Wolfram Hilz/Shushanik Minasyan (Hg.)

Armenian Developments

Perspectives of Democratization and the Role of the Civil Society

Bonner Studien zum globalen Wandel
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Herausgegeben von
Prof. Dr. Wolfram Hilz

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1 Introduction

Wolfram Hilz / Shushanik Minasyan

The development of societies during and after periods of authoritarian or totalitarian rule is among the most interesting research topics in social sciences. On the one hand, the analysis is directed at why, when and how societies resist tyrannies and what ultimately leads to the downfall of seemingly invincible regimes. On the other hand, once such authoritarian regimes unravel, it is important to comprehend how societal groups organize themselves and how they try to influence political processes.

According to more idealistic views, a quasi-automatic transformation of authoritarian societies and political systems into Western democratic systems seemed inevitable for decades. Yet while the replacement of several Western European military dictatorships in the 1970s and the end of communism in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 confirmed this assumption, many former Soviet republics revealed a much more complex development after the fall of the dual tyranny of communism and Moscow-centralism in 1991: The initial period was defined by an aspiration for economic and political stability of the Soviet Union successor states. But apart from the exception of the Baltic republics, there were no efforts to establish Western style democracies in this region at the beginning of the new century. The Georgian and Ukrainian attempts in 2003 and 2004 to found a new democratic orientation following a delay of nearly fifteen years proves this path remains difficult and largely unpredictable in post-Soviet states. The Georgian and the Ukrainian cases demonstrate that the unique societal constellations of former

Soviet republics lead to very heterogeneous political and social developments due to the specific historical, ethical and current political situations.

When regarding the political and social situation in the Republic of Armenia in this context, it is hardly surprising that the civil society followed an entirely different route over the past three decades than those of other post-Soviet states, which attracted considerable scholarly interest from Western researcher. The Armenian rendition of civil-social structure is particularly interesting because it signifies that social trends *are* able to induce major changes in states which possess limited capacity for action. Due to the territorial situation of Armenia – wedged between the predominantly hostile neighbors Turkey and Azerbaijan, in the shadow of hegemonial Russia and Iran – the domestic Armenian development options seemed limited for a time. All the more remarkable was the observed flourishing of environmental activism, especially within Armenian civil society since 2012 – despite the palpable Russian pressure on the South Caucasus – and its influence on shaping the political landscape.

Armenia witnessed multiple transformations of its civil society sector since the early 1990s as its members sought a representative definition of their role. Civil society actors pursued various transition narratives to overcome their Soviet past and prevent 'post-Soviet anomalies' to anchor itself within the new discursive political matrix as a political decision-maker. Over the past years, the Armenian civic landscape continually reached new levels of development, assuming more influence in the social and political processes, which led to its qualitative change.

The aim of this volume is to shed light on the ongoing discussion on civil society in Armenia in the context of democratization and to examine its potential for democratic consolidation. The perspectives recount diverse facets of the Armenian civic landscape, as well as the recent processes of democratization. The contributions from predominantly Armenian experts focus on the necessary structures and important actors for an understanding and characterization of the Armenian civil society. This book does not intend to provide a structured comparative perspective, but rather presents a set of illus-

trative in-depth case studies and multifaceted aspects of the civic landscape in Armenia.

Shushanik Minasyan opens this set of studies with an analysis of the European Union's democracy promotion in Armenia with a special focus on its dialogue with civil society. Following the establishment of the European Neighborhood Policy in 2004 and particularly since the elaboration of the Eastern Partnership in 2009, the European Union has gradually become a more prominent player in the promotion of democracy in its Eastern neighborhood as well as a visible advocate for civil society actors in post-Soviet countries. Looking at the EU's engagement in Armenia, Minasyan focuses specifically on the interplay between the EU's external democracy promotion and its support for civil society. By critically evaluating European concepts, mechanisms and interactions with domestic civil society actors in Armenia, this starting contribution provides a general introduction of the true impact of EU assistance on the Armenian civil society sector, which is applied in following studies. In the second chapter, Yevgenya Jenny Paturyan and Valentina Gevorgyan look at Armenia's current civil society and analyze the trends and patterns of social and political participation among Armenians. The authors observe the overall context by examining the use of social media by the Armenian public and the role of social media in strengthening civil society. In the third chapter, Nina Kankanyan and Yevgenya Jenny Paturyan, critically evaluate the environmental activism in Armenia, which was prominent in the 1990s and started as a movement concerned with environmental as well as security issues of the chemical plant Nayirit. Focusing on individual actors, the authors examine the recent rise of social mobilization by civil society groups around environmental issues in Armenia and highlight the achievements as well as the challenges in this field. The contribution analyzes the lines between environmental groups and the government by focusing on the strategies and factors that define the scope of influence of civic actors in the political decision-making process. The fourth chapter authored by Narek Manukyan focuses on the transition and reform process of Armenia's general education system in the post-independence phase. Manukyan analyzes the key policy-level developments via the methodological perspective of 'policy as a discourse,' drawing on a number of documents related to educational policy-level developments. Manukyan employs a classification of the types and content

of policy borrowing as an analytical framework and examines policy borrowing in a transition society with weak institutional capacity for locally-developed education policy. In the fifth chapter, Arpine Balyan concentrates on the role of the Armenian Civil Service in enhancing governmental transparency and accountability as well as its support of the deliberative elements in the decision-making process. Using these two lenses, Balyan observes the impact of civil service reforms on state legitimacy, how it institutionalized strong public management necessary for good governance and development in Armenia. After a careful analysis of the role of civil society in various political areas, Narek Mkrtchyan offers another perspective in the sixth chapter by analyzing the role of the Armenian Apostolic Church as a mediator between the state and its citizens. This institution was historically an inseparable part of the Armenian reality and national identity and enjoys therefore the confidence of both the government and civil society. The author critically examines the image of the Armenian Church as a society-close actor by illustrating the challenges and limitations it faces in supporting the process of democratization in the country. In the final contribution, Shushanik Minasyan looks at the Velvet Revolution in spring 2018 and analyzes the nature and key aspects of this successful political development in Armenia.

We would like to express our heartfelt appreciation to everyone who provided input in the development of this book. Special thanks go to our experts from Armenia for all their hard work, fruitful cooperation and extensive patience. We are also grateful to our team members Mark Offermann and Julia Trautner for their editorial assistance and for the final preparation of this book.

2 The European Union's External Democracy Promotion in Armenia and the Importance of Civil Society

Shushanik Minasyan

1 Introduction

The term civil society saw a recent resurgence in response to the anticommunist revolutionary movements in Eastern Europe, which produced communities with functions parallel to the state. The accompanying academic conceptualizations of the relationship between civil society and government have become enormously distinct. Civil society is often depicted as a source of legitimacy and resiliency for governments, or as a voice of dissent against authoritarianism. In some explanations, civil society is perceived as an impulse for political development, prior to and independent of government, and in others as dependent on government for legal structures, strong appreciation, or unconditional fiscal support. Civil society is characterized both as a development in partnership with the government and as a substitute in lieu of government's.[1] A vibrant civil society is vital as it enhances the virtues relevant to a democratic system that can enable structures or communication channels between the government and interest groups involved in the policymaking process. As Jamal stipulates, civil society contributes four central functions to a democracy:

[1] See Post, Robert & Rosenblum, Nancy (eds.): Civil Society and Government, New Jersey, 2002, p. 1.

> *"[...] (a) it counters state power, (b) it facilitates political participation by helping in the aggregation and representation of interests, (c) it serves as a political arena that could play an important role in the development of some of the necessary attributes for democratic development, and (d) more broadly, it plays an important role in furthering struggles for citizenship rights."*[2]

In theory, a progressive civil society provides important conditions as it strengthens democracy by producing and facilitating

> *"[...] checks of power, responsibility, societal inclusion, tolerance, fairness, trust, cooperation and often also the efficient implementation of accepted political programs."*[3]

The promotion of civil society is consequently upheld as an essential component of good governance promotion. As an international normative actor, the European Union (EU) stresses the importance of strengthening civil society in its shared values with third countries. Brussels

> *"[...] gives value to a dynamic, pluralistic and competent society and recognizes the importance of constructive relations between states and CSOs.*[4] *Therefore, the emphasis of the EU policy will be on CSO's engagement to build stronger democratic processes and accountability systems and to achieve better development outcomes."*[5]

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2 Jamal, Manal: Democracy Promotion, Civil Society Building and the Primacy of Politics, in: Comparative Political Studies, Vol. 32, No. 1, 2012, pp. 3-31, p. 12.

3 Merkel, Wolfgang: Embedded and Defective Democracies, in: Democratization, Vol. 11, No. 5, 2004, pp. 33-58, p. 47.

4 Civil Society Organization.

5 European Commission: The Roots of Democracy and Sustainable Development: Europe's Engagement with Civil Society in External Relations. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, COM (2012) 492 final, Brussels, 2012, p. 4.

In this context, the EU pays special attention to the civil societies of its neighborhood countries and prioritizes dialogue with them in its European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).[6]

This paper considers the nature of EU democracy promotion in the Eastern Neighborhood with a focus on Armenia in particular. Central and Eastern European countries have intensely engaged Armenia's political and economic transition since the early 1990s with important consequences for its civil society members. Prior to the ENP, the EU was neither a prominent external democracy promoter, nor a visible advocate of civil society actors in post-Soviet countries. The ENP, however, introduced a coherent policy towards its new neighbors in 2004, a quality which has only blossomed since the expansion of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) in 2009. Considering the EU's democracy promotion in Armenia, this contribution examines the interplay between the EU's external democracy promotion and its support for civil society. The ensuing evaluation of the EU's external democracy promotion will discuss the concepts, mechanisms and interactions with domestic civil society actors in Armenia upon which external support is based. As the evidence will demonstrate, although civil society support and communication constitute a potentially auspicious approach, the actual impact of EU strategies in Armenia remains weak.

2 The EU's External Democracy Promotion and Civil Society

Civil society has become an important issue in democratization policy and a central topic of discourse for scholars, policymakers, and other observers. Civil society theory first appeared in the political and academic landscape of the transitioning Central and Eastern Europe democracies in the late 1980s. The concept has since made its way into the democracy promotion strategies of all Western states and international organizations. In the case of the EU's efforts, civil society has continuously achieved an ever more central position in its foreign policy discourse. The EU's democracy pro-

[6] See European Parliament: Resolution on Strengthening Civil Society in the Eastern Partnership Countries, Include the Question of Cooperation between Government and Civil Society, and the Question of the Reforms Aimed at Empowering Civil Society, No. 2012/C 153/04, in: Official Journal of the European Union/ C153, 30 May 2012, p. 16-17.