



Open Government Partnership

Independent Reporting Mechanism

Armenia

Comments Received on the First Progress Report

vlulukyan

We think that the Government should take very precise and purely measurable responsibilities. Government's responsibilities are very important in public health sphere. Tobacco use burden is destroying human being. So, we suggest our Government to take a strong mission in fighting against tobacco and much more strengthen tobacco control policy in Armenia. Particularly it is necessary to increase excise taxes on tobacco, to prohibit selling tobacco near schools, hospitals, etc. (at least 500 meter away), to prohibit displaying cigarettes at point of sale.

Armenian Public Health Union

www.publichealth.am

Abraham Artashesyan

I think that the report most of all highlights the "tuning" nature of reforms in Armenia. No reforms can be qualified as demanded. Those are the minor things never can solve the systems issues. The system tried to keep as close as possible.

Arman R. Gasparyan

Firstly, I would like to mention that the vast majority of commitments are related to taxation sphere, at least to some extent. This fact largely wrecks the value of implementation of those commitments. It would more plausible to start actual work in the field of needs assessment, putting it as a priority issue for the country, given its poor quality currently. I wouldn't go too far, suggesting delving into completely new fields, as some other commenters have already done it and besides, it seems to me that at least half of the issues put forward by the GoA were mid-range activities, at max. My argument is that being unable to introduce Mail-Armenia system, e.g., in a timely manner, which actually seems to be an unnecessary effort, as not any citizen needs an email address, but still, the country should be making an effort not to enter new fields, where it will most likely fail, but to come up with new

mechanisms to support and strengthen the fragile achievements. A Monitoring and Evaluation system could do that, not the internal audit body, obviously. At last, the anti-corruption activities are a whole new story. Since the foundation of anti-corruption strategy and the council, Armenia has been smoothly going down, instead of improving its index. Much could be written about the actual work of anti-corruption council and the utility out of it and overall, the measures Armenia has taken to "improve the situation" in that regard, but I believe that 2013 EU report on Corruption in Armenian Public Sector could shed more light on this issue for all the parties engaged.

Taxpayers Right Protection NGO

In case of certain activities or inactivity by tax officers, to define clear mechanisms and standards to discuss such cases by the Tax Authority, ensuring transparency of such activities.

To improve the mechanisms aimed at reducing informality by means of developing the mechanisms and systems of tax administration, and evaluate their quality

To make legislative specification (clarification) of concepts "obviously misstated data" and "maliciously escaped", set forth by Article 205 of the RoA Criminal Code;

To legally regulate provisions that contradict each other, bear ambiguous interpretations.

Anonymous

Within the scope of criminal cases, to define specific standards for initiating the criminal case, by excluding the practice of initiating criminal cases on the basis of discretionary decisions and the practice of requiring inappropriate clarifications from taxpayers.

Petra Story

First of all: a good written report and finally some info publicly available about Armenia. We wanted to do a collaborative project on health with an Armenian organization starting by FP7 and then now in HORIZON 2020, but we were not able to get access to any government databases and decided to do a project with another country. Armenians are smart people well known in several industries and Armenia will benefit if it will make its health related government held databases available publically e.g. via web.

Armen Ghalumyan

Too soon to assess the value of the OMG report and its impact on the improvement of key areas of good governance, such as the access to info, public participation,

accountability and technologies and innovation for transparency and accountability in Armenia.

Understandably, the report is designed to ensure enhanced civil society participation in decision-making in and improvement of the above areas. For another hand, the report will be taken more seriously by the Armenian government if OMG further works on its visibility with a view to include it in donor coordination process and ensure, that donor community, while designing new projects and/or coming up with new program priorities, put the OMG as a reference or "Means of Verification" to "measure the success" of their respective projects and activities.

Nonna Margaryan

PFCS NGO hopes that its proposal on the report will be adopted by the Government.

Alvard Gasparyan

This report pinpoints the obvious fact that an inherently corrupt system has no chances of curing itself from corruption unless there is a genuine desire amongst its top leaders to improve the system and become humble servants of their own citizens. This is about changing the core culture about civil service. And international projects, funds and expertise will continue to be wasted as long as this issue is not tackled. Why would procurement officials be interested in cutting their profits given they have the approval of their bosses? Isn't it obvious that instead they would simply play around and take advantage of any funds that Europeans and Americans would offer? I suspect that the latter might have felt the inevitable failure of these projects but they rather decided to continue their 'co-operation' for their own interests. About eight years ago I was part of a European Project which produced an e-Governance development strategy draft paper and presented to the Armenian Government. This paper contained valuable proposals based on the study of international experiences as well as field research. However, the Government never organised any proper discussions or any other actions that would attempt to make some use of this effort. I suspect this current report is going to face the same destiny.

And I would suggest that international donor agencies stop providing the Armenian Government with any sort of funds and projects in the field of e-governance. These funds only feed and legitimize the corrupt system. If the Armenian Government truly wanted to tackle corruption let it demonstrate this intention; let those useless committees and promises start showing some visible results; who is holding their hands if they wanted to be more accountable and transparent? - nobody prevents them from involving citizen groups in their decision-making processes. They could

do this even with a very basic website - just make sure somebody collects citizens's comments and gives proper responses. Why SME's are still suffering from those hostile visits of tax inspectors? The stories I hear are just horrendous as if they are the enemies of their own economy and people. Why not alleviate SME's from them and allow them to work freely and create jobs in this country? Let them just send their tax reports and if they appear fraudulent then make the visits to clarify things.... And what is the purpose of that Mail-Armenia System?.... How many times in our lifetime we need or we want to hear from government and why should we bother to open and check those 'special' mail boxes? Such minor projects perhaps simply intend to imitate as if the Govt is doing some effort so to distract our attention from the important activities potent to create true accountability and transparency within the government. Technologies by themselves can do very little if anything; we need competences to instil them with meanings and first of all we need genuine interest from the top Govt in using them against corruption. And this genuine interest can be proven only by specific actions that can be measured and evaluated by the public.

And thus this Open Government Partnership seems to be yet another way of covering up and perhaps legitimising the incompetent and corrupt Armenian Government. I sense this might be more about politics rather than generating true changes in this Govt. And based on the recommendations of this report, perhaps some more precious funds would be wasted on standardizing government websites, or analysing the faults of the procurement operations, or organising some trainings and conferences....in the end, nothing significant will happen because there is no genuine will. And yes, the prospects of this society and economy will become even dire...