Since 2003, the Armenian Government has adopted two Anti-Corruption Strategies and Action Plans. Numerous laws addressing corruption have been adopted by National Assembly, such as the Law on Fixed Payments, the Law on the Organization and Implementation of Inspections, and the Law on the Declaration of Property and Income and several international conventions on corruption have been ratified such as the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC, 2005). Despite these steps, Transparency International's Corruption Perception Report for 2011 showed a decline in Armenia's progress in the fight against corruption and the Council of Europe's Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO) concluded in its 2010 Evaluation Report that corruption is still a major problem in the country.

EPF addressed anti-corruption programming directly several times over recent years. In addition, various areas of its work, such as targeting the enhancement of democracy, freedom of information and expression, good governance, Armenia's approximation to the EU etc., all include an anti-corruption component. In order to implement its projects more effectively, EPF had to formulate its vision and approach to the issue of corruption in Armenia, its reasons, effectiveness of fighting it and mechanisms to do so.

In Armenia, anti-corruption strategy involves two major elements - top-to-bottom reform, done mainly by the state, and a bottom-up struggle against corruption, done by NGOs and public groups. The top-to-bottom reform includes reducing corruption directly or indirectly. Direct anti-corruption actions are, for example, prosecutions for major corruption cases, such as the prosecution of the deputy head of traffic police. These cases are few in Armenia. Another example is the consolidation of an Ethics Commission. However, it is doubtful that any particular new state structures will be able to seriously address the issue, if not combined with systemic reform.

Among the state structures a consensus has emerged that anti-corruption should become a part of a larger governance reform strategy. Thus, the new Law on Public Servants came to complement the existing Law on Civil Servants. Its essence is to, on one hand, increase the scope of those who are considered public employees (in addition to civil servants), as well as to define better the asset disclosure requirements for the 500 top public servants and to make this more doable. This law is widely considered potentially a major anti-corruption measure. Similarly, the attempts to evolve e-governance systems, reducing red-tape and public employee-customer interaction, are also considered as important milestones in fighting corruption.

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While this understanding of anti-corruption reform is valid, still more drastic measures should be undertaken to reduce significant corruption risks.

In Armenia, the top-to-bottom reform in fighting corruption cannot be effective if taken alone, because the roots of the issue go much deeper. Indeed, fighting corruption requires governance reform. However, corruption is also related to the values of a post-Soviet society, and a society that lives in a situation of an unresolved violent conflict. The post-Soviet factor makes society's values comprised of exaggerated expectations from the state with no desire to volunteer for public participation, combined with an inclination to transcend the law which is not fully trusted, since it is not usually being observed. The conflict factor adds to that feeling of insecurity, siege psychology, increasing intolerance, conservatism and retrograde attitudes to modern developments.

In addition, poverty, taken in its larger sense, determines a lack of jobs, moreover of well-paid jobs, and the low quality of education.

An anti-corruption reform similar to that undertaken in Georgia would require firing the staff of entire departments or ministries and re-hiring them based on high quality exams for changed higher-level responsibilities, higher salaries, in lower quantities.

This would go against the social inclinations of the society and the state the way they have been shaped until today.

Those who lose their jobs would have to be given new opportunities, which could include comfortable conditions for small business development, re-training opportunities, etc.

The government does not seem ready for such a reform in its systemic version for a variety of reasons. Small business is not thriving since the country is in the hands of oligarchy, which in its turn is determined partly by the unresolved conflict, blockade and isolation. In addition, the government does not feel like going for a bolder reform because its legitimacy base is low, since election results are deeply mis trusted by the population.

The quality of elections does not provide society with the opportunity to trust the attempts of reforms by political authorities.

Therefore, the bottom-up approach to anti-corruption reform, i.e. the inclusion of civil society and particularly of NGOs in this process, is crucial to achieving a more systemic approach to the reform process.

However, so far there have been limited anti-corruption programs implemented by the few NGOs (Transparency International, Freedom of Information Center of Armenia, Achilles Drivers' Rights Protection NGO) funded mainly by USAID or other international donors. These too, taken separately, will not be able to bring about significant change.

authorities.

In its modest capacities, EPF undertook several actions over the last years aimed at a change in societal values. These included:

- **understanding corruption,**
- **bringing in cases of good practice,**
- **enhancing public engagement through social media,**
- **policy advocacy and alliance building.**

In order to better **understand corruption**, EPF's research wing Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC) conducted three household surveys and one enterprise survey during the period of 2008-2010 (within the USAID-supported Mobilizing Action Against Corruption project implemented by Casals and Associates). The surveys aimed to measure perceptions and victimization relating to corruption and the provision of public services. The results of the surveys for 2008, 2009 and 2010 can be found on the CRRC website. Other activities implemented by EPF in this line were the research on Barriers to External Trade conducted within the context of EU-Armenia economic integration as well as the first of its kind research on plagiarism in higher education.

The anti-corruption toolkit developed by EPF with the support of the MFA of Czech Republic is another attempt to understand the typology of corruption, its reasons in Armenia and other EaP countries (Georgia and Moldova) as well as the mechanisms of fighting it successfully used in Czech Republic, Moldova and Georgia. This project thus is also an attempt of **bringing in cases of good practice** and spreading information about these possibilities throughout Armenian society.

This project is particularly focusing on conflict of interest (CoI), which is an area left unattended within many anti-corruption undertakings. The reason for this omission is that a small post-Soviet society such as Armenia has no tradition of assuming that employing the boss's relative in a public organization is a CoI, or that using the office car for personal needs is a CoI.

The results of all this work are being disseminated further in order to increase public understanding of corruption.

EPF uses its permanent talk show format, *Article 27,* broadcast on Yerkir Media TV, as a stage for public discussions; the issue of corruption was one of the prominent topics over the last years.

The *Theory of Improbability* documentary by Tigran Paskevichyan and Ara Shirinyan (made within the Alternative Resources in Media (ARM) project's Open Door grant scheme), introducing the Georgian experience of anti-corruption reform was broadcast as part of the talk show. The talk show brought together state officials, representatives of international organizations and the civil society sector working in the sphere of the fight against corruption. Another talk show was dedicated to anti-corruption reform within the context of Armenia-EU relations and generated the liveliest feedback by the viewers. The overall number of viewers for the two talk shows was 31,955.The USAID-sponsored ARM project (Alternative Resources in Media), which EPF implements in partnership with Internews (USA), Internews Media Support NGO and Yerevan Press Club (YPC), is aimed at **enhancing public engagement through social media;** discussing the issue of corruption through social media on regional and local levels is an important component of the project.

One of the small projects implemented within the ARM is City-Bugs.am, which is an online platform for user-generated content through which citizens monitor the operation of municipal authorities. The online platform enables users of the website to report on the situation in different parts of the city. The ultimate target of the information is the municipality of Yerevan, which receives the complaints and addresses them accordingly. The project was elaborated during the Hackathon Yerevan event, funded through the Social Innovation Scheme of EPF and implemented in cooperation with the Yerevan Municipality.

Within the SIDA-supported Open Door program in 2011, projects on journalistic investigations of hazing in the military, and traffic accident IT 3-D modeling were undertaken. This last project is also a case of bringing in good practice.

interlink between the grassroots organizations and the decision makers, and a player in **policy advocacy and alliance building** in the sphere of anti-corruption reform.

Apart from the above-mentioned, EPF has been further building anti-corruption practices within its own organization and among major partners. This has been done via a variety of trainings, increasing transparency, frequent audits etc.

In 2012, Transparency International (TI) presented the Handbook on Freedom of Information (FoI) in the South Caucasus Countries. The Handbook is a result of the common efforts of TI Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The survey on FoI perceptions in Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan was taken from CRRC annual household survey, called Data Initiative.

EPF's activities aim at changing values in society, developing anti-corruption values and corruption prevention, rather than at pursuing the hard anti-corruption issues. This is because EPF believes that it can make the best contribution in the area of value change, and also because it believes and sees the evidence that the most active part of the general public, particularly the youth, is changing their levels of tolerance towards corruption, i.e. a change in values is possible indeed, though it takes time, particularly if political will is lagging behind.

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