



PRESS RELEASE

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Yerevan

Expanded Working Meeting of the Government-Civil Society Anti-Corruption Working Group Theme: Working Process on the Criminalisation of Illicit Enrichment in Armenia

On 17 November, 2016, an expanded working meeting of the Government-Civil Society anti-corruption working group (theme: Working Process on the Criminalisation of Illicit Enrichment in Armenia) was held in the Combined Meeting Room of the Best Western Congress Hotel, Yerevan. Representatives of the RA Government and other state agencies, the CSO Anti-Corruption Coalition of Armenia, as well as other NGOs and mass media participated in the working meeting. The meeting was organised by the Freedom of Information Centre and the Armenian Lawyers' Association in partnership with the CSO Anti-Corruption Coalition of Armenia and the RA Ministry of Justice, along the same lines of the "Multi-Faceted Anti-Corruption Promotion" Project funded by the European Union and co-funded by the OSCE Office in Yerevan.

RA Deputy Minister of Justice Mr. Suren Krmoyan, Ms. Naira Gyulnazaryan, the Coordinator of Anti-Corruption Projects at the OSCE Office in Yerevan, Mr. Armen Sakapetoyan, the Deputy Chairman of the RA State Revenue Committee adjunct to the RA Government, and Mr. Karen Zadoyan, the President of the Armenian Lawyers' Association (ALA) and the Coordinator of the Secretariat of the CSO Anti-Corruption Coalition of Armenia, gave opening remarks at the working meeting.

Mr. Zadoyan said, "Just like Martin Luther King dreamt of equality in his country, today we dream about living in Armenia that is void of corruption". In his words, in this regard criminalisation of illicit enrichment is a very important anti-corruption mechanism which they have been fighting for since 2008. Ms. Gyulnazaryan noted that every year the applicability of the institution of criminalisation of illicit enrichment grows in different countries of the world. Mr. Krmoyan highlighted that the Ministry formed an anti-corruption platform with ALA and a number of other partner NGOs. As a result of the work carried out in the scope of this platform, illicit enrichment has been included in the Government's new programme and the respective legislative bill has been prepared. Mr. Krmoyan added that this platform had helped in breaking the ice between the civil society and the Government.

Ms. Arpine Sargsyan, a Leading Specialist at the Anti-Corruption Policy Preparation Section of the RA Ministry of Justice, presented to the participants the legislative bill on illicit enrichment which had been envisaged as Article 301 in the RA Criminal Code. Ms. Mariam Zadoyan, a member of the working group formed by the decree of the RA Minister of Justice and a National Expert of the above-mentioned project, spoke about the international experience and the existing problems pertaining to illicit enrichment. She specifically noted that in the discussed bill provided for no added 5-year time frame for this corpus delicti to be effective upon a high-ranking official's termination of office. Mr. Carl Ulbricht, another member of the working group and the International Expert of the project, recommended that the following risks be taken into consideration when criminalising illicit enrichment: the presumption of innocence, the correspondence with the Constitution, the principles of the right to remain silent and not testifying against oneself, as well as the possibility of political persecutions. He added that in those countries where illicit enrichment has been criminalised, there is a tendency for corruption decrease, e.g., in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Hong Kong.

The presentations were followed by a discussion during which the participants expressed their views on different provisions of the legislative bill. Upon getting approved by the RA Government, the legislative package on criminalisation of illicit enrichment will be sent to the RA National Assembly.

The main goal of the "Multi-Faceted Anti-Corruption Promotion" project is to increase the role of the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in promoting anti-corruption reforms and their implementation. In the framework of the project the capacity of CSOs and the media to engage in monitoring and watchdog activities has been enhanced. Thus, 100 CSOs and media organisations have strengthened their understanding of corruption issues and freedom of information as well as their ability to monitor and engage in watchdog activities. Small sub-grants have been allocated to 20 CSOs and media organisations for raising the effectiveness of public monitoring and the implementation of appropriate monitoring, watchdog and investigative activities. In 2014 the CSO Anti-Corruption Coalition of Armenia was established in the scope of the project. The Coalition now comprises more than 80 CSOs and media organisations and plays a key role in the sustainable CSO-Government dialogue developed in the scope of the project. The joint work of the Government and the Coalition on the issues of the criminalisation of illicit enrichment and the establishment of an independent anti-corruption agency in Armenia has been a particularly remarkable achievement in the scope of the project. The project is funded by the European Union and co-funded by the OSCE Office in Yerevan. It is implemented by the "Armenian Lawyers' Association" NGO – Applicant and "Freedom of Information Center" NGO – Partner. The project duration is 3 years (January 2014 – December 2016) and the budget is 650,000 EUR, of which 585,000 EUR was contributed by the EU and 31,117 EUR was contributed by the OSCE Office in Yerevan.

The **Armenian Lawyers' Association (ALA)** was established in 1995 with a mission to promote to the establishment of the rule of law, democracy and formation of the civil society in Armenia, where the people are aware of their rights and where their rights are protected. Before February 2016, ALA was called Armenian Young Lawyers Association.

The **Freedom of Information Centre (FOI)** operates over 10 years. The Mission of FOI is to promote application of the RA Freedom of Information Law, contribute to the transparency and openness of the Armenian government system and to stimulate civic society's involvement in the governance system.

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The European Commission is the EU's executive body.

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The Project is co-funded by the OSCE Office in Yerevan.
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The OSCE Office in Yerevan has been operating since 1999, and its mission is to support Armenia in developing its democratic institutions and strengthening civil society, acting in the areas of legislative reform; combating corruption and trafficking; environmental activities; raising awareness for human rights; media freedom; gender equality, etc.



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