



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Office in Yerevan**

10 December 2002

OSCE OFFICE IN YEREVAN ACTIVITIES IN 2002: A REVIEW

The OSCE Office in Yerevan was established in March 2000. Under the terms of its mandate its tasks are to promote the implementation of OSCE principles and commitments as well as the co-operation of the Republic of Armenia within the OSCE framework in all OSCE dimensions; to develop co-operation with the OSCE Institutions and bodies, as well as with international organizations and institutions; to consolidate the network of local contacts with non-governmental and academic structures; to assist in arranging events with OSCE participation (PC.DEC/314/99).

The current staff of the Office consists of six international and eight full time and one part time Armenian members.

Against this background, the main activities of the Office during the period under review have been as follows.

Politico-Military Dimension. In the **political/good governance** field, the Office has continued to co-ordinate the activities of the international community in the work to develop an **anti-corruption** strategy for Armenia. The international and national experts, employed under a World Bank grant to produce the details of the Strategy, submitted their final report to the Prime Minister at the end of July 2002. This report has been discussed in Cabinet and the Office has been informed that the Government will adopt a shorter, targeted Action Plan by early December 2002. Thereafter, the Prime Minister will meet with the international members of the working group to discuss future action/cooperation in the implementation of the plan.

Throughout all the period, the Office has worked closely with the expert group and, together with international partners, put together a series of workshops to examine specific themes/issues relating to the proposed Strategy. International experts presented case studies of laws, institutions etc. employed in other countries to tackle corruption and looked at ways of adjusting these experiences to Armenian conditions.

In addition, the Office assisted in the creation of a coalition of some 30 NGOs concerned with levels of corruption in the country. This coalition will have a critical role to play in both assisting and monitoring the implementation of the Strategy once it has been adopted. With USAID, the Office commissioned and published a major public opinion poll on corruption, the findings of which were widely publicized.

More broadly, the Office has continued to provide support/assistance/expertise in the area of **legislative change**. The attachment in January 2002 of the Council of Europe representative to the Office has greatly eased the burden on the Office although many of the laws – Ombudsman, Elections, Criminal Code, Constitutional amendments, Police and NGOs – are as relevant to OSCE as to Strasbourg. The Office needs, therefore, to maintain its close

involvement in the legislative process. To this end, we have received excellent cooperation from the leadership of the National Assembly.

The Office has been heavily involved (again, in a co-coordinating role) with local and international partners in **electoral issues**. Joint expertise of the OSCE/ODIHR and the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe was provided to both the Government and National Assembly related to the amendment of electoral legislation in advance of the local, Presidential and Parliamentary elections which are taking place in 2002 and 2003. Close working contacts have been maintained with the Central Election Commission. In May 2002, a major workshop was held to discuss the draft amendments to the electoral code. In advance of the major elections to be held in 2003, the Office also expanded and deepened its contacts with political parties in the country.

With assistance from ODIHR and members of the international and national communities, the Office carried out a political assessment of the October 2002 local elections in Armenia. As a result, a number of recommendations for improvement were made to the Central Election Commission.

The Office has continued to participate in a working group on **displacement and refugee issues**. The group also works closely with the Department for Migration and Refugees. The main interest of the Office lies in the area of filling legislative gaps and in supporting a project by the Norwegian Refugee Council to conduct a mapping exercise of conflict induced IDPs.

During 2002, the Office extended its coverage of **military/security issues** and engaged in discussions with Ministries to see whether there were areas of potential cooperation. At the same time, following the Bucharest Ministerial decision, the Office looked at additional ways of assisting in the field of anti-terrorism.

Apart from providing support to a **Code of Conduct seminar** and a Canadian/Armenian **Workshop on anti-personnel landmines**, the Office initiated a **Workshop on fraudulent document identification**, which was addressed by international experts. The Office is still discussing, with the relevant authorities, the possibility of holding a further, specialist workshop on **Cyber-crime/money laundering**. In addition, with the assistance of ODIHR, the Office provided a speaker at a Lawyers' Conference on **Anti-Terrorism and Human Rights** in September 2002.

The Office continues to maintain its interest in the progress of the proposed new legislation on **alternative military service** – a subject also relevant to our monitoring of religious freedoms and conscientious objection. Expert comments from an ODIHR panel were passed to the National Assembly Committee dealing with this issue in November 2002 and further, joint activities are planned for 2003.

In January 2002, the Office convened a Workshop on **Freedom of Information** legislation. Subsequently a joint media-government-parliamentary working group was established to draft legislation in this area. The new Law on Freedom of Information was given its first reading in the National Assembly in October 2002. Throughout this period, the Office was heavily involved in coordinating international expertise and facilitating meetings.

The Office continued to work with local media organizations, the Ministry of Justice and international partners on the preliminary draft of a new **Law on Media**. This has been already submitted to the National Assembly. In addition both Council of Europe experts and the Office have been engaged in promoting amendments to the **Law on TV and Radio Broadcasting**, passed in 2001.

The implementation of the latter law led to the events surrounding the loss of broadcast frequency to two television stations – **A1+ and Noyan Tapan**. The Office has closely monitored subsequent developments, including a series of court appeals, and has kept the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media fully informed. A further tender was announced in early November 2002 and the Office is, again, following events.

With funding provided by the German Government, the Office was able to support the formal launching of the **International Association of Journalists of South Caucasus**, which held its founding conference in Georgia in November 2002. The OSCE Mission to Georgia has also provided assistance and support to this Association. Securing international registration (in Strasbourg) has been a lengthy process.

Economic-Environmental Dimension. The Office worked with and accompanied Armenian delegations to the **Baku Preparatory Seminar and the Prague Economic Forum**. During the course of these meetings projects in the areas of water quality and control were elaborated and agreed. The Office has subsequently worked with the Armenian partner organizations on implementation.

Following the Office's work in securing ratification of the Aarhus Convention by Armenia in 2001, a **Public Environmental Information Centre** was opened in the premises of the Ministry of Nature Protection in May 2002 and the Office has been instrumental in encouraging its use by Governmental and Non-Governmental bodies and individual citizens. A directory of environmental organizations has been published with support from the Office.

A major **Workshop on Competition Policy** was held in September. This was an Office initiative. The recommendations of this event are currently in circulation among participants.

The Office actively participates in the UNDP-led work on a **Poverty Reduction Strategy** for Armenia. Within this project, the Office has concentrated on the promotion of social reforms and credible poverty reduction. In particular, amendments to the old Labour Code, monitoring of the economic legal framework and promotion of workforce rehabilitation/retraining policies.

Human Dimension. The Office has been responsible for the implementation of six major **ODIHR projects**. On human rights public awareness, 22 television documentaries, including 5 talk shows dealing with human rights themes, have been produced and disseminated. Using these materials, the Office instituted a public awareness "road show" which showed the videos and held discussions on their contents in rural communities, universities, schools, prisons and law enforcement establishments.

A **NGO training** project has resulted in the production of 4 human rights monitoring reports examining performance in the courts, army, higher educational institutions and the penal system.

In the sphere of **prison reform**, work is underway in retraining prison staff following the transfer of the prison system to the Ministry of Justice from the Ministry of Interior, introducing social and psychological services in criminal executive institutions and establishing a civil society monitoring group for detention places.

Within the framework of the project to introduce a new **registration system** for citizens, a package of three new laws was drafted and submitted to the National Assembly for consideration. UNHCR participated directly in the ODIHR registration project and the Office is supporting them and the Norwegian Refugee Council in the field of refugees and IDPs.

The **Women Rights education** programme for young women was continued, comprising gender education at universities and schools, and a training of trainers on women's rights developed for young women from the regions.

In accordance with its mandate, the Office has continued to monitor the **human rights situation** in Armenia. In the past few months, attention has remained focused on religious freedom/conscientious objectors, retention of the death penalty and allegations of torture and ill treatment in the army and prison system.

Many of the cases we have pursued have been brought to the Office's attention by **individual complainants**. Where the Office has approached the relevant Government institutions, it has always received an open and helpful response. The number of individual cases continues to rise – in the absence of an ombudsman institution – and the Office took the step of employing a part-time legal specialist to help carry the load. This has been successful. The Office also carried out a regional training workshop for other OSCE field presences in the South Caucasus, to exchange experiences and best practices in this work.

Using British Government funds, a workshop on **national minorities** was held. This has resulted in a series of proposals for future work and during the course of 2002, two publications on minority issues were published with Office assistance.

Reform in the **women and children's prison system** is underway in partnership with DfID.

In cooperation with the Netherlands Helsinki Committee, a project on **democratization of law enforcement bodies** was successfully launched.

On the Office's initiative, **coordination meetings** on human rights and democratization issues have been held with all relevant international organizations and donors – both public and private sector. As a result, several working groups have been established to cover specific issues – e.g. elections, Ombudsman, gender and trafficking issues.