



Eurasia Partnership Foundation

2020-2023 Strategy

June 2019

Contents

Introduction and Methodology	3
Acknowledgements	4
Background: Today’s Developments in Armenia	4
EPF’s Strategic Directions for 2020-2023	5
1. Civil Society Development	5
2. Human Rights	9
3. Good Governance: Public Administration Reform, Conflict of Interest policies, Participatory Democracy and Local Governance	12
4. Media, Civic Journalism, Innovation and Elements of E-governance	15
5. EU - Armenia Dialogue	17
6. Cross-Border Dialogue	19
7. Environmental Protection for Sustainable Development	21
8. Newer Avenues: Judicial Reform and Linking Research to Reform	22
9. Grant Making and Consortium Management	22
10. Publications and Video Production as Parts of Informal Education	23
11. Social Entrepreneurship, Talent Management, etc.	24

Introduction and Methodology

Eurasia Partnership Foundation (EPF) hereby presents its program implementation and general operating plans in Armenia for 2020 - 2023. EPF's programs seek to promote democracy, development and freedoms in Armenia and in the region by supporting local civil society. EPF's mission is focused on enabling civil society actors to effect change and to effectively participate in governance of their communities and of the state.

EPF is the legacy institution of Eurasia Foundation (EF) in the South Caucasus. EF was created in 1992 with support from the U.S. government to provide funding for development at the grassroots level in the countries of the former Soviet Union, and is a recognized leader in the field of grants and program administration for civil society. Established in 2007, EPF Armenia is an independent Foundation, registered in Armenia, with close network ties and elements of joint policies, values, Board members and programming with its counterparts: Europe Foundation in Tbilisi, as well as EPF Azerbaijan. EPF is a member of EF network which covers all the states of Eastern Partnership, as well as Central Asia.

Our programs in 2020-2023 seek to continue the work of previous years and to address new issues in advancing the reform agenda in Armenia towards empowering people and communities for positive transformation; promoting civil society and civic participation; community empowerment and democracy; gender and minority rights; youth leadership; freedom of expression, media literacy and critical thinking; transparency; as well as cross-border ties and dialogue between the conflicting societies in the neighborhood.

As three of the USAID-supported 5-year-long projects that EPF is engaged in come to an end in 2019, EPF seeks support or partial support for the implementation of this strategy. EPF's support plans include continued cooperation with EU, particularly for its cross-border agenda; work with UK; USAID; the Netherlands; SIDA and others as current or prospective donors.

The strategy is presented in the form of chapters which reflect EPF's programmatic directions and demonstrate, in general lines, what has been done and what are the 2020-2023 plans.

Some of EPF's impact of previous years is demonstrated within the chapters, related to each programmatic direction; in general, the impact can be characterized as building civic space via addressing specific issues which either are not being addressed sufficiently (such as religious tolerance or addressing the culture of violence) or in which EPF is a recognized leader (such as consortia set up and CSO development; or conflict transformation work).

In addition to having very clear niches in the various areas of Armenia's development paradigm, EPF's specific methodologies are reflected in the below chapters, in explanations on the way it works. Many types of work that EPF does are also done by other agencies, local and international. However, EPF's approach is usually *different* than that of other agencies. EPF is a local agency which is there to stay, so it can have a longer-term approach than international agents which leave the country after their project is over. Also, EPF has developed a unique culture of creative and enthusiastic work, which it transfers from its employees to partners and beneficiaries and which helps it achieving results where others may not advance sufficiently.

In brief, EPF's methods include the following know-how:

- Specific and successful means for facilitation and alliance-building with the actors who would not otherwise cooperate.
- Focus on critical thinking.
- Working on the 'full circle': from policies to their implementation, from addressing the central government to empowering the grassroots; from reforming institutions and informal education to fixing the changes in attitudes and behaviors of the beneficiaries;
- Combining research and implementation (being a 'think and do tank').

- Promoting civil society-government dialogue.
- A focus on anti-corruption as a major value.
- Grant-making as a tool of empowerment and partnership.
- Treating civil society in an enlarged sense, including CSOs and the movements; the media; the academia; socially conscious businesses and social enterprises; the minority groups; etc.
- Engaging beneficiaries for a long term, and building their institutional as well as issue-based project implementation capacities.
- Cross-fertilization of the partners' and beneficiaries' capacities via building networks among those who would not otherwise meet.
- Fostering innovation and creativity.
- Teaching via practice: EPF's tenet is that best professionals in their fields should learn being teachers and trainers as well, and EPF's training programs and Schools are based on imparting a tightly interwoven mix of knowledge and practical skills.
- Institutional development (management, including financial, governance, administration, including reporting, internal communication and talent management) is fun and creative, rather than a tedious work, and is intimately related to the projects' having effective and lasting results.
- EPF partners, grantees and beneficiaries should not only implement projects but also develop institutionally.
- Making human rights, gender and minority issues, and international development values in general a core of its operation.
- Cross-fertilization of programmatic directions to increase impact, such as human rights based approach to development; the human rights and conflict transformation nexus; engagement of partner local civil society into the cross-border work; local governance participation and media literacy education for the regional youth; etc.
- The culture of gender equality is mainstreamed throughout all programming of EPF, as well as in some cases and projects is being addressed directly (e.g. rights of minority children, etc.).
- Apply your preaching to yourself: avoid stereotypes in anything; think creatively; introduce innovations in your daily work; pay equal attention to the process and the results; aim at long-term impact; fish out the externalities and unexpected results; capitalize on positive results; rely on partnerships, networks and collaborations for a multiplier effect and to achieve results similar to the economies of scale; reflect, monitor and evaluate; change as needed.

Acknowledgements

EPF is thankful to all its donors and collaborators, which help it accomplishing its aims. We apologize for not mentioning all of them and their roles in full detail in this paper, for the purposes of keeping the text relatively succinct. Their roles are fully recognized and presented in detail in individual programmatic and other papers.

Background: Today's Developments in Armenia

The Velvet Revolution that took place in Armenia in April-May 2018 caught the international community by surprise. It took place in a semi-authoritarian country on a downward spiral towards more authoritarianism, a country which has been poor and increasingly dependent on its patron - Russia - which itself is accelerating in its slide towards pure authoritarianism, and can be considered as one of the global leaders in the policies of closing the civic space. Nothing before that revolution helped to predict the way it would happen. It could not have been predicted that the revolution would be peaceful and victorious. The new government is in place only for a year now, and it is yet to be seen if it will be able to implement the excruciatingly difficult plan of reforms needed, in the situation of instability and high expectations of

the population. However, this revolution - or its first stage - is a very interesting case which helps understand how the civil society build-up and international assistance should work in order to achieve a positive change of a historical dimension.

The revolutionary movement, under the leadership of Nikol Pashinyan and his small opposition party, as well as a few civic disobedience groups, and with the support of a very significant part of the population, put forward several values, in the form of slogans or actions, that strikingly resemble a significant part of the value list of the civil society and of the international development paradigm. These values were: non-violence, non-violent civil disobedience and freedom of assembly; the power of civil society; the power of youth and students; transparency; free media; decentralization; solidarity; independent action; anti-corruption; rule of law; and human rights.

Among the strongest contributing factors behind the massive public protests resulting in peaceful change of power in Armenia were systemic corruption and oligarchic governance structure intertwined with an inefficient law enforcement and non-independent judiciary. Hence, the public trust towards state institutions, including the law enforcement and judiciary, was traditionally low.

What could be the causes for such an intermediary victory of the global civic values in a country which, while struggling between these values and the fall into the reaction, could not claim, in any area of its development, a significant progress? Undoubtedly, the decades-long international development assistance, usually channeled both to the state system as well as to the civil society (including free media), has played a significant role in that. It was thanks to this assistance that the new technologies developed in Armenia, and a major part of the population engaged in internet and ended up in the social media in recent years. It was thanks to this aid that some elements of the governmental transparency and e-government structures were built, such as the e-draft website which publishes all the draft laws for public discussion. Most importantly, it was this support that allowed for the appearance of a group of vibrant, more or less sustainable NGOs, CSOs and public movements, which can be divided into two groups: ‘issue-based’, addressing human rights, elections, violations in the army, environment, etc., as well as ‘generalists-think and do tanks’, working on a wide variety of issues, such as EPF. After the Velvet Revolution, there is a unique window of opportunity to fill in the gaps in various areas of social, economic, political and cultural life of the society.

EPF’s Strategic Directions for 2020-2023

1. Civil Society Development

EPF uses innovative approaches to build institutional capacity of CSOs. During 2015-2019, through [CSO DePo: CSO Development Program](#), implemented with USAID support, more than 300 CSOs throughout Armenia received assistance either through participation in the EPF-run [CSO Management School](#), small grants support to improve their capacities and build systems and processes for other CSOs (become multipliers), or through receiving consultation with [The Capacity Enhancement Tool](#) developed by EPF, which introduces a systemic review of the organization’s structures, availability of different policies and systems, the role of each component, such as communications, human resources, governance, administration, marketing, financial management, etc. EPF also manages the [hkdepo Portal](#) which provides necessary resources for CSOs – such as grant and training opportunities, expert and consultancy contacts, news, research and development resources, database of CSOs etc. Through EU supported Bridge4CSOs program (2017-2019) EPF and Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) work on creating mechanisms for bridging technical expertise and good will for long-term development of Armenia’s CSOs. EPF uses its CSO training and development expertise to organize more than 15 thematic (‘horizontal’ issue-based) trainings for clusters of CSOs (working on youth, creative industries, education, environment, social enterprise, gender and other issues), and, most significantly, pioneering the

establishment and launch of a Certificate (non-degree) Program in Non-Profit Management in the American University of Armenia with around 35 graduates taking the course in 2019.

A need for a set of new capacities for CSOs emerge in light of the current context of post-revolution dynamics, when a significant shift in politics, priorities and the operating environment takes place, and challenges faced by CSOs are changing in Armenia. CSOs need to develop into innovative actors, supporting the reform processes, supporting newly formed and more democratic state agencies, but also providing strong oversight, watchdogging and critical thinking.

- *CSO-Government cooperation*

After the [Velvet Revolution](#) it became obvious that there is an enormous amount of work to be done both in terms of various sectoral reforms, such as anti-corruption, decentralization, higher education and others, as well as the institutional reform of the whole system of governance. The revolution has also revealed that there is a strong necessity to maximize the engagement of the quality civil society in the reform implementation process. The newly appointed government has been working under extreme pressure due to several factors: firstly, the constitutional crisis related to the judiciary; secondly, the government has set ambitious benchmarks promising fast reforms; finally, many from the newly appointed high-ranking officials have little experience of working in state institutions and even in people management as such. It is clear that the need for more professional involvement is crucial to make the results of the revolution visible and tangible. New officials are mostly far from duplicating the old practices, particularly the corrupt and non-transparent style of governance.

There exists a window of opportunity to embark upon forming the new governance culture that is based on transparency and accountability and is implemented in accordance with the principles of participatory democracy, a major value of the Velvet Revolution. Lack of experience and/or ‘path dependency’—when the old practices affect the newcomers in the government offices, - sometimes affect their desire to develop good practices, which is visible at least in the cases of the lack of sufficient communication with the society. One of the recent cases was the announcement of the reform in the structure of the government, according to which several ministries were united. Regardless of the correctness of the decision and the quality of the expertise used while designing the new structure of the government, the absence of any kind of public discussions and consultations on this extremely important topic before the announcement of the plans illustrates the possible pitfalls in the reform path and underlines the strong necessity of the activities proposed by the current project. Another important development that took place recently was the announcement about the establishment of public councils for each ministry. This decision illustrates the willingness of the government to effectively communicate with the society. However, the experience from the previous times demonstrates that these councils are not effective since they have no mandate, facilitation capacities, strategies and well defined functions. There is a strong need to redesign and restructure some of the councils adjacent to the new and reforming ministries.

In light of the above, the need to establish effectively working institutional connections between the government and civil society becomes a top priority. There is a strong need to assess and structure the needs, priorities and expertise of the new authorities and the civil society, and see how these two can be best interconnected. It is crucial to use the post-revolutionary momentum for forming effective tradition of cooperation between the decision and opinion makers and to establish institutional mechanisms for full utilization of the cooperation potential between these two actors.

From immediately after the Revolution, EPF embarked upon organizing events and discussions which built EPF’s and other actors’ expertise in this field. In August 2018 [a large-scale consultation was organized](#), where CSO leaders and government members discussed together these issues and topical priorities. Afterwards, several discussions and consultations took place between EPF and the government agencies, which were reflected in [summary documents](#). Finally, with the support of Black Sea Trust

(BST), from April 2019 EPF embarked upon a small-scale project on addressing the culture of violence via the capacities of civil society to help the state agencies dealing with education, defense, police, social issues, etc. to start changing their policies to reduce societal violence. This topic is at the forefront of the government's attention, and after the end of the BST pilot project, additional support will be needed for EPF to continue on working on this.

The post-revolutionary developments demonstrated that the government agencies need a big number of services, which CSOs can provide. There are resources available for CSO-led programs and services, and working with the government more constructively will help CSOs generate additional resources through a new line of service provision. For this to work smoothly, CSOs need in-depth knowledge on how Armenia is governed, what mechanisms of working with the government exist, and how to provide quality services to support public reforms and state services and other state structures.

On a different note, the internal management remains among the most urgent needs of the government. Armenian CSOs often have stronger management capacities and skills that can be shared with state agencies and their staff, particularly on program management, increased efficiency and quality of day-to-day operations, communication systems, reporting and accountability, fair and corruption-free procurement management, fundraising, understanding of democratic processes and value systems, cross-agency cooperation, and others.

There is an emerging need to professionally facilitate this mutually beneficial cooperation, i.e. strengthening the profile of CSOs as service providers and creating platforms for facilitating this transfer of expertise of CSOs. This can be facilitated via intensive capacity building, consultancies, CSO schools, CSO-government networking events, joint participation in program design, experience exchange, as well as via advocating for government allocations to CSOs and otherwise preparing the state and CSOs for effective CSO cooperation.

- *CSOs as critical thinking leaders*

CSO leaders need state-of-the-art knowledge in decision making, critical thinking, and other such skills in order to be able to realistically select the targets and beneficiaries and work in such a way as to achieve the impact in advocacy rather than to merely spend resources with no visible result or selecting wrong targets. Critical thinking capacity of CSOs is vital for differentiating progress and development-oriented programs and strategies from those with hidden agendas, often promoting retrograde values and exploitation of CSOs' power to affect the minds of youth and other constituencies.

EPF promotes critical thinking skills for many years now, engaging CSOs, media and social media professionals, and youth in its [Critical Thinking and Conflict Transformation](#) Schools. EPF has published a manual on critical thinking—the first ever such publication in Armenian, and has developed several video presentations on this topic. EPF's work is focused on helping civil society orientate in the information 'hurricane'; analyze media and other complex texts and discern disinformation; counteract the mythology, stereotypes, misogynic, radical nationalist or other anti-tolerant information in the public discourse and/or in the textbooks and teaching in the schools and universities. Media literacy and investigative journalism skills are also a part of EPF's curriculum. This strategic line helps civil society enhance its role as the drivers of positive participatory transformations and correctly select targets for engagement, as opposed to being influenced by indirect agendas in external and internal rhetoric, often driven by political purposes of narrow circles or counter-constructive influences. EPF plans to continue the periodic 3-day long Critical Thinking Schools and Conflict Transformation Schools, each at least one per annum (see also the chapter on cross-border work).

- *CSOs as global players*

The above mentioned needs are intrinsically linked to the need for CSOs to be able to have international remit, i.e. to cooperate with international advocacy issues and platforms, as well as to rely on international support, including that of the state and intergovernmental actors which support reforms in Armenia, while advancing causes important for Armenia's development.

There is a need to develop a course for CSO leaders and civil society movements on the international frameworks that Armenia is engaged in: Armenia's international obligations, the international development paradigm, how to build successful local and international advocacy networks. CSOs have become strong players in Armenia, but they often lack the connection with international development trends and play little role in bridging Armenia with global development tendencies. There is a need to educate CSOs on international development agencies and trends (WB, UN, EBRD, etc.), and on which are Armenia's major commitments and memberships (CEPA, World Trade Organization, SDG, AELO, the Bologna process, etc.). This will enable effective collaboration of CSOs with international agencies and organizations. This effort can be supported by global networks of Armenians and non-Armenians: pools of experts formed around specific topics such as environmental protection, industrial innovations, etc. The experts can contribute to policy formation and act as observers of reform processes in Armenia. The objective of these activities will be the implementation of global projects locally, as well as creating opportunities for Armenia-based organizations to work and cooperate with diaspora-based organizations and partners. A strategic aim that EPF entertains is to develop a Master's degree course on International Development with one of the Armenia-based universities.

For a long time now EPF has promoted visits of CSOs, particularly those from the regions, to the offices of intergovernmental organizations and Embassies, particularly those that fund the CSO work, to familiarize themselves with the ways these organizations work. This has proven to be very useful and has generated praise both from the CSOs and the target offices. Since newer CSOs and public groups become active in Armenia on a daily basis, this work needs to be continued as well.

In recent years, EPF has advanced [trainings](#) on developing shadow reports and comments to the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) on Armenia. We have addressed such issues as: non-discrimination, freedom of religion and belief, economic, social and cultural rights, rights of the child. This work needs continuing so that more actors in Armenia are capable of presenting to the international community their perceptions and the evidence on the situation with Armenia's international obligations (see also the chapter on [Human Rights](#)).

- *Legal literacy for CSOs*

EPF plans to increase the legal and political literacy levels of a significant number of CSOs for their effective engagement in political-policy processes and for advancement of reforms at local (community) levels and strong advocacy at national level. During the five years of the CSO DePo program EPF and consortium partners made considerable efforts towards internal capacity building of CSOs, and now there is sufficient ground for targeting CSOs' capacity as reform and advocacy actors: this includes legal literacy and policy development strong competencies. Most CSOs (except for a few which exercise advanced advocacy) are not aware of Armenian legislation regarding both basic laws such as the Labor Code, the Law on Public Organizations, etc., and specific legislation regarding their fields of activities such as the Law on the Rights of the Child, the Law on the Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities, the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, etc. There is a need to sensitize CSOs on the procedure and peculiarities of drafting laws in Armenia, and/or initiating legislative changes, and how they can be engaged in these processes. There is also a need in introducing CSOs to the new governance structure of Armenia, new in two senses: a) after the Constitutional changes and b) after the Velvet Revolution. This should also include practical visits to the governance institutions, discussions, etc.

- *Youth and Social Innovation*

EPF mainstreams youth participation in democracy, youth engagement and empowerment through a variety of programs, such as the signature [YouthBank](#) project, implemented since 2007 – a project that helps young people from rural communities learn to identify local development challenges, generate a great amount of youth-led initiatives, and manage projects and resources in a transparent and accountable manner. EPF has successfully applied the YouthBank methodology in various contexts such as confidence building, conflict resolution, environmental protection, arts and culture promotion, civic engagement, community improvement, participation in local decision making, youth and women empowerment, tolerance and antidiscrimination, protecting the rights of minorities, building up youth-led small businesses, etc. EPF plans creating more opportunities for increased environmental awareness, social and economic activity for young men and women in the rural and remote communities of Armenia through programs that boost social entrepreneurship, local community-level philanthropy, environmental activism, business and enterprise management, employment and career skills. EPF’s youth work usually contributes to building employment and citizenship skills: as young people become aware of the environmental and community-level issues and opportunities to resolve these, they become capable of making decisions equipped with proper skills and education, information and mentoring, and demonstrate excellent program management and problem solving skills. EPF’s recent work has addressed also support to [small business development](#) and [youth-led entrepreneurship](#).

In addition to this, EPF has created a network of youth citizen journalism and local governance participation hubs called Information Houses ([InfoTuns](#)) operating in the regions of Armenia. See more on this in the Media and Good Governance chapters.

EPF plans to continue designing innovative and fresh approaches for youth, mainstreaming them in most program directions. Teaching critical and independent thinking and creating opportunities for youth to proactively solve problems, to initiate and manage transformation, break political, economic and social exclusion - is another way to nurture generation able to serve the democratic development of the country.

2. Human Rights

Paradigm of Transformative Change lies at the core of EPF’s Human Rights (HR) program: EPF works on changing the structural causes of intolerance, violence and discrimination, as well as the attitudes and behavior of actors. Critical thinking methodology – deconstructing stereotypes, opening up tabooed discussions, changing imposed narratives and perceptions, challenging the notion of ‘the other’ – is a key to addressing issues of minority rights, non-discrimination and freedom of expression, areas which are at the foundation of EPF’s Human Rights programming.

Thinking and conceptualizing behind each project is based on EPF’s conviction that contextual, cultural and political drivers of human rights violations should be addressed in the first place. Thoughtful study of a problem, close cooperation with all counterparts and beneficiaries, looking for out-of-box solutions are some of the instruments EPF applies while designing and implementing projects.

- *Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB) and Anti-Discrimination*

In the area of FoRB, EPF works in different fronts to support religious tolerance in Armenia. During the past years, EPF succeeded in policy advocacy to suspend the adoption of the new discriminatory Draft Law on Religious Organizations. It initiated dialogue with the government, involved and worked with the Ombudsman to go for an opinion about the Draft to OSCE ODIHR, shared its concerns with the international community and had the Draft suspended after ODIHR developed an opinion. With its key events such as Media Award Ceremonies and Annual FoRB international Conferences (the last one attended by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan), EPF touches upon and raises awareness on issues such as

ForB and gender equality, interreligious dialogue as a tool for conflict transformation, issues of education, etc. EPF has received recognition by smaller religious denominations for engaging them in a respectful and constructive dialogue with each other as well as, on an equal footing, with the Armenian Apostolic Church. EPF is the lead organization in Armenia which has been working on religious tolerance in such a strategic and determined way for several years.

EPF has been a key civil society organization involved in development of the draft law on non-discrimination (the Law of the Republic of Armenia “On Equality”) together with the Ministry of Justice and facilitating civil society dialogue with the government around adoption of the law. Currently, EPF advocates for the adoption of the law but after several amendments only. Its main concern and advocacy efforts are now aimed at establishing an independent Equality Body adjunct to the Parliament to supervise the implementation of the Law and to make the Law effective. For this purpose, EPF creates platforms for dialogues between CSOs and other stakeholders, initiates discussions with all factions at the Parliament, with relevant Government institutions and other interested parties.

This work will continue on, and concrete actions will be determined depending on the pace of the reform. Ideally, EPF also aims at establishing Conflict Prevention and Resolution Units in the regions of Armenia. Such Units will build periodically (preferably weekly) meeting networks from the representative of the regional government (marz), local authorities, health professional, social worker, police representative, and local NGOs specializing in social and violence prevention issues, to discuss the cases that have come to their attention and design actions accordingly, and work on prevention of domestic violence and acts of discrimination. This will also contribute to judicial reform via helping decreasing the caseload of judges; this will also contribute to better education of state agencies, particularly the police, how to address domestic violence and discrimination.

- *Rights of the Child and Gender Equality*

Within its ForB-related activities, child rights have always been a major part of EPF’s HR work. In a number of recommendations to various institutions, EPF addresses the issues of families and children who have experienced problems of domestic violence, discrimination, etc. In particular, through research and evidence-based advocacy, EPF tries to address the issues of education of the minority children, to raise awareness on gender equality, child rights and harmful practices such as early marriages among certain national minority communities, and to implement actions aimed at empowering girls to exercise their rights and practice competencies and skills.

- *Bullying and Cyber-Bullying*

Bullying, including cyber-bullying, are increasingly revealed as major issues affecting the psychology, social skills and career opportunities of individuals and the capacities of societies to develop. The Armenian state policies of the years before the Revolution, such as the Human Rights Action Plan or the Strategy on the Protection of the Rights of the Child (2013-2016) have been focusing on preventing violence against children in very general terms; no specification of bullying on the policy level can be found anywhere. Some part on violence against children is covered by the police. There are almost no reports or data on the cases of bullying in schools, whereas the experience of parents and former pupils demonstrates that it is widespread. It appears that bullying is not a distinct category, state agencies are working based on referral mechanisms, and no holistic approach on the issue is in place. Meanwhile, as ‘Young Voices’ study - inspired and conducted in Armenia with the support of [Save the Children Sweden](#) - demonstrates, 84% of respondent children consider that greater efforts must be exerted in Armenia to prevent bullying, and 43% have witnessed bullying at school at least 1-5 times.

To contribute to better understanding of root causes of bullying among children and adolescents in Armenia, including cyber-bullying, and to establish a correct methodological path towards an effective policy for proactively addressing and reducing the cases of bullying, particularly in schools, EPF plans to study the root causes of the problem and establish a methodological path to counter bullying practices in Armenia. EPF will conduct a qualitative research on bullying and behavioral practices in Armenian schools to identify typical cases and forms of bullying in Armenia, combined with desk research to study relevant materials from Armenia, Russia, some European countries, and successful policy and programmatic practices to counter bullying, in cooperation with other local and international actors. EPF plans to develop an Armenian-language Toolkit which will feature a set of behavioral and communication instruments based on concrete findings of the research and analysis of qualitative data and basic legal documents and information about institutions and/or organizations where children and adolescents can apply to for protection. EPF will pilot the Toolkit in 5 selected communities of Armenia for at least 100 pupils (60 boys, 40 girls) of 7-10 grades in cooperation with its regional partners, also using the facilities of [InfoHouses](#). EPF will also hold a number of key stakeholder discussions, including with teachers, where findings and recommendations of the studies and the Toolkit will be presented and discussed. Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, UNICEF, Save the Children, World Vision, DVV are among the key stakeholders EPF will be working with in the course of the project. The National Security Council has expressed its support for EPF's work on this in particular, as well as on all of EPF's work on the culture of violence. By the end of the project a policy recommendation paper will be developed and presented to the Government, Parliament, and other stakeholders, paving the way for deep and extensive institutional reforms in this area.

- *Hazing in the Army*

Despite the government's limited attempts to improve the situation, according to independent sources, hazing is still widespread in today's Armenian military. As a result of hazing, physical and psychological abuse and other forms of violence dozens of young people are annually maimed or dying under non-combat conditions in the armed forces. Though the issue became bold due to publications in the press and social networks, [Army in Reality](#) activist group and few watchdog CSOs, the action is often rather reactive and post-factum. This project proposed by EPF plans to address the issue in a proactive and preventive manner, to contribute to reducing the number of abuses and deaths under non-combat conditions in the Armenian military by improving future conscripts' ability to employ soft behavioral and communication skills. To pilot the program, we are focusing on Goris town and 4 neighboring rural communities in Syunik region of Armenia, and Ijevan town and four neighboring communities in Tavush region. Both regions are borderline and most affected by conflict. The project will be implemented in cooperation with Goris based Goris Press Club and Ijevan based Northern Branch of EPF. The issue of hazing is not confined to Armenia and is a universal problem, with commonalties typical for post-Soviet states; therefore the project results will introduce a replicable methodology for adopting in other contexts in various countries. This project, which will include studies and trainings on how to counter aggressive behavior and how to avoid being aggressive, bodes well with the project on bullying (see above), and is again welcomed by the National Security Council. At the same time, it has to be done with caution, since the Army is very sensitive to this issue; also it can be used by counter-constructive forces to attack EPF, its partners, and civil society work in general. However, EPF is capable in addressing this issue constructively in cooperation with the state.

- *General Human Rights Work*

In its human rights work, EPF provides recommendations and takes part in major human rights meetings, conferences and events, such as the discussions on Human Rights Action Plan, Universal Periodic Review, etc. EPF prepares alternative reports to UN Committee on Economic, Social and

Cultural Rights (CESCR) and Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on a number of issues, including the right to enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, the right to adequate standard of living, labor rights, as well as the rights of ethnic/religious minority children. EPF is also actively involved in the process of shaping the human rights policies of Armenia through other initiatives. Particularly, EPF is continually contributing to baseline Human Rights report within the initiative launched by the EU Delegation in Armenia for ongoing monitoring of ENP and GSP+ agreements, with a particular focus on rights of religious minorities, children and non-discrimination issues. To further promote its work aimed at raising tolerance and increasing the level of human rights protection in the country, EPF plans to further research and continue its work with regard to human rights and local governance, human rights and gender equality in the context of Armenian culture, human rights and conflict transformation, researching on the foundations of democracy in the context of Christianity, etc.

3. Good Governance: Public Administration Reform, Conflict of Interest policies, Participatory Democracy and Local Governance

After the Velvet Revolution the new authorities of Armenia have faced a difficult situation. The governance system that was designed specifically for the previous ruling party and Serj Sargsyan personally became an obstacle for effective government after the Revolution. The artificially expanded state apparatus and the post-Soviet tradition of state work have contributed to a heavy, inflexible and non-transparent governance system with various internal conflicts, red tape and obstacles that are slowing the reform processes down. In some cases, it is clear that many aspects of the governance system have been designed to help its beneficiaries in their corruption and money-laundering schemes rather than in order to serve the public.

One of the top priorities of the reform agenda is the Public Administration Reform (PAR) that should ensure properly working public participation mechanisms, evidence based, transparent and accountable decision-making, strong cross-sectoral communication, empowering of mid-level bureaucracy and delegation of decision making from top management to the next levels of governance. This reform in its wider sense should address the issue of decentralization of authority and resources from the central level to local self-government bodies; this will ensure better management of public finances and enhance the quality of public services that are fundamental for PAR. It is obvious that this is a complex reform which should address legislative and institutional gaps, as well as focus on building the capacities of the staff of state institutions and raise public awareness about the reform and participatory mechanisms with an aim to empower citizens to involve in government process.

- *Local Governance*

EPF has been working on increasing civic engagement and oversight in local governance reforms for many years. Since 2014 it is implementing Civic Engagement in Local Governance (CELoG) 5-year program in a consortium led by Communities' Finance Officers Association. The scope of EPF's engagement is wide and diverse and includes ensuring collective decision making at local level involving wider public in policy-making processes. EPF has been engaged in capacity building activities for Local Governance representatives, supporting community initiatives to address community issues, providing evidence for informed decision-making. Participatory democracy is promoted through various tools and methods such as supporting bottom-up initiatives to provide public opinion based recommendations for effective community consolidation, engaging youth and mobilizing local resources with various means such as YouthBanks, [InfoTun Network](#), small grants to NGOs, [Mardamej Social Innovation Camps](#), Schools of Local Democracy, etc. (see more on this in the chapter on Media).

In the CELoG consortium, EPF is also charged with the consortium building and improvement of management skills of partner organizations; enhancement of consortium members' communication and grant management skills; establishment of internal and external communication mechanisms; moderation of the public strategy development process; and the development of training materials focused on decentralization reform.

To support the decentralization reform declared by the old government, which is being continued by the new government, and lessons learned from the community consolidation cases, EPF will organize capacity building trainings for LG staff with particular stress on external communication, including timely and targeted communication with the public on the issues of their concerns, reform process, its objectives, etc.

An important area that EPF has identified as a priority in local democracy development is human rights based management approach, which includes wider introduction of non-discrimination policy in decision-making processes and gender equality in all aspects of local governance. EPF's experience on working with the LG representatives shows that there is still demand to provide LG staff with the skills and knowledge how to engage all segments of the society in local decision-making without any exclusion based on gender, age, nationality, etc.

The communities in Armenia possess underestimated and underused capacity and resources that can be directed to local issues. During the last 5 years, EPF has initiated a series of small scale projects to mobilize local resources and engage citizens for the economic, social, and cultural development of communities in Armenia. EPF will continue to promote participation in local affairs through engagement of its various networks such as InfoTuns, YouthBanks, etc., and will promote bottom-up civic initiatives by providing small-scale grants to initiative groups.

Finally, in order to ensure evidence-based decision-making while implementing decentralization reforms, EPF will initiate collection of public opinion and feedback on decentralization reforms that are currently being implemented by the new government. There are various forms of public deliberation and consultations that are usually underused by state and local authorities due to lack of resources, time and capacity. However, in year 2017-2018 EPF in cooperation with its partners introduced and successfully conducted a series of town-hall meetings on consolidation reforms and submitted recommendations to the central authorities in a short time-frame.

- *Anti-corruption and Conflict of interest (CoI)*

Another priority to address in the reform process of public administration is the Conflict of Interest (CoI) regulation. CoI regulation is an integral part of PAR. For many years various international institutions, such as OECD, UN, CoE and others have recommended Armenia to regulate CoI on legislative level, be that a separate law on CoI or regulations incorporated in the Law on Public Service.

Being an integral part of anti-corruption reform, it is at the same time one of the most overlooked parts of Armenia's reform agenda. Corruption in public service can have a variety of forms. Corruption based on manipulations with tenders is quite well-known. What is not being sufficiently addressed, however, is CoI, which ranges from using public property (such as cars) for personal purposes, to employing relatives under one's own command, to office romance between the boss and the employee, to setting up artificial structures based on cronyism and providing them with public means, to joint forging of documents, to nepotism, etc.

Addressing CoI creatively and radically is crucially important for a small country like Armenia, where often it is impossible to avoid employing close relatives in public offices, and where 'everybody knows everybody'. Not only the clear cases of CoI are not being addressed sufficiently, also there is a very visible lack of understanding of the concept of *perceived CoI*. This results in a certain type of 'mental

corruption’: the incapacity to criticize one’s relative lowers the effectiveness of work; the low quality work becomes accepted as a ‘business as usual’; those who watch it, in the culture of lack of means to address CoI, become demotivated and their effectiveness goes down as well. Finally, the society loses faith and trust in change and change makers and in the governance in general.

Using the momentum of post-revolutionary wave of reforms and based on public trust towards the new authorities, legislative, institutional, attitudinal and behavioral changes are necessary in this direction. The culture of CoI should be addressed seriously in Armenia.

In 2012 EPF studied the experience of Moldova, Georgia and Czech Republic on CoI policies and developed a manual “How to live in Armenia and avoid corruption”. The manual introduces the typology of corruption and CoI; corruption prevention tools; situations of corruption and CoI risks; and behavioral models in these situations. In 2013-2014 EPF implemented an EU-supported project jointly with Transparency International Armenia and Moldovan, Ukrainian and Polish CSOs aimed at studying the legal and practical levels of CoI regulations in these countries; and the level of understanding among public servants on national and local levels. This was groundbreaking research, since beforehand Armenian state institutions refused participating in such studies, conducted by independent organizations. The research demonstrated that there is a significant lack of knowledge and awareness among public servants both on the essence of CoI and the mechanisms of its regulation.

EPF will ensure that CSOs are involved in the process of development of the legislation of CoI; the international experience through such platforms as OECD Istanbul Action Plan, Open Government Partnership, Eastern Partnership and others will be utilized while drafting the legislation. Government agencies should review their internal regulations in terms of inclusion and/or reformulation of CoI regulations such as policies on declaration of CoI by public servants, forming of internal monitoring bodies, etc. Developed recommendations for legal improvements in CoI policy will be advocated in the National Assembly (NA), particularly Interim Ethics Committee of the NA, the executive branch, donor community and international organizations through direct involvement of media.

In order to facilitate awareness raising on CoI policies and regulations and absorbing of CoI values in their daily practices, EPF will organize trainings and presentations for public servants throughout Armenia, based on its manual and newer materials. A series of trainings and workshops on CoI regulations will be organized for CSOs that work on anti-corruption, good governance, local government and public administration in Yerevan and in the regions. Youth will be provided with education on in-depth understanding of CoI and ways of avoiding it.

- *Participatory Democracy*

In light of the recent political changes and large-scale reform processes taking place in the public administration sector, there is a need to establish effective institutional connections between government and civil society. Throughout past decades, civil society in Armenia has accumulated valuable knowledge and expertise in various sectors that should be communicated and exchanged with the policy and decision makers. EPF will use its experience, capacity and civil society networks to establish institutional mechanism of cooperation between civil society and government. Armenia has an important advantage in terms of effectively utilizing participatory democracy tools. Armenia is a small country with strong horizontal communication tradition; involving the society in opinion and decision making process through collecting feedback, raising public awareness, etc. is relatively easy, and, if implemented properly, this will allow ensuring transparent and accountable governance, as well as will save financial and professional resources.

During the last 5 years of CELoG program, EPF was working with LGs and community based NGOs on joint strategy development, project execution and implementation, which had considerable impact on local policy-making process and quality. EPF plans to continue working on this, addressing various community hubs of Armenia.

In addition to the need of cooperation and communication mechanisms between the state agents and civil society, EPF's recent cooperation with state institutions proved that public servants in Armenia lack the capacity of effective management, and knowledge on this matter. This drawback is one of the main obstacles of effective policy execution and implementation. There is a need to educate public servants on management and communication: strong management and communication skills will increase the quality of policy making and implementation in Armenia. See on this also in the chapter on [civil society](#).

4. Media, Civic Journalism, Innovation and Elements of E-governance

Throughout the past two decades the major target of international assistance to media in Armenia was mainly directed to supporting and developing the alternative and online media as well as to the critical thinking capacities and media literacy of media consumers. In the conditions of significant lack of media freedom and total control of the mainstream broadcast media by the former authorities and currently oligarchs, the media consumers' ability to navigate in the information flow as well as creation of alternative information channels was crucially important.

EPF has been supporting the development of alternative media resources for more than 10 years, also with SIDA support (2010-2012), via its Freedom of Expression program, as well as its current USAID-supported Media for Informed Civic Engagement (MICE) program, led by Media Initiatives Center as the lead partner of a consortium. EPF provides support to [local media](#). EPF's network of Information Centers ([InfoTuns](#)) includes ten multimedia hubs, one in every region (marz) of Armenia. InfoTuns work on media literacy and community governance participation, particularly with and for youth; they provide opportunities to access and create alternative media content for thousands of rural residents in Armenia, specialize in critical thinking and media literacy and spread knowledge on them. The InfoTun network has become another one of EPF's signature undertakings, utilized by a variety of actors: intergovernmental organizations, Embassies, the government of Armenia, NGOs, etc., if they want to act throughout Armenia in a concerted way or need a particular focal point for their ad hoc action.

The Velvet Revolution became possible also due to significantly improved capacities of the Armenian society to act as civic journalists, identify disinformation and disseminate information through social networks. These abilities significantly decrease the influence of state- or oligarch-controlled broadcast media and their disinformation effect. The logic of old-fashioned censorship and propaganda that was exercised by the former authorities was proven to be ineffective, and the capacities of the society to confront disinformation and manipulation with information were strong enough to orientate in the information flow, operate as civic journalists, identify and block the former authorities' and their supporters' efforts to spread disinformation and generate informational provocations.

Internet and social networks have created an opportunity for each and every person having access to the web to become media. The phenomenon of internet has created conditions where censorship and propaganda as it was organized previously by the non-democratic regime became close to useless. The growth in internet usage is a great opportunity, and at the same time it contains threats: it is being used for raising transparency in governance, create alternative sources of information, on one hand, but also for spreading disinformation and misrepresenting facts, on the other.

Fighting disinformation through fact checking and/or identifying and terminating its sources is important but insufficient, since the amount of disinformation that is being generated far outnumbers the capacities of professional fact checking entities, though these entities are still very important to be supported. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that investigative journalism in Armenia is still underdeveloped:

during the previous regime it was likely to result in possible violence and harm being exerted over the journalists, with no reliable state support against such incidents, therefore not many media entities dared to seriously work on investigative journalism.

News verification and fact checking stays a priority, as well as corporate media regulatory mechanisms, and tools and mechanisms aimed at ensuring responsible reporting. At the same time, EPF should continue on focusing on media consumers, their ability to think and analyze critically the flow of information that comes through different types of media outlets, traditional and alternative, represented by professionals or civic journalists.

For 2020-2023 EPF plans to continue its work on the following:

- Development of fact checking, responsible reporting skills among professional media, including professional education mechanisms for media professionals in the areas of responsible reporting, such as literacy of major reform processes in the country, key professional input providers, understanding internal and external influences, geopolitical changes, analytical ability to issue commentary and confront escalation of hate speech or retrograde discourse.

There is a need to promote and stimulate the development of new tools, platforms and mechanisms with application of information technologies aimed at proposing new technical solutions in identification of disinformation and media manipulation. It is also necessary to strengthen the cooperation between the media and expert community, including CSOs and academia that have the methodologically supported expertise.

- Civic media education activities allowing citizen journalists to develop and disseminate trustworthy media content, at the same time learning to recognize the hazards to local democracy, analytical ability to critically broadcast local news from the perspective of human rights and social justice, etc.

Civic media is much more flexible in addressing important topics that have fallen out of the attention of the professional media, talking about tabooed topics, developing alternative discourse, etc. Civic journalists should be familiarized with the new technical opportunities allowing to produce media content of better quality with less consumption of resources.

It is also important to ensure natural connection between civic journalists and professional media outlets giving both an opportunity to utilize each other's capacities. If effectively organized this connection leads to development of innovative solutions in media production.

- Continuous and widespread education on critical thinking and media literacy for the entire society. The media, social media users and citizen journalists need thorough understanding of mechanisms of propaganda, the role of public opinion in shaping political agenda and the linkages between news and their effect on societal behavior.

This is perhaps one of the most important areas of activity, since it is not simply about consuming media products but also addresses the ability of the society to adequately respond to the ongoing political and social processes and to the flow of information. The ability of citizens to identify trustworthy sources of information, analyze and make conclusions based on rational thinking and not the rigid stereotypes is a significant tool for the development of the society and progress.

The major target should be young people, particularly high school, university students and civic activists. In institutional-formal education systems instead of introducing a critical thinking subject, course or class, EPF should focus on advocating for mainstreaming critical thinking method throughout the educational curricula. In addition, informal education, the way EPF provides it via its Critical Thinking and Conflict Transformation Schools, stays as an important component of this strategy: it helps filling the gaps that still exist and unfortunately will persist for many years to come in the majority of formal educational institutions. Informal education is flexible and effective, and those who engage in it are motivated. The

feedback EPF receives from the previous school participants contains statements such as: ‘During these three days I learned more than during my entire time at the University’, etc. Even if exaggerated, such feedback, and the increasing amount of those who would like to take part in the Schools from year to year, proves the positive effect of this approach to learning.

In this strategic direction, EPF will work closely with its reliable partners such as MIC, Transparency International, Yerevan Press Club, World Vision, and others, and its regional partners, primarily through the InfoTun network. This approach also envisions close cooperation with state institutions, particularly the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, Youth, etc.; MoJ; Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development.

Evaluation of the educational process is most effectively implemented by the evaluation of the application of the knowledge and skills taught. The media content developed by one target group will be monitored and evaluated by another target group. Feedback provided by these groups to each other will allow identifying strengths and weaknesses of the overall approach and improve the work.

- *“Mardamej” Social Innovation Camps*

For many years now, EPF has developed and is implementing a signature annual event called “Mardamej” (translated as “among people”) [social innovation camps](#). Young people throughout Armenia (60 to 100 individuals) collect community-specific problems related to the government-run reforms, and come together to design high-tech and low-tech innovative solutions to these problems, engaging IT specialists, social entrepreneurs, marketing and sales specialists. “Mardamej” uses specially developed tools to awaken and unleash creativity of young people, after which they build teams and work on project ideas, which are then evaluated by an independent jury. The winning ideas receive financial support and are implemented after the event. Small but impactful projects addressing road conditions, traffic hazards, water sanitation, deteriorating and empty villages, environmental issues, tourism development, corruption in education, government expenditure transparency, etc. have been winners of the annual competition in various years. They are being implemented via means of social media, information technologies and enthusiastic team work. EPF plans to continue the annual “Mardamej” events.

5. EU - Armenia Dialogue

EPF has been at the forefront of promoting EU-Armenia approximation since 2007. EPF is a founding member of Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) and its Armenian Platform. Currently, EPF’s representative is the member of EaP CSF Steering Committee, leading its Working Group 1 on Democracy, Human Rights, Good Governance and Stability.

For many years EPF has promoted awareness raising on EU in Armenia, e.g. via publishing groundbreaking [manuals](#) about EU in 2010. In general, all EPF’s programming is attuned to the EU-Armenia agenda, and this agenda is mainstreamed throughout the EPF programming.

The program strategies of EPF are in tune with CEPA, particularly the following aims: enhancing the comprehensive political and economic partnership and cooperation between Armenia and EU, based on common values and close links; strengthening of democracy and of political, economic and institutional stability in Armenia; promoting, preserving and strengthening peace and stability at both regional and international levels, including through joining efforts to eliminate sources of tension, enhancing border security, and promoting cross-border cooperation and good neighborly relations; promoting the political, socio-economic and institutional development of Armenia through the development of civil society, institution building, public administration and civil service reform, the fight against corruption, including good governance; enhancing cooperation in the area of freedom, security and justice with the aim of reinforcing the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; enhancing mobility

and people-to-people contacts; enhancing civil society participation in the public decision making process, in particular by establishing an open, transparent and regular dialogue between public institutions and representative associations and civil society; promoting cooperation between youth organizations to strengthen civil society, and others.

The political changes in Armenia have instilled hope in the power of civil society to drive change and provide a key momentum for mobilizing local CSOs to engage with EU and its Member States. Adoption of reforms which bring Armenia closer to European standards will also represent a step forward in European values such as freedom of expression and respect for human rights. Yet studies have shown that the Armenian public still has a poor understanding of European values, and lacks knowledge about European institutions and Armenian-European relations. After the Velvet Revolution, the government has become more motivated and open in promoting universal human rights principles, such as religious tolerance, non-violence, respect for diversity, etc. However, negative rhetoric on European values, promoted by the representatives of the old regime, groups suspected of having external agendas (particularly supported from Russia), trolls, etc., has been raised to another level, being used by the old regime attempting to connect the gains of revolution with distorted view of European values as a threat to old “traditional values”. This impedes the Armenian society from taking a more active role in influencing dialogue between EU and the government, and at the same time visibly slows down the government’s determination to implement bold reform in the most sensitive areas, such as domestic violence, conflict transformation, minorities, including religious minorities and LGBT, etc. Increase in retrograde rhetoric and values in some of the EU states also does not help the promotion of EU-Armenia agenda. Armenia’s ongoing challenges in democratic development and human rights, coupled with a poor understanding of European values among the public, remain powerful obstacles for closer cooperation between Armenia and EU. Without the support of general public and civil society the necessary reforms will not be implemented.

In order to effectively contribute to Armenia’s approximation to European standards, EPF will work in the following interrelated areas: raising public awareness and increasing of the role of civil society in Armenia- Europe dialogue; advocating for implementation of the major elements of the CEPA ([Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement](#)) action plan; and contributing to increased cooperation among Armenian and European CSOs in a number of sub-regional platforms and contexts, such as Black Sea NGO sub-region, EaP CSF, and others.

In order to contribute to the effective introduction of the EU, its structures and principles, and the EU-Armenia cooperation framework, as well as to fight disinformation, EPF proposes a series of educational activities both through trainings and with the use of mass media. These activities will target the CEPA reform agenda, give information to the Armenian public about EU, mention successes and difficulties in EU-Armenia relations, and will be aimed also at promoting critical thinking and media literacy in Armenia. This is important also as a proactive measure, since it becomes more and more clear that the reactive actions such as fact checking are not addressing the reasons but are fighting consequences, and are incapable of covering the entire flood of disinformation. These activities will serve to introduce the European values and to promote cross cultural cooperation that will result in more active and knowledge-based participation of civil society in the implementation of reforms in Armenia in compliance with the European standards.

There are two major targets for these activities: young people who are susceptible to the possible manipulations and disinformation, yet they are also flexible and open for new knowledge; and CSOs as proven multipliers of democratic values, principles and instruments; but they may be lacking wider spectrum of cooperation frameworks and opportunities outside Armenia. Using the multilateral framework of Eastern Partnership for exchange of knowledge and experience not only between the EU member states and EaP countries but also within the EaP region becomes extremely valuable and important. Activities aimed at boosting mobility, people to people contacts and cross-cultural dialogue with active involvement of youth, academia and civil society become an important priority.

These components are interconnected with all other strategic directions of EPF, and their concurrent implementation will add value and increase impact throughout all strategies.

6. Cross-Border Dialogue

EPF's institutional predecessor Eurasia Foundation established South Caucasus Cooperation Program to strengthen and build cross-border partnerships among civic activists, entrepreneurs, journalists, professional associations, educators, and other citizen groups. The major instrument that EF/EPF used at the time was tripartite (Armenia-Azerbaijan-Georgia) grant-making to support jointly elaborated civil society initiatives. Since then, EF/EPF has accumulated 20+ years of cross-border dialogue project implementation experience along the Armenia-Turkey and Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict divides, and earned a reputation throughout the region for efficient, results-oriented conflict transformation professional and project implementation and grants management specialist. EPF Armenia works on Armenian-Azerbaijani dialogue projects with its counterparts in Azerbaijan and Georgia. EPF specialists have experience of working on peace and dialogue throughout the Eurasian region, from the Balkans to Central Asia. In recent years, EPF specialists have been also engaged in important work in Georgian-Abkhaz and Russian-Ukrainian contexts.

Civil society peace-building is a prerequisite of any successful long-term normalization and/or peace deal. If trust between conflicting societies is non-existent, the settlement reached at the political level may result in public discontent or even outrage. Civil society efforts during the last 20+ years aimed at addressing the conflict and supporting the peace process; this investment may disappear irrecoverably should the peace-building work stop at any point. Despite the political difficulties and increased military and security tensions in recent years, to date, EPF and other not numerous actors working in this field have succeeded in sustaining not very big but vocal groups of civil society leaders, as well as new actors and youth groups, who work together across the Armenia-Turkey and Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict divides, support alternative programming to foster tolerance and peaceful messages within the societies, and develop early warning and conflict prevention mechanisms.

- *Armenian-Azerbaijani projects*

Starting from 2008, EPF has carried out several Armenian-Azerbaijani dialogue projects. EPF has worked on unbiased Coverage of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations, and developed a [conflict sensitive glossary for journalists](#). It has worked on community groups' peace and confidence-building through new media, which resulted in several joint projects, such as cartoons and shot films, websites, etc. It has issued several [on-line talk shows](#) under the heading "Line of contact". It has worked on linking civil society [peacebuilders](#) with policy-level stakeholders. Its signature Conflict Transformation Schools are considered by the participants and peace and conflict specialists as a uniquely effective tool for building confidence among the Armenian and Azerbaijani youth and developing their critical thinking capacities. Currently EPF implements [Peacebuilding through Capacity Enhancement and Civic Engagement](#) (PeaCE) project, funded by EU.

In 2020-2023 EPF plans continuing Conflict Transformation Schools and grant making for peace-building projects, enlarging the amount of those newer civil society actors who want building peace and who counter the war and intolerance propaganda inside the Armenian and Azerbaijani societies, including Nagorny Karabakh. After the Velvet Revolution, the interest of the new government to such initiatives has increased, which means that there may be new areas of collaboration between EPF and policy-makers in this work.

EPF will continue focusing on the rehabilitation of an inclusive dialogue between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, engaging new voices, and on the facilitation of contacts at civil society and grassroots levels, with a particular focus on youth. EPF anticipates an increase of collaboration among the Armenian and Azerbaijani civil society activists and leaders.

One of the newer initiatives is to work on dialogue between peace-builders and human rights specialists. In many conflicts human rights specialists have a more rigid and legalistic approach which prevents and hinders confidence-building rather than facilitates it. Peace builders, on the other hand, are often unaware of the legal background and legal consequences of the violent conflict situations and disregard these issues in their work. EPF plans to address this issue via an international conference. This issue is important not only for the Armenian-Azerbaijani context, but also for other conflicts, such as the Georgian-Abkhazian or the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, as well as globally.

Please see the full description of EPF plans on addressing the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict for 2020-2023 in an [additional paper](#).

- *Armenia-Turkey projects*

Over the last ten years, EPF has also implemented a series of confidence-building Armenia-Turkey initiatives. The EPF-run large-scale [dialogue program](#) between Armenia and Turkey in 2014-2015 directly targeted around 2,000 people from the two countries; meanwhile, the number of people who benefited from numerous activities and events is estimated at about 10,000.

EPF continued its efforts towards the normalization of Armenia-Turkey relations through EU funded [Support to the Armenia-Turkey Normalization Process](#) (ATNP) program implemented by a consortium of eight civil society organizations from Armenia and Turkey. Since the program's kick off in January 2014, members of the consortium carried out media exchanges, cultural performances and art exhibitions contributing to better mutual understanding, as well as business forums, workshops, trainings and exchanges for young people, teachers, artists and film-makers, enhancing people-to-people and organizational contacts and addressing some of the most important issues of mutual disagreement, such as trade and business relations in the situation of absence of diplomatic relations; joint vision on the fate of the Armenian cultural heritage in Turkey; teaching history in schools of both countries in a way which will not hide the truth about the tragedies of the past and mutual biases; etc. This work has been supported with Bridge Funding by SIDA in 2017-2018. Currently EPF implements *Armenia-Turkey Economic Relations: New Stage?* Project funded by UK, and plans to start soon the third stage of *Support to Armenia-Turkey Normalisation Process Program* (ATNP-3) to be funded by EU (2019 - 2020).

The new Armenian leadership is interested in the reasonable voices from civil society and independent expert community while updating Armenia's regional doctrine. This presents a clear window of opportunity that EPF is going to take advantage of while building its cross-border dialogue programming for the next several years.

In 2020-2023 EPF will build-up on the achievements of the previous stages of ATNP to consolidate and complement the accumulated experience, engage more supporters among state- and non-state actors, and prepare a fertile ground for bolder developments at the policy level and for larger-scale interventions. Among other areas of engagement (youth, media, professionals, gender, human rights, teachers, grant-making, etc.) a particular area of focus remains trade, business and economic relations.

EPF has also worked on Armenia-Georgia cooperation, particularly in developing business ties in the regions, supported by EU, with the help of its Northern Branch, situated in the city of Ijevan in the Tavush region. This office, in addition to hosting an InfoTun and engaging the local communities of the Tavush marz in a variety of projects, is also very well situated to promote cross-border ties between Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan.

7. Environmental Protection for Sustainable Development

Armenia possesses a complex ecosystem along with a broad range of natural resources and biodiversity, and at the same time faces many risks typical for a small and poor post-Soviet country; many of these risks lead to cross-border, political, social and economic consequences. Over recent years, characterized by systemic and organized corruption and exploitation of natural resources, which led to disproportionate development of extractive industries, detrimental to the environment, Armenia has ratified many international conventions to address issues such as biodiversity, climate change, desertification, and the preservation of cultural and natural heritage. Armenia's Constitution explicitly addresses nature protection, damage to the environment, and the rights of people to lead healthy lives. However, at present there appears to be a significant gap between these policy statements and obligations and the reality; the concerted effort of the government and society to professionally and systematically address environmental problems is lacking. Long-term sustainability strategies of the country are either lacking or not followed. The environmental issues, including urban planning and management, deforestation, biodiversity and extractive industries, are perhaps some of the most acute issues being discussed by the public and the government on a daily basis.

The environmental movement is gaining momentum in Armenia. The grassroots movements have been rather successful in raising attention towards some acute mining and deforestation issues. Still there is a need in developing strong enough institutions and organizations which can have a decisive impact on policies. CSOs work on environmental protection, preservation of ecosystems, protection of flora or fauna, global warming, water management, environmental education; but they usually have limited resources and influence. There is a need to enlarge the number of and capacities of strong and professional CSOs that (1) have in-depth understanding of the issues and (2) advocate for literate and professional protection, prevention and rehabilitation strategies in all the spheres of environmental protection, including water, air, soil, waste management, renewable energy resources, agricultural pollution, deforestation, fisheries, biodiversity, urban planning, public health and other related issues.

As part of its strategy, EPF has implemented capacity building trainings for CSOs working in the field of environment via various programs; it has provided grant support to grassroots CSOs, including those that address cross-border environmental issues, and has worked on sustainable urban planning issues. EPF plans to design a solid and long-term vertical capacity building program to support the sustainable development via the following activities:

- Supporting non-formal groups and activists to increase their strategic capacities in sustainable development.
- CSOs to increase environmental literacy, monitoring and policy impact, to learn international agreements and frameworks, to engage new tools and programs to address the complete chain of issues, and to understand and manage political, human rights, social (including youth and gender-related) implications of environmental problems.
- Cooperative and synchronized strategies among CSOs, private sector, academia, the government, the media and international environmental organizations to ensure synergy of advocacy and synchronized targeted efforts towards sustainability strategies.
- Grant support to CSOs to successfully address concrete issues which may positively affect the environment, such as educational activities among the youth groups so that they change their behavioral patterns of treating the environment; debates around the culture of waste management and new patterns of behavior; support to social enterprises promoting green economy and alternative energy, etc.

8. Newer Avenues: Judicial Reform and Linking Research to Reform

EPF is discussing with US government two large-scale interventions, on civil society support to judicial reform and on community development via evidence-based research which leads to policy reform and implementation. These discussions are likely to lead to results and decisions in fall 2019.

9. Grant Making and Consortium Management

- *Grant Making*

Over more than 20 years that EPF (and its predecessor, the representative office of the Eurasia Foundation) have operated in South Caucasus, the Foundation has managed over \$80 million in grants and technical assistance, a third of which in Armenia. The majority of this money came from USAID; a number of other donors also entrusted EPF with grant making on their behalf. Among these donors have been SIDA, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, FCO and others. One reason that donors entrust their funds to EPF for making grants on their behalf is its proven capacity to make grants to various local and international actors, supported by a state-of-the-art systems of grant management and advanced grant-making strategies. EPF uses its grant-making tool as a way of establishing partnerships; increasing the impact of its programmatic work; building the capacities of civil society actors; educating them in anti-corruption via working on grant projects; looking for innovative ideas; making grant beneficiaries themselves into stakeholders in EPF's strategies and leaders in their field of work; and covering the gaps that other donors have not addressed. Over the 20 years of its operation in Armenia, EF/EPF have built the capacities of several hundreds of NGOs, and most advanced and sustainable NGOs of today's Armenia have been some of the first recipients of EPF grants.

EPF has flexible and varied palette of grant-making, all types supported by special and well-defined procedures, both in terms of programmatic as well as financial accompaniment of the grantees. In 2020-2023 EPF plans to issue the following types of grants:

- Issue-based grants; these are competitive grants linked to EPF's programmatic directions (such as Human Rights or Citizen Media) and designed to either enhance EPF's project's impact or fill a gap that EPF's project does not plan addressing;
- Open door grants; these are grants on any topic which corresponds to EPF's mission; this wide competition helps identifying issues that are not being addressed by EPF currently, or by other donors; or new actors. Particular attention during the selection process is paid to the innovative nature of the proposed ideas.
- Invited grants; these are grants which are based on prior identification of potential applicants based on their expertise and organizing a restricted competition among them.

EPF usually does not issue non-competitive grants; grant selection is done by independent jury, selected and invited for every grant making occasion.

Usually EPF's staff receives and reviews a wide variety of proposals on a rolling basis. EPF provides analysis of projects before award, grants management and administration; grantee training in financial management, oversees structured programmatic and financial reporting; and provides continual monitoring and grantee support throughout the lifetime of the project's activities. EPF's program staff engages in research and outreach to cultivate interest in the Foundation's programs among potential grant applicants. These activities result in greater innovation in grant making, opening up new fields of interest, different approaches to project activities, new collaborative efforts, and imaginative co-funding ideas.

EPF allocates grants of various sizes and to various entities. EPF has procedures for allocation of grants to both organizations and individuals, local and international. Providing grants to government entities or

businesses is rare, however, such state-linked entities as universities, etc., or such businesses as the media can be grant recipients.

- *Consortium Management*

EPF is a recognized specialist in consortium building and management. In recent years, more and more donors prefer for CSOs and development agents work in consortia, to enhance the expertise of the project implementers and pull together varied resources. EPF has an experience of working with local, international or mixed consortia of various sizes, both as a lead as well as a partner. EPF also works as a non-lead partner, however, as a manager of a consortium, as is the case, for instance, with CELoG.

In 2020-2023, EPF plans to provide trainings and consultancies to the organizations which plan setting up consortia and need skills in that. Several of EPF's projects, such as ATNP-3, will be consortium projects. New consortia will be set up by EPF as the need arises or the donor's proposition requires.

10. Publications and Video Production as Parts of Informal Education

A major part of EPF's activities is focus on informal education, including trainings, Schools, building capacities of grantees; etc.

EPF has a well advanced communication strategy, which includes its presence on the web, FB, LinkedIn, Telegram and other platforms, as well as a database of several thousands of contacts who periodically receive EPF newsletters. At the crossroads of its communication and informal education strategies, EPF aims at publishing and distributing materials which become a basis of its informal education actions.

- *Print publications strategy*

EPF has had an advanced publications strategy. While EPF is an environmentally conscious office and most of its semiotic products are published on-line, in certain cases EPF publishes paper print products, particularly brochures and books. These are usually selected publications which aim at targeting those actors which usually prefer print texts to on-line. As a 'think and do tank', EPF has developed numerous methodologies to urgently and strategically address challenges that Armenia faces. See, for instance, its policy advice on Armenia's ways forward after the Russia-Georgia war of 2008, research on the [child rights of religious minority groups](#) in Armenia and [other policy and educational materials](#).

Recently EPF has developed a 'Publication manual' (2019), a brochure on publication principles for itself, its partners, grantees and other actors; this is a unique manual in Armenian that for the first time presents a unified procedure on how to work on publishing a larger text, from its first draft development to publication, dissemination and impact. Other such unique products are the Dutch-supported research on [tolerance and intolerance in the Armenian literature](#) (2017); and the first ever Armenian-language introduction to critical thinking tools and logical mistakes (2019). In 2020-2023 EPF plans continuing on print publications, both in Armenian and English, of the texts and materials that are best usable in a print form, particularly materials to be distributed to schools, libraries and those segments of the population that prefer printed matter to on-line reading, particularly in the regions. All of EPF's printed publications are also being made available on-line.

- *Video production strategy*

As part of its programming, EPF has supported production and dissemination of films on the socially salient issues of past and recent history, such as the event of 1948 (repatriation and Stalin's purges); on dissidents and freedom of speech in the USSR; on the downwards slope in women's rights after

independence (on silent housewives); on the four presidential elections in Armenia; on March 1, 2008 events; etc. EPF has produced several films on tolerance, and several video lectures, often with transcripts, on such issues as critical thinking, conflict transformation, civil society development, civic culture, etc. All these materials are being used as part of educational and training actions of EPF, for discussions and for filling knowledge gaps that exist among its audiences.

11. Social Entrepreneurship, Talent Management, etc.

- *For-profit activities*

EPF and its staff often work as consultants and try engaging in for-profit activities which fit EPF's profile and benefit EPF. One of the areas of expertise is providing short-term internship and placement services for foreign students and trip and event organization, if their agendas fit EPF's mandate. EPF has a long-term contract with Stonehill College (USA) on internship and placement for its students.

- *Talent management*

EPF's staff is the main source of its success. It comprises a highly specialized group of 20+ men and women, and constitutes one of the main assets of EPF. EPF has special procedures for talent management, and works incessantly on building its staff's capacities and on empowering them to be recognized leaders in their areas of expertise.