

Third party intervention in litigation promoted by the OSCE



G.Harutyunyan, Chairman of the Constitutional Court, A.Zohrabyan, Vice President of the Chamber of Advocates, A.Orbelyan, Deputy Minister of Justice, at a discussion on third party intervention, 4 December 2012 (OSCE/Gayne Ter-Stepanyan)

On 4 December 2012 the OSCE Office in Yerevan (hereafter the 'Office') hosted a discussion on third party intervention in domestic and international litigation jointly with the Armenian Chamber of Advocates, focusing on the submission of *amicus curiae* ('friend of the court') briefs in Armenia. Representatives of the judiciary, the Ministry of Justice, the Human Rights Defender's Office, civil society and international organizations discussed the practice of international human rights organizations in this regard, including that to the European Court of Human Rights. Written observations submitted to the Armenian Constitutional Court by the Scientific and Analytical Centre at the Chamber of Advocates were also discussed.

NGOs to learn from their experience and practice in the submission of *amicus curiae* briefs to local courts and international instances. The visit was organized in co-operation with the Interights NGO and the Armenian Chamber of Advocates, and was aimed at raising awareness among Armenian lawyers and at strengthening capacities to facilitate engagement in local and international judicial proceedings. The visit also proved to be beneficial in expanding networking and mentoring opportunities in this area.

The Office is working to promote the principle of *amicus curiae* in Armenia to contribute to greater efficiency of judicial decisions, and to help build the capacity of advocates, human rights defenders and civil society to provide information to courts, including on the possible implications of cases on third parties.

Prior to the discussion, the Office had organized training and supported a study visit for and meetings between Armenian human rights lawyers and several international human rights

Encouraging youth debates throughout Armenia



The members of the winning teams from Yerevan and Gavar at a final university debate organized by the Jinishian Memorial Foundation with the OSCE support, 21 November 2012 (JMF/Asatur Yesayants)

Through the support of the Office, the Jinishian Memorial Foundation has established university debate clubs in seven universities in the towns of Gyumri, Vanadzor, Ijevan, Gavar, Kapan, Goris and Yerevan, with at least 40 active students in each club. Participating students received a number of training sessions and had the opportunity to put their newly acquired skills and knowledge into practice at intra-university debate seminars. The final two-day national competition was held in Yerevan in November 2012 for the best teams of five students from the seven universities. The

winner received medals and certificates of participation. In addition, three TV debates were organized on the Yerkir Media TV channel, where students discussed the role of the Ombudsman's Office, the participation of women in elections, and the control over internet resources.

Along with two other international organizations, as well as NGOs and Government representatives, the Office also participated in the working group to prepare the State Youth Strategy for 2013-2017. Employment issues, socio-economic conditions and youth participation, as well as high quality, cultural and spiritual education, were identified as the main priorities of the strategy. The draft strategy was discussed with all regional stakeholders and adopted at a session of the National Assembly in December 2012.

Roundtable on Inter-parliamentary Co-operation and Diplomacy

Since 2004 the Office has been supporting the Armenian Parliament by offering experience exchange opportunities for both staff and the members of the National Assembly. As part of this work, under the initiative of the Parliament's Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, a Roundtable on Inter-parliamentary Co-operation and Diplomacy was held in December 2012 in Tsakhkadzor. The event was attended by executive representatives of several inter-parliamentary bodies, the Vice-Speaker of Parliament, and high-level Armenian diplomats, and provided an opportunity for newly-elected parliamentarians to exchange experience on matters pertaining to the role and functions of inter-parliamentary institutions such as the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCEPA), PACE, NATO PA, EURONEST PA, CIS PA and CSTO IPA. The event also invited initial discussions on the general questions of parliamentary diplomacy.

OSCE strengthens women's political participation



Women groups learn about new OSCE project promoting women in political and economic life, 25 July 2012 (OSCE/Gayane Ter-Stepanyan)

Promoting women's participation in the economic and political spheres, as well as inclusion in public life, is an essential factor for ensuring democratic advancement. For this reason, the OSCE Office launched a series

of activities to increase opportunities for women's participation in political life in July 2012 ahead of local self-government and presidential elections in 2012 and 2013 in Armenia. The project, financed by the Government of the Netherlands, included a broad range of activities: training seminars on best practices in advancing women as leaders, decision makers and candidates; the development of gender sensitive political platforms; effective campaigning; working with the media.

As a first positive result, female representation on local government councils has increased significantly. While the average level of female representation at the local level throughout Armenia is approximately 2%, in Syunik, where the Office has been supporting the activities of Women's Resource Centres for several years now, 17% of the newly-elected members of the Council of Elderly (avagani) are women. Among the OSCE project beneficiaries who were female candidates for local elections, 68% were elected (25 out of 37).

Human Rights Day events



Real Rights in Virtual Life, the second-prize winner of the Human Rights Film Festival, 10 December 2012 (OSCE/Gayane Ter-Stepanyan)

A rock concert, a film festival on Human Rights in the Digital Age, a youth debate and a moot court competition were among the OSCE-supported events held on 10 and 11 December 2012 in Yerevan and Vanadzor to mark

International Human Rights Day. Rock bands *Vordan Karmir*, *The Bambir*, *Dogma* and *Lav Eli* performed at a concert on 11 December in Vanadzor. The concert, held for the third time, has become a tradition in promoting values of universal human rights and peace.

Prizes at the Human Rights Film Festival were awarded by a jury comprised of representatives of international organizations, with the film *Homo Habilis* receiving first prize; the second prize went to *Real Rights in Virtual Life*. A YouTube poll awarded the first prize to the film *Enter* and the second prize to *Know Your Rights in the Digital Age*.

The events were organized by the Office jointly with the UN, the EU, CoE, HR Defender and MFA.

30 secondary school students from six regions of Armenia and Yerevan participated in a moot court competition organized by the Human Rights Defender's Office with the support of the OSCE Office.



Rock band *Bambir* performing at a concert in Vanadzor held on the occasion of the Human Rights Day, 11 December 2012 (OSCE/Gayane Ter-Stepanyan)

Police-Media conference

On 20-21 October 2012 a two-day conference on issues affecting the police and media was organized, aimed at encouraging effective partnership between them. Around 30 media representatives and 20 police officers discussed media coverage of sensitive topics, such as pre-trial investigation of criminal cases, cases involving juveniles, traffic security and drug trafficking. Dusko Zavisic, an expert from the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, shared his experience with those present.

Study visit of the Armenian delegation to DCAF, Geneva

To promote the further enhancement of civilian control of the armed forces in Armenia, the Office, jointly with the Geneva Centre of Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), organized a study trip of an Armenian delegation to Switzerland from 17-22 November 2012. The Armenian delegation included representatives of the Ministry of Defence, the Police, and officials from the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence, National Security and Internal Affairs.

The visit was aimed at familiarizing Armenian officials with DCAF as an institution, its mission, and its scope of activities and experience, as well as at emphasizing the importance of democratic control of the armed forces as an indispensable factor for building a state with democratic values. As a follow-up, a high-level DCAF delegation visited Armenia in December 2012 to sign a Protocol of Intentions with the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence, National Security and Internal Affairs.

Public discussions on prisoners sentenced to life

The Office, in co-operation with the Armenian Helsinki Committee, launched a project to raise the issues of prisoners sentenced to life imprisonment in public discourse. Activities included tailored meetings with civil society organizations and political parties, as well as a TV talk show in which representatives from the state administration and civil society participated. The project was implemented in close co-operation with the civil initiative group, which advocates for case review and the promotion of early conditional release for persons sentenced to life imprisonment.

In addition, a two-day international conference on life sentenced prisoners was co-sponsored by the Office together with Open Society Foundations on 21 November 2012 to discuss the issues of the imposition and implementation of life imprisonment, early conditional release, probation and preparation for release. Recommendations and draft legislative amendments were produced as a result of the conference.

Annual Meeting of Aarhus centres

On 14 December 2012 the Office organized an annual gathering of representatives of all Aarhus centres in Armenia in the Yerevan Aarhus Centre to summarize activities undertaken in 2012. It was noted that activities had been focused on raising awareness of community rights, supporting public participation and boosting knowledge on environmental and health safety. Approximately 90 public hearings on Environmental Impact Assessments and community budgets, 300 seminars and roundtable discussions, and educational activities were organized and jointly carried out with local administrations, civil society and international organizations. Participants were also provided with training on a number of pressing environmental topics.

Environment and Security (EnvSec) Initiative activities in Armenia



Participants of the Roundtable on Forest Fire Management organized within EnvSec initiative, 4 December 2012 (OSCE /Gayane Ter-Stepanyan)

The Office, together with the Armenian Ministry of Emergency Situations and in co-operation with the Global Fire Monitoring Centre, organized the second National Roundtable on Forest Fire Management in December 2012 within the framework of the EnvSec Initiative. During the event 40 representatives from state agencies, civil society and the international community discussed existing legislative, regulatory and institutional frameworks for wildfire risk management in Armenia, the fire management action plan, and national policy and its strategy for implementation.

On 16 November 2012 the National Screening Board for Civic Action for Security and Environment (CASE) Small Grants Programme met and approved 4 project proposals to be implemented in Yerevan, Syunik and Aragatsotn provinces.



A highly toxic pollutants' and pesticides' burial site in Nubarashen, Armenia, with potential risks for the environment and human security is in the focus of the OSCE Office's attention, 27 March 2012 (OSCE/Edward Safaryan)

NEW PUBLICATIONS/STUDIES

Textbook on military leadership

The Office considers the educational level of military officers as one of the most important factors affecting human rights in the Armed Forces. The link between the educational level of military officers and the disciplinary and moral environment in the army was made evident through various projects implemented by different organizations in Armenia. Therefore, the promotion of leadership skills and managerial capacities constitute one of the key elements in the reform process. For this purpose, within the framework of the Co-operation Plan for 2012 signed between the Office and the Ministry of Defence, a new textbook on Military Leadership was developed and published. Additionally, a series of lectures for mid-level command staff aimed at introducing the textbook and collecting feedback was initiated. The new textbook will be included in military institution curricula, will contribute to modernizing the educational process, and will ensure a professional approach in the military.

Study on establishing a probation service in Armenia



V.Tchountoulov (left), Human Rights Officer at the OSCE Office in Yerevan, at the presentation of the study, 12 November 2012 (OSCE/G. Ter-Stepanyan)

The findings of a study on introducing a probation service in Armenia, which analyzed current legislation and practice, international standards and good practices of OSCE participating States, were presented on 12 November 2012 in Yerevan. Prepared by the Social Justice NGO, with the support of the Office, the study was aimed at advancing criminal justice reform in Armenia. Its findings can serve as a basis for the Armenian authorities to develop a strategy to introduce a probation service which concurs with the Governmental Strategy of Legal and Judicial Reforms for 2012-2016. The study presents various models of probation services in European countries and analyzes their comparative advantages, and includes the results of in-depth interviews with line agencies to assess the current state of rehabilitation work carried out with convicts. According to Arshak Gasparyan, the Head of the Board of the Social Justice NGO, the establishment of a probation service could contribute to crime prevention, reduce the reoffending rate, increase the application of non-custodial sentences and, in the long term, contribute to societal security.

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The OSCE Chairperson-in-Office for 2013, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Leonid Kozhara (OSCE/Jonathan Perfect). Ireland chaired the OSCE in 2012 and Switzerland will chair in 2014, followed by Serbia in 2015.

Information Disputes Council website and publication

The Office supported the official website (www.idcarmenia.am) of the Information Disputes Council (IDC), an extra-judicial body which publishes opinions or statements on and offering out-of-court solutions to freedom of expression-related disputes, as well as a bilingual (Eng and Arm) publication (<http://www.osce.org/yerevan/98199>), which comprises 19 statements published since its establishment in 2011. These were developed by the Freedom of Information Centre through OSCE support as part of a project funded by the US Government.

Talk show on legal and judicial reforms

The Office, in co-operation with the Ministry of Justice, supported a talk show on the provisions of the Governmental Strategy of Legal and Judicial Reforms for 2012-2016, which was adopted in July 2012. The talk show, broadcast in December 2012, aimed to raise public awareness and generate discussion on the overall scope of the strategy, its objectives and means of implementation. The first deputy Minister of Justice was the key presenter and other participants in the discussions included Government experts, civil society, Chamber of Advocates representatives and academia.

About the OSCE

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) works for **stability, prosperity** and **democracy** in its 57 participating States through political dialogue on shared values and through practical work that makes a lasting difference.

The OSCE Office in Yerevan was established in 2000 to assist Armenia in the implementation of its OSCE commitments in all three aspects of security: politico-military, economic and environmental and the human dimension.

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