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# CIVIL SOCIETY COALITIONS IN ARMENIA

Author: Valentina Gevorgyan

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*Regional Technical Assistance to Build Civil Society Capacities  
Eastern Partnership (EaP)*

**Research: Civil Society Coalitions (CSC)  
in Armenia**

Report prepared by Valentina Gevorgyan

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## Armenian civil society: a background check

Armenia is a country in transition to democratisation, located in an aggressive neighbourhood with challenges to regional integration, external and systemic problems shaping country's social environment. Post-revolution 2018, post-pandemic 2019, and especially post-war 2020 (a trifecta of shocks that have shaken the country to its core), Armenia is facing multiple social and political challenges. Today, less than half of the world exercises democracies (EIU 2022). Armenia is the only member state (in Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation) rated *Partly Free* (Freedom House 2023b). According to Nations in Transit country ranking: Armenia is classified as a transitional or hybrid regime, with improvements registered in 2023 (including civil society and independent media) (Freedom House 2023a). Armenia is also classified as democracy's front liner, along with Moldova and Ukraine, having steadily improved their democratic institutions in recent years (Freedom House 2023c). Bertelsmann Transformation Index classifies Armenia as a defective democracy (regarding political transformation), limited (regarding economic transformation) and moderate (regarding governance index) (BTI 2022).<sup>1</sup> According to the Varieties of Democracy reporting (2022) Armenia is among the top democratiser countries (since 2011), an advancing country in Eastern Europe, which made a democratic transition from electoral autocracy to electoral democracy in 2021 (V-Dem Institute 2022).

Most recently, growing security tensions have dominated the political and social environment in Armenia (Human Rights Watch 2023). Since Azerbaijan's war on Armenians and the Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) (the 44-Day War 2020), and Azerbaijan's attacks since 2020 on Armenia proper (Amnesty International 2023), the country is facing numerous problems, which do not seem to go away, rather snowball into bigger challenges. Azerbaijani forces have continued to attack and occupy Armenian territory along the border, threatening the democratic government in Yerevan (Freedom House 2023b). In the post-shock environment, currently, Armenia is a country struggling to recover from the constant security threats, the ruins of legacies of post-Sovietism, authoritarianism and limited freedoms. The political social and security shocks, and especially the circumstances after the 44-Day War, have inevitably shaped public perceptions and expectations

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<sup>1</sup> BTI Atlas: Armenia Country Report 2022, available at: [https://atlas.bti-project.org/1\\*2022\\*CV:CTC:SEIARM\\*CAT\\*ARM\\*REG:TAB](https://atlas.bti-project.org/1*2022*CV:CTC:SEIARM*CAT*ARM*REG:TAB) (Last accessed: 10 Nov 2023)



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regarding country's development and future. Interestingly, in a poll (2023) asking about the most important "political partners" for the country, the top three responses provided by the Armenian citizens were: *France* (75%), *Iran* (67%) and the *United States* (52%). Regarding the countries posing the greatest political threat, the top three responses were: *Azerbaijan* (93%), *Turkey* (89%) and *Russia* (24%) (International Republican Institute 2023). Armenia's three decades of post-Soviet experience did not move the country closer to reforms. In fact, that period contributed to the eventual crisis due to the lack of diversification of dependence strategies. An overwhelming reliance on Russia in security and other vital for the country spheres have brought the country to a crisis. Armenia's current challenges, unseen before, may lead the country towards a serious reconsideration of its former faulty experience, making it an imperative to establish new practices, by also contributing to the shift of its peripherality (Gevorgyan 2023).

For centuries, the Armenian society would uphold the promise of education, its language and literature, and a culture of participation. The value of public initiative has been a persistent element throughout the long history of the Armenian people. However, the influences of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and being a part of a totalitarian structure with a communist regime did not fade away quickly. The influences of the communist regime on the societies throughout the Soviet Union have been a long-time subject of academic interest. In particular, the research has been concerned with conditions of civil society and its problematic features, including public trust towards civil society organisations (CSO), membership and volunteering in CSOs (see, for example, (Sztompka 1998; Howard 2002; 2003; Voicu and Voicu 2003; Howard and Gilbert 2008). The same findings refer to Armenia, pointing to the communist legacy of distrust and disengagement, in addition to social and political problems (Paturyan and Gevorgyan 2014a). In fact, a somewhat deep distrust of associational life persisted in modern Armenia as well (Paturyan and Gevorgyan 2021).

Armenia has moved from the Soviet period and into a post-Soviet one, starting from the years of independence. Focusing on Armenia's recent history of statehood, it warrants mentioning that the country has undergone some curious stages of civil society development. Along with other European societies and developments spanning the countries of the Eastern socialist block by the end of 1980s, Armenia struggled for independence and a new way forward, (including also the Karabagh movement), a period referred to as the birth of the Armenian civil society (L. H. Abrahamian 2001); (L. Abrahamian and Shagoyan 2011). From the birth of civil society in 1980s, along with the larger promise, it has arrived into the 1990s. The early years of independence were characterised by economic hardship, social and political challenges, let alone an urgency of a state building anew. Then the development of civil society has been questionable and democracy suffered (Dudwick 1995; Stefes 2006). It was when a new so-called stage of civil society development was in the making, largely referred to as the period of a 'boom of NGOs' or an 'NGO-ised' society (Chimiak 2006; Ishkanian 2009).

There are many factors responsible for failing a proper civil society development in Armenia, commensurate with qualities of a third sector in consolidated democracies. Such factors include

centralised media control, the lack of state accountability mechanisms, a space and a meaningful role for civil society. Importantly, arbitrary decision-making and informality, a common feature of the post-Soviet space (Giordano and Hayoz 2013; Hayoz 2015). Human rights, participation and accountable governance did not serve as guiding principles for Armenia’s political leadership throughout the three consecutive regimes, which skilfully manipulated the reform process for years (Gevorgyan, 2021; 2024). Roughly since 2007, Armenia entered another stage of civil society development, that of civic initiatives or an informally developing society, with more than 50 cases of issue-based, spontaneously organised activist campaigns, many of which resolved in activists’ favour (Y. Paturyan and Gevorgyan 2016; Y. J. Paturyan and Gevorgyan 2018; 2016). That period seemed to have led to a culmination, the revolution. The study of Armenian civil society conducted in years preceding the revolution (2018) displayed evidence on an overwhelming agreement among the public that the only sphere capable of leading the development of the country in the right direction was the third sector or the civic sphere (Paturyan and Gevorgyan 2021).

After 2018 the environment of the Armenian civil society has been characterised by somewhat curious (for researchers) and alarming (for democratic transition) dynamics. Select anti-democratic initiatives came to the fore, positioning themselves as civil society actors, however, exercising a completely divergent agenda, that of rather an *uncivil* society (Kopecky and Mudde 2014). Their agendas focused on attacking the values and principles of human rights and democratic standards, provoking hate and violence targeting the popular and active civil society representatives focused on reform agenda (Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly Vanadzor 2021). Such attacks and intimidation were continuous targeting human rights advocates, those: openly supporting women’s and children’s rights, advocating for legal and judicial reforms, and in particular the Open Society Foundations - Armenia (U.S. Department of State 2022).

Some indicators about Armenian civil society post-revolution are as follows. The recent available data (2021) on trust towards NGOs shows that a total of 37% said they either *fully* or *rather trust*; a total of 25% said they either *rather* or *fully trust* (categories combined) (Caucasus Research Resource Center (Armenia) 2021). There is an assumption that the attacks on civil society post-revolution had contributed to the damage of public perceptions related to trust and accountability of the sector. The legal environment of civil society sector remains somewhat friendly (USAID 2023). According to Reporters Without Borders Index Armenia retains a pluralistic environment, however with a polarised media. It experiences an unprecedented level of disinformation and hate speech (largely regarding the issue of Nagorno Karabakh) (RSF 2023). Regarding civil society relations with the government, for a second year in a row recommendations remain the same: namely, pointing the need of implementing a comprehensive strategy on cooperation between the two entities, effectively utilising the potential of consultative bodies, and increasing the cooperation in formal joint formats (ECNL and TIAC 2023). In fact, the Armenian civil society, and the years of its expertise can serve a leading force bringing the country closer to implementing vital reforms on its way to a deeper democratisation (Gevorgyan 2023; 2024).



The most recent data from the Index ranking the performance of EaP countries shows Armenia as the fourth member and the next in line after the successful team of performers: Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia. Report highlights Armenia scoring well on indicators regarding democracy and good governance, not much regarding its policy approximation with the EU (EaP CSF 2021). Another report highlights that Armenia has actually progressed with reforms, while a non-associated country (Moldova) has registered regress (The Polish Institute of International Affairs 2019). Armenia has also moved forward with a specific example: the ratification by the Armenian parliament of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) (RA National Assembly 2023). It is important to highlight that this process has been initiated and supported by select individuals and civil society's effort. The 'EU's Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society in Armenia 2021-2027' mentions that a pro-active involvement of civil society in policymaking and governance reforms is crucial to deliver the political transformation in Armenia (EU Delegation to Armenia and EEAS 2022; Gevorgyan 2023). Today, Armenia is an exception (within EaP's non-associated countries), which has entered the path of reforms and wants EU's increased cooperation for that purpose (The Polish Institute of International Affairs 2019).

Akin to other societies in transition, with a similar social and political context, Armenia retains a wide terrain of civil society actors. Unfortunately, this did not emerge to mean effectiveness or success. There are **more than 6,000 CSOs registered** in Armenia<sup>2</sup> with the majority existing on paper only, with **only some 20% actually functional**, much less effective. A mismatch between the number of actual and legally registered entities is a common feature of the post-Soviet space, due to institutional and other failures (Gevorgyan 2021). Despite a wide range of organisations, groups and networks, many remain on paper or inactive. Previous research has pointed to the need, let alone urgency, of civil society actors' joining forces, including that of formal and non-formal members (Gevorgyan 2017). Coalition building has also been mentioned among the impact strategies of Armenian CSOs. Some increase has been registered in the number of organisations joining coalitions (Margaryan, Hovakimyan, and Galstyan 2022). Armenian CSOs' needs assessment: highlights the lack of capacities of developing relations among each other, a multiphase and a challenging process, which can be fruitful, but also full of risks of becoming a painful process for all parties (Danielyan et al. 2018).

From mostly service provision throughout the 1990s, civil society's functions started slightly to change towards participation in policy and advocacy from early 2000s. However, these functions would be pertinent to select coalitions and human rights defender organisations, uniting pro-actively around ideas and values, not reacting to donor strategies or other factors. Competition, struggle for resources and polarisation would become defining characteristics of the Armenian civil society-terrain throughout the next two decades, with the same problems remaining and deepening up to date. To name a few, not necessarily registered, but rather known coalitionary-groups and networks: Coalition to Stop Violence against Women, Partnership for Open Society, Coalition for

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<sup>2</sup> State Register of Legal Entities, Armenian Ministry of Justice, 2022.





Inclusive Legal Reforms, Coalition of Domestic Violence Support Centres, The Armenian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, The Non-Discrimination and Equality Coalition, Human Rights House (Yerevan), select CSC-networks facilitated by Oxygen Foundation, Armenian Environmental Front, the Forest Alliance; Coalitions for Election Observation Missions, and also Unions of Employers, and Trade Unions operating in Armenia.<sup>3</sup> The research on Armenian civil society up to date has mainly focused on actors' environment, capacities and financial sustainability. It is safe to say that the main targets of the previous research agenda have been: civil society organisations per se, formal (legal entities) or non-formal actors (civic initiatives, activist campaigns etc.). This research concentrates on **civil society coalitions in Armenia**. See: methodology for definitional boundaries.

## Civil society coalitions in research

Some attention warrants focusing on the civil society coalition literature. Civil society, a subject broad, and therefore ambiguous, has attracted the attention of scholars throughout centuries. This research is mainly about *the forms of civil society*, as the unit of analysis is *a civil society coalition (CSC)*. Among the branches of civil society literature, the theoretical discussion here has concentrated on civil society (non-governmental, non-profit, voluntary, third sector) formal and informal forms or ways of organising, including grassroot associations, social enterprises, international CSO coalitions, interorganisational networks, social movements and so on (Porta and Diani 1999; Chetkovich and Kunreuther 2006; Nicholls 2006; Fowler 2013). Some point to a tangible success of the transnational civil society networks, having proved their use and benefit (for example, Florini 2000). CSCs became a curious subject of research, especially in open economies, highlighting the growing 'coalitional capital' developing in parallel to country's liberalisation policies and political change (for example, the case of Singapore, Ortmann 2015).

Research on CSCs, and in different corners of the world, is diverse, looking at networks': benefits of capacity (Liebler and Ferri 2004), benefits of larger advocacy (James and Malunga 2006), or challenges and increasing competition (Raphael 2021). Some authors suggest conceptual models to understand coalitional dynamics. *The Five Network Model* highlights the need to distinguish between the types of networks based on the type of their shared purpose (Ashman et al. 2005) (a subject continuously appearing also in this research findings). The latter develops as an independent variable affecting other variables, such as: *the levels of interdependence* within the network (intra-groups), *the type of decision-making strategies*, *ownership of governance* and *the types of network structure*. However, considering that most of the time civil society networks may exercise several shared purposes, the picture gets blurred and overlapping, at the same time. In case of more than

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<sup>3</sup> For the full list, consult the mapping of CSCs developed in addition to this report (2023) (available upon request).



one shared purpose, the rest of the variables get intertwined (somewhat combined), disallowing seeking clear lines between the types of organisations.

*The Advocacy Coalition Framework* identifies the importance of the following variables: a) the interaction of competing advocacy coalitions within a policy subsystem; b) changes external to the subsystem in socioeconomic conditions (and also the opportunities and obstacles to competing coalitions within the subsystem); c) the effect of stable system parameters, such as social structure, constitutional rules, major economic changes, political instability etc. (Flora et al. 2001). *An Operating Model* suggests to bridge the gap between network strategies and end results by means of four interrelated elements: structure and accountabilities, management systems, enablers and ways of working (McKeag and Brine 2019). The *organisational interdependence*, either simple or complex, stands out as a popular variable classifying different models of civil society networks across different sectors and countries (including Armenia, among case-points observed in this research) (Ashman and Luca Sugawara 2013).

For the past decades, in the post-Soviet context, the scholarship attention has mostly been concentrated on civil society's role in state-building and democratisation (to name a few, Ishkarian 2008; Uhlin 2006; Tordjman 2008; Aliyev 2015). The wealth of evidence demonstrates that societies with post-Soviet influences still retain problems preventing a healthy civil society development. Hence, the academic literature focusing on specificities of civil society's group- or coalition-work is in progress. This exploratory research based on the case of a transitional regime, is one minor contribution to that aim.

## Methodology

This report presents the findings of an exploratory research aimed at identifying specific issues regarding the situation, operation, sustainability factors, problems and successes of civil society 'alliances' and 'coalitions' (used interchangeably) in Armenia. This research used the following methods of investigation: consultations with the Delegation of the European Union in Armenia (EUD); review of literature and previous research; semi-structured and in-depth interviews with representatives of Armenian CSCs, civil society experts, and representatives of international donor institutions in Armenia. The methodology section presents: a) *the concept definition*, used in this research, b) *a research review*, as a methodological tool to access information, c) *the interviews*, as a primary source of information to address research enquiry, and d) *the limitations* of this research.

### a) Concept definition

The concept of 'civil society' is ambiguous, which makes a research definition an imperative. The unit of analysis in this research is a 'civil society coalition' (CSC). The following criteria were used to identify CSC in Armenia: a) coalition (group, network, alliance, union etc.) operating fully in

Armenia's local context (excluding international coalitions); b) either, formal, registered entities (NGO, fund), or non-formal groups (not necessarily registered), however recognised by public, government and international institutions based on their popularity, previous work; c) this research makes a distinction between a 'coalition' and a 'consortium', and does not focus on the second type: which has a popular practice, may be established with a shared, however one-time purpose and mission, in response to available funding opportunities. The research does not concentrate on social movement type of organising, including (large or mini) civic initiatives or civic activist campaigns. The unit of analysis for this study is: **a group, alliance, network or any other joint established cooperation based on either formal (registered) or non-formal joining of forces with a common purpose.**

### b) Research review

This research uses the available data on Armenia's social and political context, Armenian civil society, mainly the reports by the community of local and international expertise, references of local and foreign experts in the field, and scholarship sources. This research has also included a mapping activity, aiming to develop, possibly, an exhaustive list of CSCs in Armenia (available upon request). The mapping activity (among others) has applied an online searching technique, which does not cease its relevance as an innovative approach for organisational mapping purposes. For example, a similar activity was applied to map the online visibility of Armenian NGOs (Paturyan, Gevorgyan, and Matevosyan 2014).<sup>4</sup> The mapping exercise conducted on the side-lines of this research has identified the main and functioning coalitions in Armenia, while at the same time, it should not be considered absolutely thorough and exhaustive.

### c) Interviews

Interviews are a significant data source for qualitative research. A total of **30 semi-structured and in-depth interviews** were conducted to generate primary data for the purposes of this research. Interviews were conducted with representatives, coordinators and leaders of CSCs (networks, groups), independent civil society experts, and representatives of international donor organisations. The interviewee selection was conditioned by participants' leadership, coordination position, active membership, involvement, and knowledge related to the units of analysis (CSC). Purposefully, the research has focused on civil society networks with a number of years of experience in provision of consultations, monitoring and advocacy of government's performance, able to reflect on the evidence. The interview instruments were developed based on the preliminary developed and discussed with research team indexing scheme (Appendix 1). The anonymity of participants was ensured; all interviewees were presented information about research by providing their consent to participate (Appendix 2). Respondents interested in interview questions, were also presented with interview guide in advance (Appendix 3). The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The research applied thematic analysis of qualitative data (Gibson and Brown 2009) based on the dominant themes extracted from the

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<sup>4</sup> Conducted in the scope of study on Armenian civil society (Paturyan and Gevorgyan 2021).



research enquiry of this study. The analysis has also used inductive approach, developing data based on emergent themes from interviews. The interviews were conducted: in Armenian and English languages; in person (Yerevan) and online, during the period of October 2023.

#### d) Limitations of research

The implementation of current research coincided with the period of humanitarian crisis for Armenia and Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh). During the months September-October 2023, Armenia welcomed more than 100,000 forcibly displaced Armenians from Artsakh. It will be fair to say, that the Armenian civil society community has been overburdened with providing support to the displaced population, by responding to their immediate needs. Although the participants were eager to participate in this research, the main focus of the CSCs and civil society actors has been on addressing the urgent needs resulting from this humanitarian crisis.

## Data Analysis

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### Civil society coalitions in Armenia: a structural diversity and ‘blurry boundaries’

This research denotes the third (civil society, non-governmental, voluntary) sector of the Armenian society, with a particular focus on civil society coalitions (CSC).<sup>5</sup> The ecosystem of the Armenian civil society is large and diverse. Regretfully, on the post-Soviet space the two descriptors did not emerge as synonymous to effectiveness or contributing to the sector’s success. It is safe to say that CSC structure is of an ambiguous nature. The ways in which civil society organises in Armenia are similar to the terrain itself: very different, let alone chaotic, making it impossible to put forward one definition, which would serve as a common denominator or an exhaustive umbrella covering all types of joining forces.

The diverse ways of organising or coming together include, but are not limited to, a mix of formal and non-formal civil society groups. Some coalitions are composed of: organisations (legal entities) only, some include organisations and civic groups (non-formal initiative groups or campaigns), some, in addition to previous types also include individual members, human rights defenders or civil society/thematic experts. There are overlaps, blurred boundaries and also cross-memberships among the different compositions of CSCs. For example, some organisations are members of several coalitions at the same time, some individuals are co-founders of several organisations which in their turn are members of different coalitions, etc. There are also different *types* of coalitions, in terms of their legal standing. Some actual and known CSCs or networks in Armenia appear as registered entities, while others operate informally, recognised by the following dynamics. There have been cases when a coalition started its operation informally, later becoming a legal entity,<sup>6</sup> institutionalisation allowing to seek funding opportunities as a coalition collectively, and not based on member organisations’ individual effort. Despite a wide-ranging structural diversity of civil society groups in Armenia, **becoming a legal entity does not serve as a determinant factor of coalition’s impact or success**. Despite the structure, coalitions have different functionalities, influences and destinies.

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<sup>5</sup> See concept definition applied for this research in Methodology.

<sup>6</sup> Registering as an NGO (*public organisation: «հասարակական կազմակերպություն»* in Armenian) or foundation, according to RA legislation.

The diversity of structure allows for developing a minor typology of CSCs based on the case of Armenia (see, Table 1). Considering the wealth (and confusion) of civil society’s organising formats, the typology is developed from the perspective of coalitions’ areas of engagement, establishment purposes and also membership-modes of organising. The following types of CSCs are identified:

- *big, with a larger reform-agenda,*
- *sectoral,*
- *thematic or issue-based,*
- *mixed, network type,*
- *individual (stand-alone).*

The so-called ‘*big*’ coalitions, refer to the ones with a larger reform agenda, involving different areas of operation, these may include other thematic-smaller coalitions, working or professionalised groups. *Sectoral* coalitions work on many issues however within a given sector of interest, while *thematic* or *issue-based* coalitions are organised with an exact purpose: advocate for a specific legislation, or work on specified issues (for example, women’s rights). Armenia’s case is that, usually, the creation of these type of coalitions is triggered by a major wrongdoing or a tragic event, that led to the need of establishing a collective force for action as: a responding, educational and preventive mechanism. Interestingly, in some cases, a coalition *type* may also be shifting, for example, from issue-based to sectoral. The *mixed or tier-system* coalitions have similarities with sectoral coalitions, however diversified based on multi-layered membership-bases allowing to collect members based on different factors, including thematic, regional and direct membership.

There are coalitions which do not directly fall under the described categories, although sharing similarities with other types. The typology separates the coalitions facilitated by an international or regional factor, however fully established and operating in Armenia. The examples include the Civil Society Platform, established due to a conditionality in the requirements of the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA). The EU-Armenia CEPA is almost a constitution of Armenia’s sectoral cooperation and approximation to EU standards. The implementation of the document in a timely and quality manner is down to both the executive and legislative branches of the Armenian government. This means a deeper civil society involvement must be expected and executed. The CEPA Civil Society Platform involves EU civil society representatives (members of the European Economic and Social Committee, EESC), and Armenian CSO representatives: NGOs/funds, confederation of trade unions and employers organisations. The decree on the composition and selection of NGOs/funds in the platform designates the electoral commission, comprising members of the following CSCs: ANP of the EaP CSF (three members), Partnership for Open Society (one member) and Commitment to Constructive Dialogue (one member). The second stand-alone type of coalition is Armenian National Platform, facilitated by the EaP’s Civil Society Forum, which similarly shared descriptive qualities with other coalition-types,

however is considered separate due to the factor of being established due to a regional conditionality.

Additional *individual or stand-alone* coalitions existing in Armenia are the Public Monitoring Groups conducting civilian oversight in closed and semi-closed institutions (including, penitentiary bodies and institutions, psychiatric wards, care institutions, special schools etc.). These civil society groups share similarities with other coalition-types, however are considered separately due to their specific mission of observing state institutions’ performance, with an inevitable involvement of government in the dialogue.

The post-pandemic and post-crisis environment in Armenia has positively influenced civil society action, making it more flexible (mostly related to community issues), and successfully resolved. Such are considered to be decentralised online network-initiatives, spontaneous, involving participants from formal, non-formal civil society, and individual experts. Online platforms are said to be convenient when it comes to drawing the attention of authorities towards specific issues, but also raising the awareness of those who may be interested in the issue. Online capabilities are considered important and a distinguishing factor of the new groups or networks, which are created even for a one-time or issue-oriented cases. In the words of a CSO leader, *“With more online communication and opportunities, we witness a shift from ‘clumsy’ associations to more flexible and successful ones.”* There has also been a practice of developing CSCs similar to the ways of consortia organising, so-called project-led coalitions. This means that some coalitions were developed in response to funding conditionality, boosting the culture of collective work. This type with qualities of ‘consortium’, may retain different types, including big, sectoral, or thematic. Encouraging collective civil society work is viewed from a positive perspective, however also leading to problems, discussed later.

**Table 1 Typology of CSCs in Armenia**

<i>Type</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Examples*</i>
Big (reform agenda)	large reform agenda and member-base, focus on different themes and issues, may also include sub-coalitions (thematic, ad-hoc, working groups, etc.)	Partnership for Open Society
Sectoral	general agenda to tackle problems/for the development of a specific sector (or sub-sector)	Agricultural Coalition Forest Alliance of Armenia
Thematic or issue-based	thematic agenda, mandate or issue (may be also organised for the purpose of specific legislative advocacy)	Coalition for Inclusive Legal Reforms Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women Non-Discrimination and Equality Coalition
Mixed or tier-system	larger agenda, similar to big coalitions, but qualities pertaining to sectoral and thematic coalitions; somewhat diverse membership structure (thematic, territorial/marz-based, direct membership)	Confederation of Trade Unions of Armenia/ Republican Union of Employers of Armenia



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Network	specific agenda (mainly sectoral), decentralised, mixed and open membership incl. formal and non-formal members, experts, online modes prevail: organising, communication, operation, similarities with civic initiatives	Environmental Network Gituzh Initiative (Power of Science)
Individual (stand-alone) (facilitated by an international/regional factor)	similarities with big (reform agenda) type, with a distinguishing feature: establishment facilitated by an international or regional conditionality or initiative, examples include: the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), the EaP Civil Society Forum	EU-Armenia CEPA Civil Society Platform Armenian National Platform of the EaP Civil Society Forum
Individual (stand-alone)	similarities with sectoral and thematic or issue-based types, with a distinguishing feature: specific monitoring mission and an inevitable involvement of government institutions in the dialogue	Public Monitoring Groups of closed and semi-closed institutions

### Functions and areas of operation

Similar to the diverse formats of organising, the functions of many CSOs, and therefore coalitions, vary and overlap. According to the majority of respondents the most frequently mentioned function is: collective advocacy or having a collective voice to influence a policy or reform. There can be much said about this function’s operation in the past. However, after 2018, civil society’s collective advocacy for policy and reform seemed to have shifted, becoming more ‘collective’, ‘including campaigns’, otherwise defined as ‘bigger’. CSCs have seemingly developed more the understanding of the importance of a policy or reform being supported by the public. This is said to have shifted the nature of collective advocacy, which is considered as the main function by coordinators and also members of various coalitions. Monitoring of the implementation by the RA Government of the EU-Armenia CEPA has a visible standing on the radar of CSCs’ responses, when asked about functional priorities. Members of influential coalitions attach importance to the monitoring of Armenia’s EU integration agenda.<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, when describing functions in the scope of collective advocacy, some participants mentioned ‘*communication with government institutions*’. Such usually happens via reports, assessments, direct enquiries (not to confuse with monitoring activities mentioned above), and also research of cases of human rights violations, with intention of developing policy and practice recommendations.

<sup>7</sup> An example is civil society’s report with analytical findings of collective monitoring of RA Government’s actions under the EU-Armenia CEPA, prepared by members of Partnership for Open Society coalition (2021), available at: <https://www.osf.am/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/EU-Armenia-Comprehensive-and-Enhanced-Partnership-Agreement-CEPA-Civil-Societys-Collective-Monitoring-report-2021-1.pdf> (Last accessed: 23 Nov 2023).



The second popular function by CSCs observed in this research is the service delivery: defined as responding to the humanitarian crisis in Armenia, after the forcibly displaced population of Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh) arrived in Armenia.<sup>8</sup> Many CSOs traditionally focusing on human rights advocacy have changed their mandates to respond to the humanitarian priorities (USAID 2023). Even the CSCs and organisations, whose main functional directions have been advocacy and monitoring of reforms, have resorted to responding to the needs of the humanitarian crisis, which necessitated activities responding to the primary needs of those affected. It is important however, to highlight that the advocacy nature of some of the coalitions did not change in crisis, rather shifted towards developing unified activities by members, for example collecting information from first sources, witness testimonies, etc.

The next popular function highlighted by CSC members refers to ‘capacity building’ activities, broadly defined. These include: trainings for citizens (on information pertaining to organisations’ mandates, or *communication skills in digital security*); mentoring programs for sub-grantee CSOs; information and resource exchange among coalitions’ members, and also international partner CSOs, or international CSCs. Some coalitions prioritise cooperative skill-sharing among members. When an organisation-member joined a useful training, they would usually re-share the knowledge and materials to other members, pointing to cooperative dynamics. Development of expertise is perceived as an ongoing process. In the words of a CSO head, “*The coalition is dependent on the expertise of its separate members.*” The subject of ‘capacity building’ remains popular among respondents. However, may be calling for new approaches. One such approach may be developing training modules with a view of contributing to participants’ monitoring and watchdogging skills via thematic and specific public policy agenda (for example, responding to the EU-Armenia CEPA priorities). The phrase ‘building capacity’ has been overused and also confused to become a descriptor relating to not necessarily positive connotations. Some respondents concerned with the ‘destiny’ of CSCs’ capacities still calls for improvement – suggest investing in a thinking aimed at identifying new approaches. Coalitions are bound to be finding new creative and alternative capacity building methods, perhaps going beyond usual formats, such as training. For Armenian civil society’s new generational change, the third sector needs changes in teaching and learning approaches.

There seems to be no lack of areas of involvement by civil society groups in Armenia. The third sector is full of either formal or non-formal members claiming to be protecting the rights of diverse groups, focusing on diverse problems and operating in different areas. What seems to be lacking is the actual assessment of operational success, defined as resolution of specific problems or achievement of concrete aims, as highlighted in the coalitions’ or CSOs’ missions. The areas of CSCs operation are as wide-ranging as the CSO sector itself: the areas of thematic and sectoral coalitions speak for themselves. These usually relate to protections and advocacy of defined human rights

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<sup>8</sup> This may be due to the fact that data collection coincided with humanitarian crisis.

standards. The so-called ‘big’ coalitions have a wide reform agenda, and incorporate sub-groups working on various issues. The main areas and issues pertaining to CSCs include (but are not limited to): anti-corruption agenda, legal and judicial reforms, education reforms, electoral reform, equal rights and non-discrimination, the implementation of a number of human rights standards and social issues (to name a few, the right to health, the right to education, labour rights, access to justice, the right to be free from torture, the right to a fair trial etc.), women’s issues, gender-based violence, gender-responsive policy, issues related to persons with disabilities, research and advocacy of non-discrimination legislation, activities towards women’s empowerment, provision of legal aid and psychological help to vulnerable groups, community development and participation on local level, agricultural issues, cross-border dialogue, peacebuilding and security, education, participation of and cooperation with youth. Recently and importantly also, provision of humanitarian support (shelter, social packages) to forcibly displaced population from Artsakh, as well as refugees from Ukraine and Russia. Regarding almost all the areas mentioned above: Armenia’s implementation of human rights standards and country’s international commitments is highlighted as essential.

### Modus operandi and funding

There seems to be a common understanding among participants that if a standalone organisation is ethical in following own legal regulations and procedures, the same would be easy to replicate on a larger level – while being a member of a coalition. In the same vein, if organisations stay true and have included in their missions the issues of openness and transparency, then it is easier for them to join and operate within coalitions. The data shows that experienced CSOs with years of successful operation behind, have been able to take that experience to the coalition level. However, there is no lack of problems when it comes to coalitions’ mode of operation. The discussion with respondents seemed to identify the following aspects: *CSCs’ coordinating body and governance composition; decision-making procedures; members’ levels of engagement in coalitional work, and intra-coalition communication methods and strategies.*

There are coalitions that have core, central coordinating bodies; there are coalitions with no such body. Formal coalitions (registered and membership-based) have secretariats, with nuanced shifts necessitating separate research attention. Selected CSC-cases observed in this research seem to be in crisis or exercise somewhat problematic dynamics due to misunderstandings among the secretariat and coalition members. One such and most recent example is, the *ANP of the EaP CSF* (discussed in the next section). For some coalitions secretariats are considered as the main, coordinating force, necessary for coalition building and development. Some others see coordination of a coalition not necessarily in terms of secretariat, but one member-organisation, which can retain the responsibility to unite and uphold the structure. No matter the actual framing of the body, the agreement exists that without a certain coordinating, central body, it is impossible to sustain coalitional work. Most of the CSCs registered as a legal entity exercise the following positions: president, financial specialist, assistant and public relations manager. Ethical boards or committees are also a usual practice among coalitions, aimed at identifying solutions in cases of conflicts. In some

cases of successful coalitions in Armenia, the role of the convener has been imperative (for example, *Non-Discrimination and Equality Coalition*, initially supported by *Open Society Foundations-Armenia*). Without an initiative-taker, an organisation that would serve the central leading role, it is difficult to establish, let alone sustain a coalition (if it was not established for a one-time purpose in the first place).

The decisions in coalitions are also made via different procedures, subject to decisions on methods of such by members, put in place in advance. The two main modes are voting procedures and consensual decisions achieved through discussion and general meetings. Some participants mentioned the practice of organising separate meetings with members-parties in conflict. If separate meetings did not help in reaching consensus, the issues were referred to the ethical boards of committees (usually composed of different members of that coalition). Successful coalitions are said to be those in which each member works separately on their own issues. But through their separate activities they inadvertently contribute to coalition's main purpose, (coalition's main idea). This mode of operation is considered as most successful, framed as "active members' input" into collective work. The majority of respondents concur (or rather complain) that the membership culture is under-developed in Armenia, necessitating investment in institutional culture. This is expected to be beneficial in two ways: by activating members work and benefiting coalition as a whole, via membership fees. Email and online social media groups are named as the most frequent ways of communication among coalition members. All respondents highlight the exercise of regular meetings (mentions include: biweekly, monthly, semi-annual). Most of the coalition members mentioned that apart from regular meetings, they have a practice of ad-hoc meetings organised, based on urgency.

Funding remains a problem. The discussion regarding available funding for CSCs usually starts with rather sad reflections of complaints, on the lack of resources, especially when it comes to coalitional organising and possibilities for success. The main sources of funding for CSCs in Armenia are international institutions (the main source remains the EU). Most of the coalitions employ membership fees (usually paid by members on an annual basis). However, membership fees as a funding source is perceived as *concerning, not enough, or yet to develop*. Select coalitions receive partial subsidies from line-ministries based on mutual agreement; for CSC to deliver specified services to groups of interest (for example, *Coalition of Domestic Violence Support Centres*). An additional source of funding for CSCs is also a service provision in the form of trainings and professional consultations etc. However, the three main sources of funding are: international donor-institutions supporting civil society, membership fees and government funding. The last two in aggregate are marginal compared to donor funding. The majority of respondents view the availability of a core funding mechanism as the basis for coalitions' institutional development. Participants' reflections evidence an inevitable correlation of CSCs' funding to issues of coordination, governance and successful coalition work.

## Culture and values

### Establishment purposes

Despite the structural diversity of the Armenian civil society, it is difficult to confirm that a culture of coalitional work is vibrant and on the rise. This shall not come as a surprise, considering that Armenia is still fighting the different influences of post-Sovietism, at the same time recognising the need of moving away from it. Although the formats of organising are important, the reasons behind establishment of coalitions are of prevailing importance. Without understanding the essence or the purposes of the establishment, it seems of no use to discuss its other functions. There seems to be a consensus that a starting point for analysing any kind of collective work must be its core, i.e. the reasons behind establishment. The participants highlight a wide range of purposes. The main ones resonate with the popular themes responsive to the conceptual models facilitating coalitional work. The most popular mentions include: common values, collective voice and a stronger advocacy for reforms. The history of CSCs from the perspective of the reasons for establishment is twofold. The popular, widely used (and abused) factor is the funding-based (or donor-driven) organising, making the sector artificial, responsive rather than initiative-taking; lacking discourse and a shared purpose. The second reason for organising has been the shared value. Both cases of coalition-development are pertinent to Armenia. A popular reasoning behind the establishment of some CSCs is the availability of funding by major donors. We know from a wealth of research how the long-time financially engineered civil society argument has retained its place, among the indicators most negative and criticised (in some cases rightfully so). The argument remained well alive developing from the collapse of communism and into the post-Soviet period. It has also played well into the hands of anti-civil society forces, putting the blame for any misfortune on civil society.

The critical attitudes -that the funding of major donors triggered the establishment of CSCs- may be in place. The participants seem to agree, that funding aimed at facilitating the establishing of a new (non-existent) coalition may have not been the donors' best strategy. This is considering that the main uniting factor in the civic sector must be a shared purpose, an idea and a way of thinking, in order for civil society members to truly unite and succeed. The majority agrees that it is easier to mobilise resources under the name of a coalition. However, fundraising and seeking other sources should not be the primary goal of unity. That kind of thinking has contributed to the distortion of culture, much competition and less cooperation. It may also be easy to detect the cases of coalitions becoming non-functional if we take out "the funding" variable from the equation. When a coalition is created to access available funding (to which a group responds), the group is likely to weaken or cease to exist, when the funding comes to an end. On the other hand, those which have been originally united around ideas and the human rights agenda, continue to serve their purpose. It is interesting that according to participants, the availability of resources sustaining civil society is perceived as a driving/encouraging force, and a necessity towards the development of the sector. The issue here remains the capacities of donors on *who to fund* for real impact. The issue of funding develops as an independent variable in relation to coalition organising practice in Armenia. Sadly,

data shows that there have been CSCs facilitated: *-based on an existing funding; -in order to generate funding; and -around a shared idea with hopes to generate funding for operational purposes.*

Referring to successful coalitions, a rather positive organising experience has been also present in Armenia. The establishment of such groups or networks has been effective and conditioned by a *crisis* factor. For example, the Partnership for Open Society (POS) coalition. This means that the members, institutional and individual experts, united in response to major critical processes or a wrongdoing, for example, fraudulent elections, increasing corruption, closing space for media, and other manifestations of the *capture of the state* phenomenon. CSCs are also characterised by the promotion of European integration, including the monitoring of country's compliance with international commitments (including, European Neighbourhood Policy implementation, Eastern Partnership agenda, EU-Armenia CEPA etc.). Value-bases and common purpose have been the main organising principles here.

Some effective coalitions were established based on a specific issue or thematic purpose. The effectiveness of such CSCs is also easy to follow, as the reasoning for their establishment appears to be 'empiric' rather than 'theoretical'. This means that the specific purpose has been to organise around advocacy aimed at: adopting a law, ratifying international documents, compliance and approximation of Armenia's legal framework to international Conventions (women's issues, anti-discrimination, disability issues etc.). For example, the Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women or the Non-Discrimination and Equality Coalition. The experience shows that CSCs organised with such purpose end up extending their functions, once the original mission is complete (for example, a law has been adopted, however the need to fight *domestic violence*, or advocate for *gender equality* remains).

From the main organising principle, or reason for CSC establishment, we move on to the issue of CSC members' motivations. Some participants differentiate between CSCs' goals and members' motivations, highlighting the importance of this distinction. Some coalitions have members with somewhat 'hidden' and divergent motivations, and this is considered as most dangerous. Such may be the case when the reasoning behind uniting seems to be a shared purpose, however the actual motivations of several members may diverge. The majority of respondents agree that it is unreasonable to expect 'one opinion' or 'one voice' when it comes to coalitional work. At the same time, participants promote in chorus the importance of any coalitional or group work to be based on main, overarching shared standards (for example, democratisation or Europeanisation).

### Intra- and inter-group dynamics

Not surprisingly, research identified both types of dynamics among intra-coalitional relations: *positive or supportive*, and *conflicting or problematic*. The supportive relations occur when a coalition's work is directly responding to its mission and goals, characterised as a two-way supporting process. In such a case the coalition presents itself as a supportive umbrella to its

members. It occurs when members of coalition are able to generate funding thanks to the coalition/s input (and based on such, empirically promote their ideas). This is where sub-granting of member organisations appears as an intervening variable, characterised as benefiting both ways. The practice of some coalitions shows that in given cases, the effectiveness and positive reputation of a coalition is supportive to individual members, while members ‘return the favour’ by promoting quality work responding firstly to the coalition’s mission. For example, the Coalition for Inclusive Legal Reforms or the Non-Discrimination and Equality Coalition.

The second frequent mention of supportive relations among members refers to the shared understanding of the importance of international advocacy, which most recently has been oriented towards the ongoing humanitarian crisis. Regular sharing of experience and information with other members is considered as a basic factor of success (if the coalition looks to sustain itself). Despite some conflicting/stony paths in the past, some coalitions seem to be ‘getting back on their feet’, moving towards solidarity and mutual understanding. For example, the EU-Armenia CEPA Civil Society Platform.

Observing CSCs in Armenia, the data shows problematic intra-coalitional dynamics, and especially so in the current critical conditions for Armenia. Coalitions manifest unhealthy internal discourses. An example here is the ANP of EaP CSF: since early 2023, the relations among the platform’s different representatives started to deteriorate with rapid and concerning dynamics. The misunderstanding between the members of the Secretariat and the coordinating team can be understood on different levels, including personal and professional (in terms of differences in views towards what constitutes a professional attitude and capacity). However, the main point of misunderstanding, or a diversion later evolving into a bigger conflict, seemed to be over the platform’s initiatives on engaging with political actors and representatives. Ideologically, it seems, the different representatives had diverse views in terms of the EU integration strategy, but importantly also on the methods or how the platform – with the main purpose of supporting Armenia’s EU integration – shall choose to progress. Some favour seemingly ‘cautious’ or otherwise neutral methods, while others would choose to engage in actual or seemingly ‘loud’ advocacy activities, openly demonstrating the wish to be a pro-active and collaborative EU joining force. The methods on how the platform shall conduct itself may be considered the main point of disagreement between the two member groups emerging as a result of the conflict.

The post-crisis environment has contributed to a polarisation in society (among political parties) but also, regretfully, in the third sector. There is a general agreement that conflicts in coalitions distort and negatively influence the entire coalitional work. A rather pessimistic or otherwise, a realistic quote by a civil society leader, *“From institutional perspective there are unhealthy situations in CSC. There have been unhealthy situations in the past, there are such now, and will be in the future.”*

The only positive factor in a total crisis situation of specific (and big) coalitions, may be that the conflict has rapidly come to the fore and facilitated an imperative of rapid resolution. This is



considered positive only in terms of cases where conflicts remain so-called ‘in the air’ and may develop in most dangerous ways when erupting unexpectedly. Culturally, a ‘freezing-method’ has been a usual mode of approaching conflicts in Armenia, a practice that can be observed in different institutional settings. The sooner conflicts make themselves loud and heard, the better, to prevent them from freezing and multiplying in layers.

Speaking about intra-coalitional relations and ways to sustain such, the analysis concentrates on the two main factors or the need for: a) transparency, an open (at times meaning open esp. to public) communication, and b) a value-based discussion as the main methods for resolution of conflicts among CSCs. The more organisations, the more individuals, and therefore the more chances of misunderstanding among each other. This is why especially in terms of coalitions, transparency of intentions, modes of operation and methodology of achieving goals, must be open to discussion and mutually conceptualised. Especially so in a society with problematic legacy, stereotypes and deepening competition. In the words of a CSC member, *“It is important for us that everyone in the coalition sees what other members do”*. The value-based discussion argument refers to the imperative of understanding the third sector’s problems (among such the deepening misunderstanding among critical CSCs members), through understanding members’ value-bases, and the urgent/primary areas for reforms. The argument sustains that a closer look at a larger uniting agenda (of a given coalition), and a better understanding of how such agenda is conceptualised by different members, may be among solutions. While some reforms are rather technical (for example, transport and energy, which mostly retain indicators that need be applied or replicated), others call for conceptualisations and understanding. Most of the CSCs declaratively sustain the values of Armenia’s chance to democratise, protecting human rights, employing inclusivity on all layers of policy, etc. The real question is – whether they do so on practice.

Data on inter-group dynamics is poor, however, enough to point to its problematic aspects. As mentioned, there are many CSOs and also groups or networks, that usually work in cross-cutting spheres and implement similar activities. These have a potential to be coordinated for a greater benefit. The participants mention the lack of experience-sharing practices between civil society groups (with an exception where the same individuals or organisations retain membership in several platforms). Another problem of ‘keeping or saving things to themselves’ seems to surface. Some respondents mentioned about the inter-coalitions’ need for more data sharing, improved communication strategies, and especially in order to avoid the duplication of activities. The issues of the forcibly displaced Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) – was most recently (September-October 2023) a uniting agenda distinguishing an inter-group relational variation. There is a common understanding that the support has been well-facilitated among CSCs – in aggregate serving the purpose of responding to the crisis.



## Relations with other actors

### Government institutions

“We must take the government *‘by the hand’* and lead them to reforms.”  
CSC coordinator, Yerevan, October 2023

Among the aims of this research was to provide an understanding of CSCs’ relational dynamics with different actors. This section summarises the main points related to the main coalitions’ engagement with government institutions in Armenia. The subject remains relevant, especially considering that the overwhelming majority of respondents highlight collective advocacy for reforms, among their main functions. The relations between the third sector and government institutions in Armenia have been different and changing, based on institutional strategies (means) and goals (ends): defined as confrontational, cooperative and also co-optive (Najam 2000), over the course of the past two decades (Gevorgyan 2021). A study looking into relations between civil society and government institutions in Armenia identified a number of factors determinant of relational variations (or changing phases of relations) between the two entities. Considering government’s strategies employed towards civil society, Armenia’s young republic (after the confusing 1990s), has travelled from *imitation of equals* or *artificiality* strategies to those of *a purposeful ignorance* and *an intentional co-optation*; from engaging with critical members to save or showcase own legitimacy to using multiple strategies aimed at discrediting civil society (Gevorgyan 2021). The international funding, a subject to which the analysis returns, has impacted the relationship between the two entities. Since early 2000s, the international community was a defining factor to explain the two entities’ relational dynamics.

In the immediate aftermath of revolution (2018), the relational variations seemed to change from somewhat conflicting to more cooperative ones (with some positive cases of cooperation, for example, *Joint committee on electoral reform*, *Joint cooperation on the Action plan of the Human Rights National Strategy 2019–22*). Later however, the relations seemed to develop in a chaotic mode, ranging from cases of actual cooperation to the ones of deepening conflict, making it difficult to search for a trend, and civil society’s concerns multiplying. This may have been triggered by a number of shocks the country experienced, but also, the intentional targeting of civil society.<sup>9</sup> It may well be safe to state that the relations between the two actors became a subject as great as the revolution itself; along with becoming a subject least understood by the public throughout the country (Gevorgyan 2021). The participants of this research confirm previous findings in this regard, namely that alarming concerns multiply. The following problems remain and also emerge in cooperation dynamics between the two sectors. The most frequently mentioned concern is the lack

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<sup>9</sup> For more information, see: *Armenian Civil Society’s Critical Potential on Target*, available at: <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2019/11/15/armenian-civil-societys-critical-potential-on-target/> (Last accessed: 22 Nov 2023).

of institutional memory (or so-called ‘continuance mechanisms’), but rather fluidity in government agencies, which is directly impacting relations between the two entities. Among the main problems with government institutions in a post-revolutionary environment has been the high turnover in governing positions (including ministers, deputy ministers, ministerial departments’ heads) responsible for communication and policy work regarding the agenda of interest for civil society. It takes time to establish relations with government agencies and their representatives. And the practice of rapid change of authorities has brought cooperation to ‘ground zero’ or a start-over, which takes time and does not contribute to effectiveness.

There is a common agreement among CSCs that engagement with government institutions (and authorities) is considered a determining factor (variable) for coalition building and success for collective advocacy. In the scope of this discussion, some problematic aspects came to the fore: the lack of *actual, quality or content* cooperation (relations) with government bodies, which are often characterised by **instability**, and **lack of maturity**. The data also points to a problem called a ‘*disorganised transparency*’, in the words of a CSO leader, “*the lack of information about the authorities’ background, specialisation or interests*”, which is considered vital when it comes to developing relations with them. This aspect is said to be influencing collective advocacy negatively, whereas more and organised transparency towards civil society would help progress CSCs’ advocacy intentions.

Another aspect which seems to be delaying actual cooperation on reforms is the policy makers’ attitudes (which came up in the interviews frequently). It is true that the government was able to establish participatory bodies involving civil society (such as, ministers’ councils or ad-hoc committees). However, the attitudes of authorities (towards civil society members’ participation) vary. They need to move back from their: ambitious ‘*very official positioning*’, ‘*a-know-it-all*’ approaches of an ‘*observer of a process from above*’.<sup>10</sup> Even in cases, when authorities had organised an ad-hoc committee to engage with a specific thematic or sectorial coalition (based on an initiative or request of coalition), it has not been enough.

Similarly, there is a certain type of a distinctive authorities’ behavioural trait (or a national manner) during all past consecutive regimes to present. This type refers: when government officials respond to public and civil society by simply ‘confirming the receipt’ or ‘taking a note of’<sup>11</sup> a document (draft/proposal/opinion). It is said to be popular among government agencies and officials, keeping actual public participation low. Such behavioural traits ‘*build a wall of misunderstanding*’ preventing an equal engagement on matters of reforms and steps on how to achieve those. Such dynamics tend to influence also attitudes and perceptions of CSOs members, making some: leave platforms, or simply decrease their participation (seeing no results or intention to engage), or remain with the main reason of ‘showcasing’ their cooperation with the government, just on paper. Whether that

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<sup>10</sup> Quotes by respondents.

<sup>11</sup> In Armenian «Ի գիտություն»:

develops into an actual cooperation needs to be analysed on CSC-case-by-case basis. Some coalition members also provided examples from joint meetings with government officials, who made it clear that they do not encourage being publicly recorded, when discussing issues without prior agreement or coordination.

Regarding CSCs' strategies towards government institutions post-revolution, the descriptors include: *cooperative*, *pro-active*, *initiative-taking*, *strategic* and *responsible* (in terms of staying focused on reforms by also following the changes in government's priorities), and in some instances also aggressive. In the words of a CSC coordinator, "*We got back to our aggressive communication strategy with them [government] that we used to apply prior to the revolution. Because there were gaps in the delivery of our expectations.*" Other quotes by CSC members speak for themselves, "*We have to continue to work with state agencies. Immediately report a wrongdoing, and advocate for changes*"; "*The Government has to be a real partner. They need to take issues seriously. Otherwise, the coalition fails.*" Another quote by a CSC member on the importance of authorities' listening to civil society's data points also to the importance of streamlining communication between the two sectors, "*The civil society sector spends more resources on understanding the problems and needs of social groups. So, they [the government] have to listen to us and base their decisions on our data. We contribute to the saving of their resources as we also do the work in their stead. But the information needs to be streamlined for them to get it right and act on it.*" Interestingly, some respondents mentioned that it is still down to civil society actors to understand how to work with government institutions in cases when they do not or remain sceptical or silent. This somewhat self-reflecting and honest approach seems to be silently accepting the lack of capacity among CSOs on the importance of upgrading skills, especially when it comes to strategic advocacy.

Let us turn to some positive cases of relational variations. A positive dynamic has been registered with cases on local level, regarding regional (marz-based) or community-adjacent councils. CSCs' cooperation with community authorities is said to have positive influences. There have been cases of specific one-on-one consulting between a CSC member or a civil society expert providing a consultancy or otherwise *educating* a local government authority. Most examples however have been limited to separate civil society members, not happening on the coalitions' level. Interestingly, the majority of respondents concur that an actual or tangible work between the two entities is possible when government representatives are '*truly*' interested in the outcomes of such cooperation. If there is no actual interest from authorities at the local level, then the engagement becomes also artificial. In the words of a CSC member, "*If we want to be consistently invited to policy discussions, we have to consistently remind them about ourselves. It is our job.*" An example of a positive engagement: an individual<sup>12</sup> has been purposefully selected from within a coalition as a consultant to the Prime Minister on issues related to rehabilitation strategies for persons with disabilities, considering the CSCs' knowledge and expertise in the field (for example, *Coalition for Inclusive Legal Reforms*).

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<sup>12</sup> President of "Full Life" Charity NGO.

## International institutions

*“Without cooperation with international institutions, Armenia’s democratisation will fail.”*  
CSC leader, Yerevan, October 2023

It is no news that for the past decades the biggest supporters of democratisation and the civil society sector in Armenia have been international actors and institutions: the European Union (EU), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the United Nations (UN), the Open Society Foundations (OSF), The German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ), also, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the European Endowment for Democracy (EED). EU member states’ Embassies and the British Embassy also support civil society, however at a much lower scale than major international donors. Different institutions have different experiences when it comes to working with civil society groups. Some institutions have been engaged directly with CSCs; some others have experience in promoting support via programme-based consortia (not necessarily coalitions). This section presents the main concerns and needs in the scope of international institutions’ cooperation with Armenian CSCs.

There seems to be a common acknowledgement regarding the importance for major international actors to keeping focusing on the development of the civil society sector. In a post-crisis Armenia, the third sector has amassed institutional problems, similar to the country itself going through social, political and security shocks since the past three years. In fact, the majority of the main functional coalitions in Armenia did not have any financial support other than from major international donors. Some quotes from CSCs members as evidence, *“The effects of our cooperation with the EU have been huge.”*; *“Without EU’s support, there would have been a repressed and a poor civil society in Armenia.”* The participants refer to the main international institutions – as partners and channels of advocacy (rather than donors of civil society). Some common themes emerged from discussion, including, reflections on: a) the institutions’ role as a third actor along with CSCs and government; b) diverse civil society groups and an improved understanding for donors on *who to fund* in post-crisis Armenia; c) work with EU member states’ embassies.

International institutions have served as mediators between civil society and government institutions, on one hand, and international policy makers, on the other. Considering the availability of this function, for CSCs members, the ability by international institutions to connect local civil society actors with international and local policy makers represents a function most useful, especially for advocacy/reform-oriented CSCs (especially working on issues related to EU-Armenia CEPA’s democratic block, anti-corruption, legal and judicial reforms). International institutions are also providers of large support to the government, which means they have to continue employing and deepening their conditionality mechanisms against the government’s performance on strategic reforms.

International institutions' funding strategies are of particular interest to respondents. According to both: representatives of CSCs and donor community, the question '*who to fund?*' seems to remain in a diverse environment of resource competition. Regarding donor representatives, this means that they need more information on the actual potential and capacities of CSOs. Donors do not necessarily have extended knowledge on the qualities, capacities, effectiveness and results of different CSCs, which explains the regular assessment of the sector, considering also its changing dynamics and generational change. The representatives of **select** donor institutions supporting civil society (especially in the Armenian marzes (regions)) mentioned that their funding strategy would be identified in cooperation with the government. This referred in particular to cases when the donor would consult officials on which groups to fund (in this case, mostly civil society consortia). In such cases, the donor institutions aimed at linking their civil society support to government/national priorities and also to local communities, where the government may have already established civil society partners.

Regarding the amount and scale of financial resources: some major institutions have shifted previous funding strategies by providing bigger support to fewer organisations vs. smaller support to many. While such a financing strategy may make administrative procedures easier for a donor, it does not contribute to: minimising the risks of corruption, risks of conflicts of interest (usually when it comes to sub-granting by major CSCs), rejecting monopolisation and over-concentration/centralisation of resources. Data of this research points to the importance of diversified funding for the main international actors supporting the civil society sector in a post-crisis Armenia. Such an approach is said also to be a determinant factor on the destiny of the functioning of coalitions. For example, if one organisation (not CSC) receives significant funding for several years, this may compromise the idea of a coalition. Conditioned by numerous problems, and also lack of financial resources, civil society institutions were not able to develop a so-called 'larger' thinking approach, but rather remained *in their own 'box' or locality*. It is vital that bigger grants, which will later be distributed via sub-granting to other member-CSOs, are provided to reputable CSCs having proven their commitment to democratisation based on their previous critical work. Some quotes by CSC members are in order, "*Many so-called civil society members usually say things behind closed doors, to 'satisfy the donor', but act otherwise in public. How can this work?*"; "*For donors: complying with standards of CSOs written on paper is not enough. They need to look into their actual experience, the background trajectory of a given coalition.*"

A subject ensuing from discussion above, and inevitably occurring in research targeting relational variations between CSOs and donors, is *resource spending effectiveness*. There has been some healthy criticism regarding the unnecessary usage of resources (waste) on so-called *easy-to-organise* initiatives (such as games, get-togethers, etc.) which is classified an activity close to a 'crime'. And especially so when Armenia faces multiple challenges and where civil society has to support the country's rehabilitation, not waste resources. Many activities would have been tolerable and acceptable some time ago. Today, Armenia can no longer afford the 'luxury' of spending civil



society's resources in an irrelevant manner. Now coalitions' advocacy potential and capacity improvement are critical.

It may be valuable to rethink civil society's cooperation (and vice versa) with EU Member States embassies. Armenia has openly stated and demonstrated its will to move towards deeper engagement and integration with the EU, and doing so via EU Member States' embassies and institutions operating in Armenia, may be another and additional engagement tool. Up to date, the EU embassies' cooperation with civil society has been mostly limited to small-project-based funding. Again, considering Armenia's vulnerable condition, but also potential to democratisation: respondents reflect on the importance of revisiting embassies' strategies by expanding their missions towards more engagement with civil society, and maybe engaging directly with CSCs: both on ambassadorial and programme/thematic levels. For example, *'shifting from one-time, short-term project or event-organising level to more in-depth cooperation'*.

Lastly and importantly, there seems to be a common understanding among CSC representatives that the EU-Armenia CEPA is able to unite the democratic civil society forces and government: and especially so, considering its institutional body, the Civil Society Platform. The Armenian CSCs need to approach the opportunities provided by the CEPA agenda to push the government for reforms (most frequently mentioned include reforms such as: anti-corruption, education, legal and judicial). Arguments uniting almost all participants are as follows. The themes, sectorial/areas of engagement, as well as resources (including financial, human, technical) aimed at supporting civil society in Armenia should increase and diversify. Such arguments are supported by respondents making references to Armenia's crises and the need to sustain democratisation. A fundamental reference for such an increase in resources may be EU-Armenia CEPA, as the leading framework for reforms. All main actors in this process (RA Government institutions, CSCs that monitor reform process and international institutions investing in Armenia's success for reforms) need to define a scope and structure with specifics and timeline of actions.

## Challenges and problems

*"The size of a coalition doesn't mean effectiveness. Membership bases don't automatically develop into results."*  
CSC member, October 2023, Yerevan

This research would not have been complete if it did not provide an understanding of the problems and challenges faced by CSCs in Armenia. First, the analysis presents challenges on the macro level, followed by discussion of problems on meso (institutional) level. It is no surprise that the most frequent references by respondents were related to country's security environment especially after 2020 (Azerbaijan's war on Armenians), and the social, cultural and political shocks ensuing from it. It is interesting to learn based on this research (which has a different target and purpose) that among

the main challenges of the country as identified by civil society members are the risks of declining democratisation and human rights standards. The majority of respondents consider that Armenia experiences conditions which are risky for democracy and the protection of human rights. That leads to the need of sustaining the country's democratic potential, importantly – and including by means of civil society. Elaborations from the same framework led to another challenge, mainly post-war 2020, which is framed as intentional degradation of public opinion utilising a 'democracy vs. security' discourse by some anti-democratic, oppositional forces. Taking into account the country's vulnerable conditions, surrounded by aggressive neighbours and so-called 'strategic partners' the security component has become easily manipulated subject targeting public opinion.

This research has identified disturbing findings related to the general state of civil society. There are internal conflicts and deep divisions within CSCs in Armenia today. The majority of participants agree that the diversity of civil society, and therefore diversity of thinking and positioning is a healthy ingredient for country progress. At the same time, such a diversity shall not mean to develop into divisions so wide, to contribute to a somewhat crisis of the sector. The misunderstanding (to put it softly) among members of coalitions is characterised by a web of blaming, shaming and ensuing actions, that do not contribute to the vibrancy of the sector, let alone a development. And especially so, regarding platforms with potential to support Armenia's democratisation. Among such vital examples is the ANP of the EaP CSF, which for the past year (2023) is characterised by unhealthy internal dynamics, having developed into serious problems calling for external actors' intervention, which seems not only needed, but also considered as a positive development.

Many internal and personal factors may have contributed to divisions among the platform's members. The main conflict however, can be framed as: diverging views of members' regarding the strategy, methodology, as well as actions and initiatives on how to monitor and how to watchdog the implementation of reforms. Largely defined, the misunderstanding, which contributes to polarisation within coalition seems to demonstrate the diverse approaches and positioning of forces towards supporting (through the platform) Armenia's path to democratisation. Some other reasons, analysed on a somewhat surface-level may include the confusing dynamics of blaming each other, most of the time of the same 'sins', namely being supported by foreign anti-democratic forces with missions to reorient Armenia's democratic path and EU integration. The fight against Russian inevitable influences and propaganda, including through pro-Russia Eurasian institutes, is qualified an enormous challenge for EaP countries (The Polish Institute of International Affairs 2019).

On the one hand, with a rich structural diversity, 'blurry' boundaries and synergies (discussed earlier), and, on the other, a deepening and critical situation of the sector, Armenia's influential coalitions may necessitate value-based self-healing processes (or evaluations). There may be quantitative, but importantly qualitative solutions to this problem. The main purpose of the self-healing or 'self-rehabilitation' processes should be an evaluation of coalition-members' values and behaviour, to provide an understanding of the actual thinking and ensuing behavioural traits. A simple solution may constitute distributing a questionnaire with specific variables responding to individual value-commitments, principles and beliefs. That, however, must be contrasted with examples manifesting



members former and actual behaviour: for example, their levels of participation (active vs. passive) in coalitions' activities, initiative-taking qualities and contributions in processes, such as, the signing of civil society petitions, announcements and real commitment to actions. Evaluating members' capacities and their understanding of CSC's strategy, functions, methodology and required contributions – should be an overarching frame for value-based self-healing evaluations (in particular in coalitions established for the purpose of EU integration). In such cases, EU's specific directives and standards may serve as a roadmap for evaluation of members' actual commitment towards the application of such standards. The list of possible exercises towards the evaluation of participants' performance may be enlarged and adjusted to the coalitions' needs. Each coalition may necessitate an individual approach towards self-healing depending on the internal problems and conflicts. If CSOs with weak capacities and questionable human rights standards may have been tolerated (for membership purposes, simply to ensure quantity) in CSCs decades ago, in Armenia's situation today, this should no longer be the case. The members' value foundations must be a subject of scrutiny, and especially so in platforms created for EU integration. Some 'repairing', either external or internal healing mechanisms are important, striving for more quality and less quantity.

As another problem is a so-called *provincialism* in thinking, still present in civil society actors' thinking, characterised as being concentrated on an own immediate locality/community level, rather on the collective national good. This problem relates to a long-term problem for Armenian civil society, necessitating a better shared agenda at national level, stronger communication and exchange channels. The lack of sharing, communication, and information exchange skills, as a problem for Armenian civil society dynamics has been highlighted before (see, for example, Gevorgyan 2017), and seems to be relevant now, which is a saddening development for a country with numerous challenges, and still embarking on democratisation. For example, citizens of a certain marz are only interested in their own marz-problems, and express no interest if the same problems on community level exist also in other regions. Such a *self-limiting* thinking remains and is said to be disallowing civil society actors' going beyond old standards; and applying innovative ways (or directives) when it comes to reforms. In words of a CSO leader, "*The problems related to Sevan Lake, are only the problems that concern civil society of Gegharkunik marz. This is it.*" In the same scope of a problematic so-called provincial thinking, data encounters a related problem of a closed- or project-based thinking (a problem uniting post-Soviet societies, especially in early 1990s).

Without mentioning the existing (not to mention a constant) CSCs' funding problem, this research would not have been honest. The lack of financial resources prevents coalitions' *regularity*, *frequency*, and *flexibility* factors, and therefore functioning. Funding strategies on both ends, by CSCs and donors, seem to call for revisions. Some sub-problems highlighted in the scope of a larger 'funding problem' include, base-sustaining funding (there is a need to develop a practice of core funding, endowment or similar funds for CSCs, securing a base for sustainability); social group-need based or *adaptable* funding (there is a lack of strategies to consider 'additional' resources or adapting existing ones to special group-needs); *out-layer-funding* (this refers to the need of encouraging stand-alone funding for CSOs operating on an issue in a geographical location/region, where there

are no other organisations working on that given issue). Data reveals *opportunism* describing a tendency when despite value-bases of groups, they are eager to apply for funding whenever possible (with most references to consortiums, not coalitions). Coalitions are set to achieve bigger goals. Achieving bigger goals requires bigger resources. Some responses resonate with somewhat practical thinking, judging upon a trajectory of *bigger targets vs. bigger resources*, or *bigger results vs. bigger resources*.

Data allows to develop a model of meso-level (organisational) problems of CSCs in Armenia. Drawing on available conceptual models in the field (Najam 2000), this exploratory research suggests a similar “4Cs” model to understand the problems among coalitions in Armenia. The model suggests the following indicators: *coordination, capacity, communication, and competition*.

### **(1) Coordination**

Coalitions need a coordinating authority. It is one of the most frequently mentioned institutional problems for the functionality and sustainability of CSCs. The importance of coordinating mechanism for coalitions is seen as vital. When there is no leading force (be it an organisation or an individual taking on the function), coalitions are said to become weak. Distribution of responsibilities, tasks and activities becomes questionable in the absence of one coordinating body. And especially so in Armenia, when the culture of collective work is yet to be developed; critical inter- and intra-relational problems among civil society yet to be overcome. The participants came up with different descriptors (including, *coordinator, guide, initiator, convener*, however referring to a central coordinating mechanism inside a coalition. Opinions vary on whether the functions of the coordinator should be either administrative, content-based or both. Some consider this role on a simple/technical level; others see an interplay of functions and responsibilities. But the opinions coincide regarding the importance of funding (for example, by members’ contributions) for such a mechanism to be employed and sustained. In some cases, rotation of the coordinator’s body (mostly on technical level) is another practicable solution to the issue. The idea most frequently encountered among respondents is that: *‘if coordination fails, the coalition fails’*.

### **(2) Capacity**

The capacity of CSCs’ members may mean many things. The findings in the scope of questions posed for this research relate to coalitions’ knowledge and capacities to engage on different stages of the policy development cycle (locally), and collective advocacy for reforms (on local and international levels). The ‘capacity’ problem refers to the lack of skills and capacities to use diverse local and international instruments to affect policy decisions. To be fair, CSCs’ capacities differ among groups. But the main mentions regarding CSCs’ internal institutional problems manifest an area still to be delegated attention, with the view of developing specific *policy-level capacities* for CSOs: a. development, b. monitoring of implementation, c. local and international advocacy. In the scope of the “4Cs” model developed based on the results of this research, the second ‘capacity’ problem refers in particular to the lack of policy and advocacy capacity of CSCs.

### **(3) Communication**

The problem of the lack of strategic communication remains high among CSCs. There are several problematic aspects here: communication among members (intra-coalition communication), and with the coalitions' constituency (public, citizens). Some descriptors of CSCs communication among members include, *unhealthy, technical, weak*, and also at times, *defamatory*. Descriptors of CSCs communication with public include, *sporadic, technical, ineffective, reactive, passive*. The first segment problem, the lack of intra-coalition communication strategies is the one usually related to coordination problems (discussed earlier). The two seem to be intertwined. In the event of a lacking (or ineffective) coordination authority, communication among members is lacking as well. Regarding the second segment of the problem, namely the problematic communication strategies with the public and constituencies, a problem of common reference is the lack of civil society's strategies towards developing a society of critical thinkers. The very concept of 'strategic communication with the public' is framed in terms of developing critical thinkers. The role for bigger civil society actors here is seen as an imperative in developing strategic communication with the citizens, as opposed to employing a 'reporting' style, which usually occurs when CSOs simply tell stories to citizens about what they do. In the words of a CSC member, "*There is a lot of technical communication. But there is a lack of communication for change.*" The issue of the coalitions' visibility has also come up. Respondents think that CSCs need to work more on their visibility. The most frequent example in point here is the ANP of the EaP CSF, which seems to be the biggest coalition (considering membership base), at the same time lacking visibility. Armenia needs to create an environment where a culture of communication among civil society and with public can fully develop.

### **(4) Competition**

Competition, viewed negatively, as a problem, among civil society in Armenia seems as old as the independent republic itself. It is sad to realise that after more than three decades, the problem of competition among partners only extends, deepens, and contributes to a somewhat crisis. This problem (#4) is included in the "4Cs" model of CSCs problem-scheme, considering its negative connotations and nature, going against the vibrancy, pluralism and development of the sector. It is difficult to highlight exactly the reasons for this, only assuming that a number of social, political and security shocks have contributed to an even larger polarisation intra- and inter-civil society groups, making the overwhelming majority of participants agree that the situation leads to crisis. Data points to different descriptors for the competition being problematic or *close to crisis*. Such include, '*unhealthy and disorganised competition for power*', '*competition to satisfy personalities' ambitions*', '*personal interests of leaders may be prevailing the public good*', '*dynamics between working groups and secretariat affecting sustainability*', '*secretariats affecting members' perceptions and leading to competition*', '*unhealthy distribution of funding*', '*practiced corruption*', '*competitive jealousy*', and so on. Unhealthy competition takes much resources that could otherwise be directed towards more effective aims, including CSCs' internal development, recovering internal divisions, inter-group cooperation and understanding the needs of public. All in all, the way it has developed in Armenia today, it prevents civil society groups from doing a good joint work. While it is necessary and

welcoming for the third sector to represent a pool of diverse groups, strategies, aims and goals, the sector's main, overarching, country-level agenda may be the same, and especially so in the case of today's Armenia.

## Positive impacts

*“A civil society coalition is potentially a strong power in and of itself, able to change the agenda, bring about change on policy and practice levels.”* CSC leader and coordinator, October 2023, Yerevan

*“There is a little bit the sense of empowerment in people, where, you know, not everyone is expecting government to do everything. There is more a sense of ‘we can organise and do stuff.’”*  
Research Centre Head, October 2023, Yerevan

This section presents data on positive influences: successes and impacts brought about by coalitional work in Armenia. This section elaborates most frequently mentioned subjects of success of CSCs. In the end coalitions' sustainability factors are summarised. During interviews, the names of select coalitions have been used in relation to successful initiatives (by respondents from other CSCs and donors' representatives). These include: *Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women, Coalition for Inclusive Legal Reforms, Partnership for Open Society, Electoral Coalitions, Armenian Environmental Front, Public Monitoring Group*. The discussion of frequent references to quality and success of CSCs, groups and networks, generally defined, is in order.

### *Civic education and participation*

The first-tier or priority-level mentions are grouped here and related to CSCs' success characterised in terms of a somewhat improved civic education and an enhanced civic consciousness. The collective civil society's contributions here may be considered in the framework of improved performance of emancipative values, including self-expression, public and youth demands for participation in decision-making of civic and political life (Welzel and Inglehart 2009). There is an understanding that during the past decade, civil society actors, including coalitions have been able to seriously contribute to/ improve educational practices resulting in somewhat enhanced civic consciousness. In the same vein, civic education had a 'multiplication effect' resulting in behavioural change: more participation and practice of self-expression. The change in public and youth participatory traits is also viewed in terms of a shift from 'simple' participation to 'meaningful'. This means that participation seems to be becoming more based on *critical, creative and innovative thinking*, not simple engagement (for the sake of it). CSCs were able to exercise minor, but important contribution to a transition from 'participant engagement' to 'critical thinker' and, therefore, 'citizen'. Reflections on the same level incorporated inevitable references to Armenia's distancing from Soviet and post-Soviet practices, and within that scope citizens and youth

becoming no longer afraid to invite an alternative thinking. To be able to go against some of the long-time established practices is recognised a success, on a general level.

### *Human rights and collective advocacy*

The second tier of success encompasses CSCs' contributions to human rights problems and collective advocacy capacities. An overwhelming majority of participants highlight civil society actors' and coalitions' contributions to specific social groups' protections, thematic human rights successes and advocacy achievements. Some examples on micro level are: CSCs' direct influence on the lives of people via direct, resource, psychological and legal support (for example, cases of domestic violence, sexual violence, anti-discrimination) by member organisations and human rights defenders-members of coalitions. There are also examples of success of institutional level, referring to the assessed behavioural change of the law enforcement bodies. For example, due to the continued effort of women's coalitions, including the Coalition of Domestic Violence Support Centres and the Coalition to Stop Violence against Women, in cases of domestic violence: a positive trend has been registered regarding police officers' issuing emergency protective orders (instead of simple warnings, a usual practice before), in line with international standards. Since 2023, there is a trend showing progress by police issuing emergency intervention orders, which, according to past experience would also be largely overturned by courts. This specific change in the behavioural trend of law enforcement is considered a direct result of the CSCs' collective advocacy.

It will be difficult to categorically confirm that the ratification by the Armenian parliament of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) has been directly influenced by CSCs, as there may have been other factors influencing the political will for action. However, with an absolute certainty, it can be confirmed that the civil society actors have prepared the ground for the ratification of the vital for Armenia document, considering the generated knowledge along with the targeted advocacy activities by members of select and active CSCs (for example, Partnership for Open Society), human rights advocates and experts during the past decade. Civil society's collective advocacy towards the need for legislative changes remains on the agenda of CSCs, especially those being well positioned to do so. For example, the Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women's advocacy agenda towards preparing the ground for the ratification of The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence; or the Non-Discrimination and Equality Coalition's advocacy agenda towards the need to keep the comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation on the radar of Armenian policy-makers.

Armenian select and active CSCs have been involved in the development of monitoring reports on implementation of reform agenda, including, the European Neighbourhood Policy Implementation Agenda, the Eastern Partnership Agenda and Action plans, EU-Armenia CEPA monitoring, Universal Periodic Review (UPR) collective advocacy documents, engaging in EU Human Rights Dialogue. Here, an important success refers to the generated knowledge in result of continuous monitoring of practices and government's performance, fact-finding and research conducted by





select coalitions and expert-members' contributions (for example, see, (Open Society Foundations-Armenia et al. 2021); 2022).

This tier of success incorporates also the so-called knowledge transfer via civil society, as a reliable partner to help citizens familiarise with issues on agenda, including, for example EU-Armenia relations, and how their improvement positively correlates to the wellbeing of citizens. Beyond doubt, Armenian civil society and coalition work has contributed to some of the recognised organisations' capacities: in particular from the perspective of improving members' understanding of issues, developing strategic messaging and formulation skills for public advocacy. Simple, but meaningful reflections on coalitions' success include indications on bringing diverse groups to the same table. In the words of CSC coordinator, *“Previously, to bring these diverse groups to the same table was very difficult. This is why it is a success.”*

## Sustainability and success factors

Apart from positive influences registered by CSCs in Armenia, among objectives of this research was to provide an understanding of the factors that make coalitions sustainable and successful (or contribute to their sustainability or success). According to the majority of respondents, sustainability is positively correlated to the success of the coalitions, if they are established for a long-term purpose, for example, to support Armenia's democratisation and the development of civil society. The qualitative analysis conducted for the purpose of this research identifies data on **coalitions' success factors** being in many cases commensurate (almost identical) with data on **coalitions' sustainability factors**. Considering the overlaps and similarities in reasoning putting forward equivalence between the two subjects of interest, this research develops a table (Table 2) combining the data, for the ease of reference.

The table below presents data on what makes coalitions a) sustainable, and b) successful summarised and classified into *resource* and *function* types (generated inductively, based on emergent themes provided in responses). The responses of study participants regarding the sustainability and success of coalitions were classified into two categories: the needed resources and the needed types of functions on behalf of CSCs. The highlighted resource-types are considered as important in aggregate in order for a coalition to survive, let alone be successful by also ensuring its effectiveness and continuity. The lack of any of the resource-type affects coalitions' sustainability. The resource-types of sustainability allowed to identify corresponding types of coalitions' functions (generated inductively from responses). The table incorporates the main functions for coalitions aiming for sustainability and success.

To be successful, a coalition should exercise the following types of resources.

<b>I. Human:</b>	<b>membership base (including coordination mechanism)</b>
<b>II. Institutional:</b>	<b>policy development and implementation monitoring capacities, experience, institutional memory, integrity</b>
<b>III. Cultural:</b>	<b>members’ value-bases, CSC’s establishment purpose and conveners’ and members’ motivations, values sustaining members’ perceptions, attitudes, behavioural traits</b>
<b>IV. Financial:</b>	<b>core funding</b>
<b>V. Dialogue:</b>	<b>established dialogue with government institutions, own constituency, international institutions and partners; CSC recognised by third actors locally and regionally</b>

Table 2 CSCs’ sustainability and success factors

<i>Resource type</i>	<i>Function type</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Membership base</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Functional (operational)</li> <li>Mobile</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Institutional memory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustainable</li> <li>Policy-knowledgeable (informed)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Perceptions, motivations (value-based)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Responsibility-sharing (among members)</li> <li>Ideologically committed (values of democratisation, Europeanisation)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordination mechanism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Possessing the power of convener</li> <li>Initiative-taking</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Capacity</li> <li>Professionalism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alarming (human rights violations)</li> <li>Responsive/active regarding its positioning on legislative initiatives (vital policy)</li> <li>Collective advocacy methodologically-savvy</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Financial resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Core-funding dependant</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Constituency or grassroots sentiment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inclusive</li> <li>Responsibility-conscious</li> <li>Responsive (to relevant social-group needs)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dialogue (government and international institutions, other CSCs)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participatory</li> <li>Recognised</li> <li>Regularity in contact</li> </ul>



## Conclusion

The terrain of Armenia's CSCs is characterised by a structural diversity and blurred boundaries. Irrespective of the type of structure, coalitions have different functions, influences and destinies. Data collected in the framework of this research allows for the development of a minor typology of CSCs in Armenia, to facilitate a better understanding of coalition types (providing short explanatory descriptions). The following types of CSCs were identified: big (with a large reform agenda), sectoral, thematic or issue-based, mixed, network type and ad-hoc. In select cases, the coalition type may also be shifting, for example, from issue-focused to sectoral.

The areas of coalitions' operation are as wide-ranging as the CSO sector itself. Regarding the functional priorities of CSCs, it seems to be that coalitions have developed more the understanding of a collective advocacy – and the importance of a policy or a reform being supported by the public. Among responses, the monitoring of the implementation by the Republic of Armenia Government of the EU-Armenia CEPA has a visible standing on the radar of civil society. Members of influential coalitions attach importance to the monitoring of Armenia's EU integration agenda. A subject popular enough among both civil society and donor representatives remains: '*capacity building*'. The subject, however, calls for an investment in a thinking aimed at identifying new approaches.

The post-crisis environment has contributed to a polarisation in society on a larger level, but also, regrettably, in the third sector. Not surprisingly, research identified two types of dynamics among intra-coalitional relations: *positive or supportive*, and *conflicting or problematic*. During the data collection, some important CSCs emerged as being in crisis or exercising problematic dynamics due to misunderstandings among its members. The analysis highlights the need for: a) transparency, an open (at times meaning open especially to the public) communication, and b) a value-based discussion as the main methods for resolution of conflicts among coalitions. For individual CSOs which proved true to the issues of openness and transparency it seems easier to join and operate within coalitions in the same manner. This means that the former practices and reputations of stand-alone organisations (members of CSCs) are vital when it comes to reviewing the performance of a given coalition. As continuously referred to in the analysis, the CSCs in Armenia need to develop value-systems or value-bases, which seem to be definitive for the destiny of coalitions, also in terms of their sustainability.

Funding remains an important problem for CSCs. Whether major funding has been a determining factor for coalition establishment, or otherwise a 'damaging' factor in Armenia is a relevant question for future research. It is relevant to observe the wide-ranging experiences and structures of coalitional or civil society-group work in Armenia. Research data shows that it is vital that the major funding by the international donors supporting civil society in Armenia be distributed to the so-called 'global' thinker coalitions (as opposed to the ones with limited/local or otherwise *provincial* thinkers). These are mainly characterised by project-based limited thinking and operation, acting cautiously, or rejecting going beyond a local agenda towards monitoring of reform implementation.

The reasons behind the establishment of coalitions are of prevailing importance. In this context, for international donors, CSCs' ideological bases, establishment purposes, and very importantly actual practice (as discussed in this report) shall serve as the main determinants for selecting civil society partners.

Regarding the coalitions' relations with the RA Government, there is a common agreement among CSCs that engagement with government institutions is a determining factor for coalition building and success for collective advocacy. Some problematic aspects here are: the lack of *actual, quality* or *content* cooperation with government bodies, which are often characterised by instability (frequent change) and lack of maturity. The clarification of both sides' strategic interests and expectations need to become a priority. Otherwise, CSCs become simple followers of the government agenda within a bilateral/joint commission (usually facilitated by the government), not a power-party to have an actual say in reforms.

For influential CSCs in Armenia, the EU and other major international donor institution are first of all considered as partners and channels of advocacy, not solely as donors for civil society. This finding is true especially for the reform-oriented coalitions working on issues related to the EU-Armenia CEPA (areas: legal and judicial, anti-corruption, democratic block). Three main subjects emerged from collected data: a) the major international donor institutions' role as a third actor along with CSCs and government; b) the existence of diverse civil society alliances/groups in Armenia and the need for an improved understanding for donors on *who to fund* and *for what*, and c) the need for more engagement with civil society actors on behalf of the EU Member States' embassies in Armenia.

This research has identified problems related to coalitional work. It points to the "4Cs" of problematic aspects related to CSCs in Armenia: *coordination, capacity, communication, and competition*. Each necessitates attention by donors and civil society actors, described in this report. In addition, concerning findings relate to internal conflicts and the deep divisions within certain CSCs – however, with potential to support Armenia's democratisation. Among possible solutions: individual members' value foundations must be a subject of scrutiny, and especially so in platforms established with the purpose to support Armenia's EU integration. Some so-called self-healing or 'self-rehabilitation' mechanisms, either external or internal are important, employing more of a quality and less quantity approach.

This research has also identified some positive dynamics, defined as successes or positive impacts of coalitional work in Armenia. Defined at a somewhat larger level, these include: a) improved civic education and public participation – as indirect contributions of collective civil society work over decades (importantly after 2018); and b) improved dynamics in terms of human rights and collective advocacy in Armenia. Here examples include the ratification by the Armenian Parliament of The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which has been advocated by active members of civil society (with hopes towards multiplicative effect on other documents, for example the



ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)). Additional examples of positive effect include the production by several CSCs of the civil society's monitoring reports of Armenia's progress (or otherwise) of the EU-Armenia CEPA.

In a post-crisis Armenia, civil society actors and coalitions represent the main agency to help sustain Armenia's democratisation. The country necessitates continued support from and more cooperation with the EU institutions, to carry out the watchdogging and the monitoring of Armenia's compliance with commitments in the scope of country's partnership with the EU. A fundamental point of reference here is the EU-Armenia CEPA, as the leading framework for reforms. Armenia's main CSCs must remain vigilant not to lose opportunity structures for monitoring the reforms.

Armenia's critical situation on many levels suggests that more resources need investing in the civil society sector. The continued resource-support from the international donor community, and mainly the EU, must be reconsidered for an effective resource-spending evaluation. This suggests that civil society actors lacking the values and ideological bases reflective of EU integration, or otherwise 'divorced' from Armenia's reality, may not be relevant agents for change. Now CSCs' advocacy potential and capacity improvement are critical. Armenia's democratic transformation depends on an informed conceptualisation of reforms. It is essential that the *big* CSCs, with a larger reform agenda, which are influential and involved in reform monitoring, understand clearly, and agree on conceptualisations, which will guide the methodology for monitoring. It is imperative that the value-bases of reforms match with both reform-implementers and reform-monitors. Otherwise, the sector encounters unhealthy competition, misunderstanding of each other's actions and, dangerously, claiming different expectations from reform process.

## Recommendations

### I. >> Recommendations to International Donor Institutions Supporting Civil Society in Armenia

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#### 1. Reformed Donor-Coordination Mechanisms and New Core Funding Strategies for the Purpose of Offsetting the Degradation of the Democratisation Processes in Armenia through Civil Society's Watchdogging Activities

##### 1.1 Donor-Coordination Mechanisms

Armenia's considerably changed environment with challenges to democratisation calls for major international donors' reformed strategies supporting civil society. Putting as a priority the need to offset the degradation of the democratisation processes in the country – the major donor institutions should consider improving donor-coordination in line with effective aid mechanisms, for example, The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (OECD 2005) and The Accra Agenda for Action (AAA) (OECD 2008). The reformed strategies may be facilitated by data and information sharing among donor institutions in Armenia, supporting civil society groups for monitoring and watchdogging reforms' implementation. It will be useful that the donor support is reformed towards alignment with Republic of Armenia's reform agenda, in particular, the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement and its thematic priorities, to support Armenia's democratisation.

##### 1.2 Core Funding Strategies

For the same purpose of disallowing the degradation of the democratisation processes in Armenia, major international donor institutions should consider revising their core funding strategies to civil society actors. “*Core funding*” provides the opportunities for civil society organisations' institutional development, and enables to do the work they define as necessary (see, European Commission and Eastern Partnership Civil Society Facility 2021). Armenian CSCs are able to safeguard the country's transition to democratisation. The major donors and supporters of civil society in Armenia should concentrate on shifting strategies towards more core funding for Coalitions. Increased emphasis on core funding strategies will be in particular relevant for advocacy-oriented CSCs and civil society actors, as it will allow engaging in long-term watchdogging activities. The policy implementation responding to country's democratisation (for example, legal and judicial reforms, anti-corruption strategy) are time consuming and necessitate civil society's uninterrupted monitoring. Increased core funding will strengthen civil society's continued engagement with reforms' implementation, recognised as most necessary in Armenia's current environment with snowballing social and political challenges.



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## 2. Supporting Public Information and Outreach Activities related to EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA)

This research confirms an established understanding and knowledge about the importance for Armenia’s democratisation of the EU-Armenia CEPA – among civil society community. However, there is a common understanding that the knowledge of public on marz- and community-levels seems lacking. The donor support should be targeting continuous public information activities throughout Armenia (marz-based) about the EU-Armenia partnership, and in particular the EU-Armenia CEPA: Agreement’s thematic priorities and actual contributions to citizens’ wellbeing in case of the Agreement’s proper and due implementation. This recommendation is designed to help address the three pressing sub-targets. More information and outreach activities and initiatives with citizens in Armenia will contribute: a) to securing public support for reforms in terms of Armenia’s EU integration, b) to countering false information flows, and c) to an improved understanding about: which provisions of the EU-Armenia CEPA are aligned with specific issues and concerns in communities throughout Armenia.

## II. >> Recommendations to Civil Society Coalitions in Armenia

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### 1. Central Coordinating Mechanism

CSCs necessitate an established central mechanism supported with a financial base and responsible for coordinating work among members. The core mechanism may be represented with one member-organisation or select individual(s) to take on responsibility for making the coalition institutionally functional. For technical sustainability: one person from each member organisations should be designated responsible for issues/regular contact with the coordinating body; for financial sustainability: each member organisation should contribute from its own budget to the central coordinating mechanism (by also foreseeing a dedicated budget while seeking funding in the scope of other activities). Upon the coalition's collective decision, the coordinating body may also have a rotation among the coalition's members, to balance the centrally coordinating power.

### 2. Institutional Self-healing Mechanisms

A developed coalitional culture in Armenia is possible through employing institutional self-healing mechanisms within CSCs. Institutional healing has become urgent, with a check of the actual impacts and value-bases of individual members. For example, if a coalition's main scope of establishment is contributing to Armenia's democratisation through its monitoring and watchdogging activities – the given coalition's members will necessitate a check of their integrity and value-foundations. An institutional update is urgent to preserve the ideological bases of the main CSCs, especially in Armenia's present conditions. Self-healing (or otherwise framed as self-filtering) mechanisms of especially *big*, *sectoral* and *thematic* coalitions is directly related to the quality monitoring of reform implementation (for example, anti-corruption, legal and judicial reforms). Coalitions should employ self-healing mechanisms to provide an updated understanding of their members': **value bases**, **integrity**, **capacity** and the **understanding** of the collective **methodology** to be applied by civil society towards Armenia's democratisation. In operationalising self-healing mechanisms, the coalitions should follow ethical rules and procedures, developed in advance for the purpose of institutional assessment.

### 3. More Transparency

This research confirms that the issue of intra- and inter-group trust remains of paramount importance in civil society cooperation. To aim for an environment of mutual trust, the coalitions should raise the standards of their transparency. More transparency – of governance and decision-making strategies, sub-granting and resource-spending procedures with information openly available to all interested parties and public – is imperative. It is





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recommended to conduct assessment, mainly from the perspective of institutional transparency, based on, including: self-assessment tools and standards provided by the Global Standard for CSO Accountability (The Global Standard 2019) or The Global Accountability Project (One World Trust and The Commonwealth Foundation 2009). Internal (self-assessment), but also external reviews should become a continuous institutional processes employed by coalitions for the purpose of high-level of transparency. Transparency-based strategies of CSCs will contribute to building trust among members of coalitions, and also improve the environment of inter-coalition trust.

#### 4. Strategic Engagement with Youth

CSCs need to expand their cooperation with youth organisations, formal and non-formal civic initiatives, student unions and academia. Considering that generational change is essential for Armenia's future and democratisation, CSCs' engagement with youth and students must be continuing, a work in progress. CSCs may need to improve their abilities on identifying youth groups with potential to an extended cooperation in the regions. More engagement may be operationalised by adding separate components to on-going and future initiatives (especially the ones exercising big donor funding for several years ahead). With big support received via international funding, CSCs need to become actual investors targeting youth groups' capacity development, resource and infrastructure stability.

#### 5. Implementing Public Information and Outreach Activities related to EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (EU-Armenia CEPA)

This research confirms an established understanding and knowledge about the importance for Armenia's democratisation of the EU-Armenia CEPA – among civil society community. However, there is a common understanding that the knowledge of public on marz- and community-levels seems lacking. The civil society actors in Armenia, and especially CSCs should implement continuous public information activities throughout Armenia (marz-based) about the EU-Armenia partnership, and in particular the EU-Armenia CEPA: Agreement's thematic priorities and actual contributions to citizens' wellbeing in case of the Agreement's proper and due implementation. This recommendation is designed to help address the three pressing sub-targets. More information and outreach initiatives with citizens in Armenia will contribute: a) to securing public support for reforms in terms of Armenia's EU integration, b) to countering false information flows, and c) to an improved understanding about: which provisions of the EU-Armenia CEPA are aligned with specific issues and concerns in communities throughout Armenia.

### III. >> Recommendations for Future Research

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#### 1. Developing a Guide for Civil Society Coalitions in Armenia

Armenia experienced select examples of successful coalition-building, however not enough for a sustainable educational base aiming at a generational change. Additional thinking and activities should be invested to help coalitional culture to mature. It is useful to develop a guide on *'How to Maintain a Coalition; What to Expect from It'* incorporating best practices, and considering Armenia's country context. A guide should provide an understanding of the 'why' and 'how' questions related to CSCs, and be focused solely on CSCs' collective advocacy function. The guide should be developed considering the specificities of Armenia's case, with growing challenges influencing the third sector. It will also help highlight the importance of the usage of social science tools to inform the tripartite relations involving CSCs, government and major international institutions.

#### 2. Conducting Case-Studies of Select Civil Society Coalitions in Armenia

This research puts forward the need to explore further with an in-depth method the select curious cases of civil society coalitions in Armenia. One such example is the Armenian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, EaP CSF. This coalition: a) is of individual or stand-alone (type), with qualities and functions of 'big' reform agenda coalitions, b) has been established based on a regional conditionality, and therefore the need to sustain its effective functionality, and c) is characterised by recent concerning internal dynamics bordering conflicting or polarising intra-group relations. An in-depth look into the platform's problems, by also analysing its performance in a comparative perspective (for example, vs. the Georgian National Platform of the EaP CSF) should be useful in terms of providing the necessary understanding of the details, latent/underlying problems, and recommendations for change.

#### 3. Conducting a Similar Study on Civil Society Coalitions in Eastern Partnership

There is a lack of studies on coalitional work in post-Soviet hybrid regimes. It should be useful to replicate similar research in the EU Associated countries (of the EaP), in cooperation with local civil society experts. This exploratory research on CSCs in Armenia may serve the basis to build further an EaP-case study knowledge. Regardless of CSCs' internal problems, if ideologically united – they remain a powerful source essential for countries in democratic transition. Viewing EaP's experiences in a comparative perspective should be useful for civil society's knowledge exchange. The replication of this research in countries with similar social and political context should also generate academic value, by contributing to the literature on civil society dynamics in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood.



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## Appendix 1 Indexing scheme

ENI/2021/425-150

Regional Technical Assistance to Build Civil Society Capacities, EaP

EU Support to Civil Society Networks in Armenia

**Research: Understanding Civil Society Coalitions (CSC) in Armenia**

research conducted by: Valentina Gevorgyan

### Research Indexing Scheme

This document presents the indexing scheme for research titled “*Understanding Civil Society Coalitions in Armenia*” (preliminary title). For the purpose of this research, the ‘civil society coalitions’ (CSC) are defined and understood as networks, groups and formal alliances organised and led by, and consisting of registered civil society organisations in Armenia. The indexing scheme includes issues of interest in current research. It is prepared based on the review of the literature, including themes and subjects relevant for considering the case of Armenia. The scheme uses the conceptual models developed based on previous studies, observing the realities in other countries, such as a) with similar to Armenia social and economic context, and b) commensurate with examples of developed democracies. The index compiles the issues of interest to be operationalised in the framework of research (N-Vivo coding: semi-structured and in-depth interviews).

#### Index:

##### 1. Coalition story

- 1.1 Inception: establishment, causes, goals
- 1.2 Collective identity (Diani 2015)
- 1.3 Culture (values, traditions, trust)
- 1.4 Main functions
- 1.5 Governance: centralised/decentralised (Chen and Graddy 2010)
- 1.6 Knowledge and expertise
- 1.7 Funding
- 1.8 Recognition/reputation

##### 2. Intra-coalition relations (within given coalition)

- (Ashman et al. 2005)
- 2.1 Level of cohesion and unity among members (strength of ties)
- 2.2 Communication strategy
- 2.3 Thematic/issue-based vs. diversified cooperation
- 2.4 Cooperation techniques (definitions)
- 2.5 Emergence of factions/competition issues
- 2.6 Factors contributing to coalition’s a) sustainability, b) strength (incl. defining strength)
- 2.7 Factors contributing to coalition’s weakness (incl. defining weakness) (Howard 2003)

##### 3. Inter-coalition relations (with other similar coalitions)

- 3.1 Frequency and type of engagement/cooperation techniques
- 3.2 Thematic/issue-based vs. diversified cooperation
- 3.3 Communication strategy
- 3.4 Collective influences/impacts
- 3.5 Problems/concerns (issues of competition, demonisation etc.)

##### 4. Coalition-government relations

- 4.1 Nature of relations (definitions) (Najam 2000)
- 4.2 Favorable/safe environment for coalition to operate

- 4.3 Thematic/issue-based vs. diversified cooperation
- 4.4 Support to reforms (examples)
- 4.5 Support to neglected issues (examples)
- 4.6 Recommendations for improvement

##### 5. Coalition-donors relations (EU Roadmap 2021-27)

- 5.1 Nature of relations (definitions)
- 5.2 Successes
- 5.3 Failures
- 5.4 Recommendations for improvement (focus EUD)
- 5.5 Recommendations for improvement (general)

##### 6. Coalition-related challenges and problems

- 6.1 First/main two mentions
- 6.2 Macro/meso/micro level (categorised)
- 6.3 Power imbalances (Naidoo 2008)
- 6.4 Issues of a) competition, b) politicisation, c) polarisation (issues of concern based on pre-study informative interviews)
- 6.5 Other

##### 7. Coalition: results, influences and impacts

- 7.1 Self-perceived definitions
- 7.2 Goals vs. results (assessment)
- 7.3 Policy planning, development and implementation (Anheier 2013)
- 7.4 Advocacy local/international (Gevorgyan 2023)
- 7.5 Public-social benefit/rights protection (as a separate category)
- 7.4 Factors affecting progress/success
- 7.5 Factors hindering progress/success
- 7.6 Other

##### 8. Other (incl. mapping)

- 8.1 Coalition’s work and other actors/players
- 8.2 Future research/policy needs
- 8.3 Interesting material
- 8.4 Quotes



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## Appendix 2 Information for interview participants

Regional Technical Assistance to Build Civil Society Capacities, Eastern Partnership  
EU Support to Civil Society Networks in Armenia  
research by: Valentina Gevorgyan, PhD

### **Research: Civil Society Coalitions (CSC) in Armenia** **Information for Interview Participants**

I would like to invite you to participate in research initiative titled “*Civil Society Coalitions in Armenia*”. The research is conducted in the framework of a Regional Technical Assistance project aimed at strengthening the role and the capacity of civil society organisations in the Eastern Partnership countries. The project supports studies on *Civil Society Issues* across the region, and is funded by the European Union. The results of this research are expected to be used by the Delegation of the European Union and other donors, supporting civil society in Armenia.

The purpose of this research is to map the CSCs in Armenia, and to provide an understanding of their successes, sustainability factors; problems and challenges in achieving their goals and missions. The research is conducted by Valentina Gevorgyan.

The data is collected through interviews with representatives of civil society and international institutions in Armenia. The interviews, upon agreement of the interviewee, will be recorded for the purpose of data analysis. The data will be used solely for scientific purpose (qualitative analysis). The interview recordings will be transcribed and analysed respecting the confidentiality of the interviewee. Your name will not be included in the analysis/or the report of this research. However, with your permission, quotations may be used. Thank you for your participation and contribution to this research.

I remain available for any questions and enquiries, now or after the completion of this research initiative.

Valentina Gevorgyan, PhD  
Researcher



## Appendix 3 Interview guide (CSC)

### Interview Guide: Civil Society Coalitions, CSC in Armenia

Name, Surname \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Position, Title \_\_\_\_\_ Location \_\_\_\_\_

#### A. About CSC, intra- and inter-coalition relations

A1. The story of your CSC reasons for establishment, main purposes and goals, shared vision, mission, culture (values, trust, cohesion/unity, communication among members). A1sub: Did/does Coalition hold regular meetings? How easy or difficult it was/is to reach a common agreement among members. Do members listen to each other and respect diverse opinions?

A2. Abilities /singular vs. collective (knowledge and expertise) to achieve goals and expected impact. A2sub: Are members able to increase their knowledge and expertise over time? If yes, how?

A3. Elaborate on the governance strategy, leader/s (emergence of factions/competition or conflict issues), main functions and subject areas (if any) of your Coalition's work.

A4. Factors contributing to coalition's sustainability and strength (incl. defining strength).

A5. Factors contributing to coalition's weakness (incl. defining weakness).

#### B. Coalition's relations with other actors

B1. Nature of relations with the Government of Armenia (GoA): a. functions, b. support to policy and reforms (focus), c. thematic vs. diversified. B1sub: Is the Coalition formally recognised by the GoA? Does the the GoA regularly invite representatives to attend public/multi-stakeholder consultations/discussions? Please specify.

B2. Nature of relations with international organisations/donors: a. successes, b. failures, c. recommendations for improvement. B2sub: EU-specific: difficulties and what to improve. Please specify.

B3. (Donor-actor follow-up) How diverse are Coalition's funding sources? Are the funding opportunities stable, shrinking or expanding? Does the Coalition develop and maintain good relationships with funders? Do you envisage new funding opportunities in the near future?

B4. Coalition's work/engagement with any other actors. Does the Coalition benefit from recognition and appreciation by other stakeholders (donors, international civil society, media, the private sector, others)?

#### C. Challenges and problems

C1. Two main challenges to/problems related to your Coalition (first mentions). Main challenges/problems on: macro/meso/micro levels.

C2. Do members of your Coalition publicly raise issues and concerns? Is it risky? Are there issues important to the Coalition that can't be discussed publicly? Would raising politically sensitive issues have negative repercussions?

C3. Main factors hindering progress (defined as achieving CSC's goals and mission), disallowing your results becoming sustainable.

C4. Specifics: issues of a) competition, b) politicisation, c) polarisation. If any, elaborate on reasons. Ors

#### D. Results, influences and impacts

D1. Have there been positive changes triggered by your Coalition? Two main impacts by your Coalition (first mentions). Main influences on: macro/meso/micro levels.

D2. Do members of your Coalition engage in policy/reform work (development, implementation, monitoring, advocacy)? How? Please specify functions and themes. Most recent policy issue advocated.

D3. Main factors affecting success (defined as achieving CSC's goals and mission), making your results sustainable.

D4. Snowball for mapping: previous and existing CSCs.

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