operates in three thematic areas: the human, economic-environmental, and politico-military dimensions. However, the OSCE Office in Yerevan does not deal with the Nagorno-Karabakh issue; rather, only the Minsk Group is in charge of this process. So this makes Armenian government even more concerned about the evaluations of the OSCE in general, and its cooperation with the OSCE becomes more important to realize the commitments made to this organization. On the other hand, the OSCE office in Yerevan helped Armenia in achieving the goals of democratic international standards and norms, gaining membership in important international institutions, such as the CoE, and preparing for further integration into Europe.

Armenia became member of the Council of Europe in 2001 and this had an impact on the domestic reform process (Conkievich 2005). The electoral and constitutional reforms were among the most important ones: the death penalty was abolished, and many democratic changes were introduced in Armenia. Unlike the OSCE, the CoE is a political organization with legally binding attributes and Armenia has obligations before this organization. However both organizations are equally supporting and providing expertise for various reforms.

The enlargement of the EU on May 1st, 2004 has brought a historical shift. It offered the opportunity for the EU and Armenia to develop an increasingly close relationship, going beyond co-operation, to involve a significant measure of economic integration, and a deepening of political cooperation (EU -Armenia Action Plan 2006). Since 2006 the European Neighborhood Policy of the EU set ambitious objectives based on commitments to shared values and effective implementation of political, economic, and institutional reforms. With the Eastern Partnership initiative the Civil Society Forum (CSF) started new phase for the Armenian civil society cooperation. By the words of the Peter Semneby, the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus, the Eastern Partnership would give the EU "better possibilities to understand the aspirations of each of EU's Eastern neighbors and will improve the possibilities to encourage regional cooperation between the countries". By means of reform, the partner countries intend to move closer to the EU. For getting new Association Agreements, the EU is having inclusiveness, differentiation, and conditionality as watchdogs by the EU (Semneby 2009). Therefore, the cooperation between both sides has been increasing with time.

It is worth to mention that during democracy assistance, each European donor has its own favored geographic region, thus pursuing varied and distinct priorities. Each country directs aid toward different projects (Youngs 2008). The Eastern European EU new member countries, such as Poland, the Czech Republic or the Baltic countries, became the advocates and active promoters of democracy in the other post Socialist countries. They started sharing their recent practical experience of democratic transition in the new neighborhood because of their external incentive, EU-related commitments, geopolitical reasoning and identity question (Jonavicius 2008). Nevertheless, the theory and praxis of external democratization, in general all over the world, has been criticized by many scholars and policy makers.

B. State of the Art

Some scholars argue that international factors influence domestic political outcomes. On the other hand, external actors are an intervening or facilitating variable and not the central causal force that brings a democratic transition (Pevehouse 2002). Levitsky and Way (2007) mention in particular two international factors, linkage and leverage, that may influence regimes in democratizing states. Linkage is related to networks of exchange and leverage occurs where democratic change is in the clear interest of influential foreign power. Similarly Schimmelfennig (2007), Vochudova

(2005), and Beichelt (2010) refer to conditionality, explaining outside actors, such as international organizations, impose conditions or incentives in return for democratic change. Kelley (2004) also considers about two different strategies: conditionality and normative pressure. However, either weak or slower actions of those factors let it be leverage or conditionality creates negative effects during democracy promotion by external actors (Kelley 2004).

The external actors have their different democracy promotion strategies and priority areas that they change accordingly. These strategies depend on their resources, democracy aid and objectives and organizational structures. They try to be more effective with respect to different domestic political situations (McDonagh 2008). It is different what each organization offers and how they offer. For instance, the incentive-based democracy promotion strategy has more explicit conditions. This carries all the information what the recipient should do and by, when and how the actions of the later will be rewarded or punished in case of compliance/non compliance, respectively. The reports incentive-based strategies are more frequent and explicit in their evaluation and assessment (McDonagh 2008).

On the other hand, assistance by socialization-based democracy promotion strategy is accompanied by more vague expectations on the part of an International Organization (IO). They usually have a fixed amount of annual financial funds regardless of a recipient's performance and the reports generally tend to have a softer, recommendatory tone (McDonagh 2008). Despite their official mandate to focus on election norms and consider the quality of elections, the assessment of the monitors also reflects their member states or donors as well as other tangential organizational norms (Kelley 2009). According to Kelley (2009), Elklit and Svensson (1997), this harms the effectiveness of future election monitoring, legitimizing undemocratic regimes, enabling government manipulation and stifle viable opposition movements. Conditionality is weak because the Western or European organizations themselves don't follow their values and don't provide effective incentives. Therefore it is very important to be consistent and practice without double standard while promoting a certain policy (Beichelt and Schimmelfennig 2010). For instance impatient and authoritative donor representatives erode people's belief in the genuine nature of democracy assistance. This creates serious legitimacy and operational problems. The external policymakers or democracy officers do not see fundamental changes in the international arena, do not take into consideration legitimacy and image problems of Western democracy assistance and are not ready to change their modus operandi (Demes 2010) It is worth to mention that "none of the European countries favored systematic use of negative conditionality as a democracy promotion instrument", although some countries cut funding to countries suffering serious deteriorations in the respect for democratic rights (Youngs 2006). Another issue was that rewards conditionality was unevenly applied.

European organizations should notice the regression of civil liberties in the country and should gradually change their democracy promotion strategies from normative persuasion to social-influence methods and even to incentive based methods to influence more the government's human rights policy (McDonagh 2008). However the European actors used to fund more work on human rights and the political dimension of democracy by allocating only limited amounts of funds for parliaments, political parties and the reform of civil-military relations. Moreover, no support was given to political exiled opposition groups. Nevertheless, all donors intended to have a better inter-connection between different areas of funding, such as human rights and political dimension of democracy (Youngs 2006). Division of labor is another problematic field because it seems that everybody is doing everything everywhere at the same time, by causing overlapping and ineffectiveness (Jonavicius 2008).

II. Unintended Side Effects in the Armenian case

This section focuses on possible negative effects of good intentions of European organizations observable in the Armenian case. These are the research results concerning unintended side effects as experienced by NGO and Think Tanks representatives as well as parliamentarians in Armenia. The results can be categorized into three groups as follows: deterioration of European image, loss of trust in European organizations, and wrong allocation of resources.

A. Deterioration of European Image

As to David Harutyunyan, the head of the Armenian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe (PACE), to a country like Armenia, the Council of Europe is known much more than the Europe itself (Markosyan 2010).

The image of the European organizations in Armenia depends on the visibility and the perception of those organizations. Also the image is related to the interpretation or misinterpretations of the European norms and values in the country. In Armenia, by implementing inconsistent policies, European organizations discredit democratic values and the image of the EU (Ishkhanyan 2010). These inconsistencies are related to Election Monitoring and protection of Human

Rights issues. If organizations don't push the government stronger to pursue human rights issues, the Armenian society would perceive that the European organizations don't value democratic standards themselves (Ayvazyan 2010). Thus, the organizations discredit the notion of democracy themselves.

Second, there is a large scale of 'reform imitation' taking place in Armenia. 'Imitation' would mean that action is taken to please European institutions by bureaucratic means and written documents but without real implementations of reforms (Kostanyan 2010; Navasardyan 2010). This is because the European organizations are satisfied by mere bureaucratic reports. Thus they themselves become the advocates of reports with no real practice and effective implementation. Moreover, the Human Rights Group of Eastern Partnership Forum of 2010 mentioned in the report that there is no need to formulate new recommendations since the previous "year's report seemed valid but not visibly applied in practice"(Working Group 1 Recommendations 18 November 2010).

Another issue is the perception of priority areas or activities of the European organizations. For example, the OSCE has many other priority areas in Armenian than just the NK conflict resolution as noted above. However, in the Armenian society the mechanism in the NK conflict by OSCE is most visible and perceived which ignores the many other priority areas related to democracy, human rights, environment and development (Bekaryan 2010). A similar recommendations problem is related to the human rights issues such as freedom of religion and freedom of homosexuals. The traditional Armenian society in general couldn't accept these two ideas easily, and for them the European organizations' main image was limited to these issues only, neglecting all the other human rights protection issues. This is also partly because of how the Armenian authorities represent and manipulate this idea among the society especially while having election campaigns either to praise or discredit the image of European organizations whenever they are intended more pro-European or pro-Russian directions.

The general image of OSCE has deteriorated and that's why, according to the Head of OSCE Division in the Foreign Ministry of Armenia, the OSCE should strengthen its effectiveness. It should reform itself to regain its principles (Mkrtchian 2008).

B. Loss of Trust in European Organizations

The perception of European organizations is very much influenced by their activities that appear either interest or value based (Kostanyan 2010; Poghosyan 2010). The Armenian interviewees think that these organizations most of the time pursue none-consistent, interest-base approaches. As it is widely argued, the EU assertively presses for the spread of its own particular model of liberal democracy for reasons of EU self-interest (Bicchi 2006; Youngs 2009; Zielonka 2006). This creates less enthusiasm for action and cooperation. There is the belief that these organizations first attract and then leave, that is at the beginning promise big support but at the end don't pursue by definite action (Martirosyan 2010). Expectations are not met when it comes to the idea of human rights issues, strong conditionality and sanctions towards the Armenian government. For instance acceptance of faulty elections and praising the elected elites by the European organizations as happened in 2008 just to push the Nagorno Karabakh conflict issue towards the direction they might prefer. This resulted in negative perception and loss of trust towards those European organizations in Armenia (Kostanyan 2010). The Elections of 2008 had no critical EU response, although they were clearly unfair (Youngs 2009). The Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe (PACE) and other institutions mainly have paid attention to democracy issue in Armenia only in case when they want to solve geopolitical problems (Postanjyan 2010). Also the opposition groups mention the negative effect of the European organizations which support the autocratic government because of geopolitical intentions (Alaverdyan 2010; Ter-Gabrielyan 2010). This hinders the democratic reforms in Armenia by strengthening the power of the current regime, and later turns and acts against the people.

If the civil society organizations of Armenia don't pressure on the European organizations, there will be no choice from the government to solve the problem. The events proves this argument: The Armenian authorities only after 3 years decided to have a common apology policy on the Armenian political prisoners and this is only after the European organizations put pressure on the Armenian government to do so. However, this was also done by the Armenian society organizations who themselves first made efforts to persuade the international community to put pressure on the Armenian authorities.

C. Wrong Allocation of Resources

In Armenia, many projects and programs take place by the European organizations without the real demand and need, and this is because there is little professional research being done (Kostanyan 2010; Poghosyan 2010). Moreover, some projects are done for a short time basis, which do not lead to enduring results. The three organizations, OSCE, CoE and EU/EaP, often have coordination problems (Bekaryan 2010). Sometimes it is not clear who should do what. For

instance many Armenian ministries are asked to be enrolled in a project, but it is not clear who and how the project should proceed which in turn creates problems also in the ministries. More than one ministry tries to compete to get the project without taking into consideration the real issues and more importantly without cooperating with others (Poghosyan 2010). Thus the working style required by the European organizations create negative effects and wrong and 'unfair' allocation of human resources and efforts in Armenia (Navasardyan 2010).

Another big issue is that the reform process as evaluated and monitored by the Armenian civil society, for instance NGOs and Think Tanks, are not taken into consideration and are not included in the future recommendations and projects (Ishkhanyan 2010; Kostanyan 2010). There is also no ongoing monitoring in the financial sector by the civil society to have some level of control on the financial expenses carried out by the Armenian government sponsored by the European organizations. These create wrong allocation of resources not only when government spends without any control, but also when money is spent on projects already done by others (Poghosyan 2010).

These are three main points concerning unintended side effects that European organizations have caused while promoting democracy in Armenia. The three groups, that are deterioration of the European image, Loss of Trust towards them, and wrong allocation of resources, are likely to be interrelated.

III. Conclusion

As we have seen, unintended negative side effects of European organizations, such as deterioration of European image, loss of trust in European organizations and wrong allocation of resources, are present in the Armenian case. These were the results of a small part of a broader research and this paper tried to give a perspective of the Armenian side. Some of the issues discussed might have been better categorized as deficiencies of European democratic promotion. To conclude, here are some recommendations that could be considered important to avoid those side effects in the future.

Related to their internal working style, European organizations should have more transparency in their projects with the Armenian government and allow civil society organizations to monitor the whole process. They should send more professional expertise to Armenia when they choose their personnel to avoid the wrong impression of negative example. Moreover, the new value-based neighborhood policy has to have considerably more respect for the ordinary citizens of ENP countries and to be less tolerant or permissive of authoritarian and façade-democratic regimes. Societies, much more than governments, should be the partners (EurActiv 2011). The civil society representatives from almost all groups demand from the European commission and partner countries to have unlimited access to the intergovernmental platform meetings. The EaP Civil Society Forum (CSF) representatives should be also included into the programming and implementation of the regional projects designed and approved within the EaP intergovernmental platforms. The representatives argue that the international assistance aimed only at governments does not bring the expected results unless they are implemented by NGOs or in combination of NGOs with governments. This perfectly fits to the objectives of multilateral process which states stronger participation of civil society to enhance oversight of public services and strengthen public confidence in them (Working Group 1 Recommendations 18 November 2010). The civil society representatives call for EU rigorous and consistent practice of conditionality towards the EaP governments. Hence, the EU and EU member states should provide financial and technical assistance to the EaP governments only if anti-corruption commitments taken by the EaP governments in relations with the EU and other international bodies have been met. (Working Group 1 Recommendations 18 November 2010)

For reforms to be successful, they must be implemented with the strongest possible involvement of society. Experience shows that no institution will ever reform itself unless pressure is applied externally (Working Group 1 Recommendations 18 November 2010). Thus civil society institutions can provide crucial input and ensure an unbiased approach to the elaboration of reform strategies. European organizations should cooperate more with the civil society organizations. The EaP Civil Society Forum is one big step towards this issue, although nothing big has been done till now (Ter-Gabrielyan 2010), and the successful results of this cooperation are still to achieve. Also, they should take into consideration the civil society organizations' monitoring results. It would be favorable to consult with the civil society concerning new projects to be implemented to avoid repetition and wrong allocation of human resources and financial capital. How much they will achieve, is a matter of time.

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