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The Silent Cancer We Must Fight - Tooth and Nail

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By Hasmik Grigoryan

"An Anthology of International Anti-Corruption Experience: Selected Studies" is a book recently published by the Campaign against "Corruption-Friendly" Legal and Social Settings in Armenia under the auspices of the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights. It was presented on February 14 at the Yerevan offices of the European Commission Delegation to Georgia and Armenia.

As Armen Aivazian, the Team Leader of the Campaign, compiler and editor of the Anthology explained, "We are not so naïve as to believe that a book on anti-corruption will put an end to it in Armenia. The effective fight against corruption will only be possible when both the government and the civil society start to jointly fight corruption."

The book gives examples of international practice including that of Singapore, which showed that it is possible for a very corrupted country, as Singapore was in the 1960s, to turn into a one that is among the least corrupt today.

Q: Why does Singapore appear as a key case story in your Anthology?

True, the book sets out anti-corruption experience in the fields of justice, education, energy, the private sector, agriculture and public finance, and specifically includes a chapter by Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's legendary former prime minister, on the fight against corruption in his country. The reason is that in the late 1950s-early 1960s Singapore shared many important similarities with Armenia such as: painful nation-building process in a difficult geopolitical environment, corrupt civil service, extremely tense relations between the government and opposition. Things were made even more complicated by the fact that, unlike Armenia, Singapore was a multi-ethnic society. Singapore is a good model for Armenia to study and, in my opinion, adjust its certain components to local needs and conditions.

Q: Is this project the first of its type to be carried out by the Centre for Counter-Terrorism Assistance? Yes, this is our first major project. The CCTA was established only recently - during 2003. Although it has other programmes and intentions, we decided to start with a comprehensive anti-corruption project, having in mind terrorism's direct and indirect relationships with corruption.

Q: I gather that you have completed seven of the 16 TV programmes as part of the project. Have you had any feedback from this?

Yes, a lot of people have called and visited us, voicing their support as well as presenting their problems stemming, in their view, directly from corruption. We feel rewarded that the message gets across. Since one of our goals is to revive the resolve of society to fight corruption and to create an atmosphere of zero-tolerance toward it. Of course, achieving this will not be easy. It will require dozens of other active and independent groups to engage in the fight against corruption as well as, most importantly, the constructive collaboration between groups from civil society and state bodies.

Q: What are the preliminary conclusions of the study? Will it have any impact on combating corruption in Armenia - and how can this be measured?

The success and effectiveness of any social technology depends on how well it fits with the attitudes and expectations of any given society. We intend to conduct a survey in Yerevan to measure the impact of the Campaign and to create a mathematical model for the generation of anti-corruption strategies. The survey is aimed to measure to what extent the anti-corruption strategies meet the demands and expectations of Yerevan's population. It is well known that Yerevan is the vanguard of social changes in Armenia. The survey will also indicate how successfully the objectives of this programme are achieved. 200 copies of the survey results will be published. The government has still to prove that it really is intent on fighting corruption, and society has to get rid of the belief that fighting corruption is an exclusive function of the state.

Q: And what does Armen Aivazian feels about all this?

Members of the Campaign are often asked whether they believe that by publishing a book on anti-corruption experience and organizing a series of TV-programmes they will be able to defeat corruption. The question itself shows how deeply sceptical people are of any positive movement - and how wrongly they perceive their own place in the fight against corruption. I believe in Armenian society's capacity to improve its governance and to reduce drastically the shadow economy and levels of corruption. This belief is based, not the least, on recognition of Armenia's perilous geopolitical situation: to put it bluntly, we have no other choice!

The Anthology of International Anti-Corruption Experience was compiled and introduced by Armen Aivazian, a Doctor of Political Sciences and the project's Team Leader. His other studies include "Essential Elements for Armenia's National Security Doctrine", "The History of Armenia as Presented in American Historiography: A Critical Survey", "Mother Tongue and The Origins of Nationalism: A Comparative Study of the Armenian and European Primary Sources", "The Code of Honour of the Armenian Military, 4-5th centuries", "The Armenian Rebellion of the 1720s and the Threat of Genocidal Reprisal" and others. For his articles and interviews visit http://www.artsakhworld.com/Armen_Aivazian/MainPage_Eng/MainPage.html

Corruption in Armenia

Many consider corruption in Armenia as being ubiquitous. It is an increasingly pressing issue - and one that has to be addressed in a time when accountability and transparency are prerequisites for proper governance and business ethics.

Organisations such as Transparency International monitor country performance worldwide and, as The Yerevan Times has pointed out, Armenia's record leaves room for improvement. Transparency International (which rated Armenia 82nd out of 146 countries in 2004) notes that since the establishment of a state anti-corruption commission in 2004, progress on the development of a national anti-corruption programme has been slow - and less than

transparent. Opposition politicians have voiced similar sentiments, as well. True, Armenia lies above neighbouring Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran as well as Russia in the Transparency International's rating index, but it clearly has some room to make up.

It is in this context that the European Commission's Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights in Armenia supported a Campaign against "Corruption-Friendly" Legal and Social Settings in order to generate public intolerance and provide methodological frameworks for the fight against corruption. An Armenian NGO, the Centre for Counter-Terrorism Assistance (CCTA), proposed the Campaign.

The CCTA identifies the major causes for corruption in Armenia and the main difficulties in the fight against it as follows:

The alienation of civil society from the policy-forming, decision-making and decision-implementing activities in governance or, in other words, the absence of popular participation in governance; Armenian society's disbelief in the possibilities for real and effective participation in governance; Armenian society's inclination to see and relegate the fight against corruption as the exclusive responsibility of state structures; The Armenian law's nominal stipulation for public participation in governance, when the ostensibly democratic provisions concerning the exercise of public authority are not supported by working and effective mechanisms; Particular Armenian laws are directly copied from European or CIS analogues, placed without their adequate/required localization to Armenian conditions, and applied with disregard to the national mind-set. The specific "corruption-friendly" elements that exist in the relationships between state officials and citizens, which hamper the supremacy of law.

The Campaign's main purpose is to strengthen society's resistance to corruption and to provide frameworks for combating it. Its principal target groups include the ruling elite, civil society (NGOs, professionals, students, etc.), as well as the public at large.

The campaign was conducted in two interrelated formats. First, An Anthology of International Anti-Corruption Experience has been published in Armenian, with an introduction and commentary by Armen Aivazian.

Secondly, an anti-corruption campaign is being conducted in the media, especially the TV, as well as in the press and the Internet.

Eventually, the project envisages the analysis of the Campaign results so as to provide for an alternative concept for the anti-corruption programme in Armenia. A survey is to be conducted in Yerevan to measure the impact of the Campaign and to create a mathematical model for the generation of anti-corruption strategies.