



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

OSCE Office in Yerevan

Yerevan, February 2006

Overview of the Office activities in 2005

Guided by its mandate provided by the OSCE Permanent Council, the OSCE Office in Yerevan continued in the year 2005 to promote the implementation of OSCE principles and commitments as well as the cooperation of the Republic of Armenia in all OSCE dimensions, including the human, political, economic and environmental aspects of security and stability.

The Office engaged in several initiatives to aid the Armenian authorities in improving legislation in a number of areas: elections, freedom of assembly, on religious freedom and the fight against trafficking. It also focused on two large projects: the elimination of environmentally hazardous rocket fuel component (mélange) and assistance in police training and promoting community-based policing.

Increasing its focus on areas outside of Yerevan, the Office established two local public environmental information centres in Syunik province and organized roundtables on economic, environmental, human rights and democratization in several regions. Other areas of activity included human rights protection, freedom of the media, small- and medium-sized enterprise (SME) development, labour migration and efforts to combat corruption, trafficking and money laundering.

Marking its fifth anniversary, the Office used the celebrations to promote OSCE commitments and principles and to increase its outreach activities.

Politico/Military Dimension

Police Assistance Program. The Police Assistance Program, which forms a significant part of the Office's activities in the politico-military dimension, aims to build up trust and confidence between the police and society, contribute to the development of modern community-oriented model policing. The Program supports the following areas of policing: the strengthening of the Police Training Centre for induction training, the development and introduction of a community policing model in the Arabkir District Police Department, and the implementation of a modern command and control system in the Yerevan City Police Department. On March 15, 2005 an Agreement of Implementation (AoI) was signed between the Police and the OSCE Office initiating the refurbishment of the Training Centre.

Strengthening Cyber Security and Fighting Cyber Crime Task Force (CTF). The Office played a key role in setting up a relevant National Task Force involving representatives from the Ministry of Defence, National Security, Police, Central Bank and National Assembly, as well as from the President's Office. The Task Force prepared a draft national action plan, which offers a way forward to strengthen legislative and technical aspects of cyber security and bolster the governments' capabilities to combat cyber crime.

Economic/Environmental Dimension

Elimination of Rocket Fuel Component Stocks in the Republic of Armenia (Melange) – a cross-dimensional Economic/Environmental and Politico/Military activity. Responding to a request of the Armenian Government the Office provides technical and financial assistance for the disposal of 872 t of rocket fuel component (*mélange*). Following the findings and recommendations of an independent scoping study prepared by an international expert group the Project Engineering, Environmental Impact Assessment and Final Budgeting has been finalized in August 2005. By signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Defense on 30 September 2005 the final and decisive phase of project implementation has been initiated – the environmentally sound recycling of the melange into a mineral dressing, which will be used for the improvement of pH poor soil in the region. The Office appreciates a very good cooperation with the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Nature Protection as these relations are the pre-condition for a successful outcome of this initiative.

The elimination of the rocket fuel component “*mélange*”, which is still located on the territory of OSCE countries, serves the goal of improving the environmental and security status of the population in respective countries and regions. The initiative has been made possible thanks to the speedy response and the substantial financial contributions of the governments of Finland, Germany, USA and Canada.

Aarhus Convention Network. The Office continues to promote the Aarhus Convention principles by supporting the Public Environmental Information Center (Aarhus Center) in Yerevan and initiating new Aarhus Centers in regions. Based on the Tripartite Memorandum of Understanding between the Office, the Ministry of Nature Protection and Province Governors, two local Aarhus Centers were established in Syunik and another two are expected to be established in Tavush and Lori Marzes in 2006. Their aim is to promote a dialogue between NGOs, business community and governmental institutions, to raise public awareness on environmental issues and to encourage participation in environmental decision making.

Lobbying on environmental matters. Thanks to the united efforts of the Office and the Environmental Public Alliance of Armenian NGOs it was possible to change the decision of the Government to build the new Armenia-Iran highway through Shikahogh Nature Reserve, which would have damaged the local environment.

Competition for Environmental Journalists. It is for the third year the Office and the Aarhus Center launched a national competition for environmental journalists—this year on the topic of “Environment and Industry”. The goal of the project is to encourage journalists of TV and print media to report on environmental issues and to provide the public with reliable and professional information. The television and press journalists nominated as winners by a professional jury have been awarded with prizes at a special ceremony. The 2005 competition focused on raising public awareness of issues such as the environmentally sound rehabilitation of contaminated former industrial areas, uncontrolled industrial pollution and the lack of treatment facilities of functioning enterprises.

Environment and Security Initiative. Supporting the Environment and Security (EnvSec) Program the Office organized workshops on the environmental status of Yerevan and a comprehensive concept for solid waste management. As well, at the request of local

community the Office commissioned an assessment of the environmental impact of the mining industry in Kajaran in Syunik marz.

As part of the EnvSec Initiative, the Office supports implementation of the national component of the South Caucasus River Monitoring Project, which is in the fourth year now focusing on re-establishing of a regional water monitoring system, increasing local technical capabilities and creating a model sharing system accessible by internet.

Combating Money Laundering and Suppressing Financing of Terrorism. The Office received an official request from the Chairman of the Central Bank and the General Prosecutor seeking further support in the fight against money laundering as a key component in the fight against terrorism. The Office supported adoption of a legislative framework and establishment of a Financial Monitoring Unit. At the international conference in May 2005 organized jointly by the Office, the OCEEA and UNODC, foreign experience of financial intelligence units and the role of international organizations in this process were discussed. The Office supports Armenia's intention to join the EGMONT Group of Financial Intelligence Units by facilitating training programs for different target groups including not only the banking system but also non-financial organizations.

Local Economic Development: Tourist Guide to Syunik Marz. With the Office's support a guide to Syunik Marz was prepared and published by "Development Programs" consulting company. It is intended not only for tourists but also for people who are interested in doing business in this province. The guide is one of the recommendations of a study of the prospects of the socio-economic development of Syunik province conducted with the Office's support in 2004.

Support to SME Development. In close collaboration with the Ministry of Trade and Economic Development, SME Development National Centre and the GTZ ProSME Project the Office supported a series of round tables focusing on the revision of the legislative framework governing activities of small and medium-size enterprises in order to provide inputs for the 2006 State Program for SME Development. Experts from local consulting companies, international organizations and the private business sector analyzed the international best practice of administrative simplification in the economic field and discussed needs for reform with special emphasis on business start up, tax and customs procedures.

The Office also initiated a feasibility study on the establishment of two pilot business incubators in Goris and Gyumri. The preliminary results of the study were presented at an international conference on "Business Incubation and SME Development" organized with the Office's support on 4 November 2005. The aim of the conference and the following workshops was to share experience and best practice on the establishment of Business Incubators as supporting tools for enhancing regional socio-economic development in the transition process towards a sustainable market economy. National and international speakers elaborated on national policies and the importance of supportive institutional infrastructure for promoting entrepreneurship and facilitating small and medium start-up companies.

Improvement of business and investment climate. On 22 November the Office together with the Ministry of Trade and Economic Development organized a seminar on investment opportunities in Armenia's mining sector within the framework of the World Mining Congress held in London. More than 150 representatives of leading mining and engineering

companies, investment groups and financial institutes attended the seminar and an exhibition on business opportunities in Armenia. Armenia's presentation focused on methods to ensure favorable conditions for domestic and foreign investors, developing downstream industries as well as the environmental soundness of mining and processing operations.

The Office also supported elaboration of a White Paper entitled "Lessons Learned from Administrative Simplifications in Developed Countries – Possible Implications for Armenia", which assesses best practices on simplification of administrative regulations and provides policy makers and business community with an overview of experiences and promising practices to further improve the business and investment climate in Armenia.

Enhancing trade facilitation. On 1 December, the Office, in cooperation with the Eurasia Foundation's South Caucasus Cooperation Programme and Transparency International Armenia, organized a workshop to summarize the outcomes of a multi-year joint project entitled "Towards Trade Facilitation in the South Caucasus". The aim of the project is to facilitate trade of goods and services and to reduce administrative barriers through initiation of a dialogue and inter-agency cooperation between relevant national stakeholders in the South Caucasus.

Within the framework of the project the legislation and existing practice in the South Caucasus countries have been assessed, informational bulletins in five languages have been issued and free on-line consultations for private companies and individuals regarding import/export procedures have been established. The project is closely interlinked with the the 14th OSCE Economic Forum "Transportation in the OSCE Area: Secure Transportation Networks and Transport Development to enhance Regional Economic Co-operation and Stability" to be held in 2006.

Human Rights Activities

Assistance to the Ombudsperson (human rights defender). The Office promotes and renders support to Ombudsman institution, follows the legislative developments in the field and continues to chair the international working group on Ombudsman, which is attended by the Ombudsperson, representatives from Embassies of OSCE member states and international organizations.

In May and June 2005 four staff members from the Armenian Ombudsman institution received an intensive on the job training by colleagues in the Polish and Lithuanian Seimas Ombudsman institutions during two weeks. In October 2005 two experts from Lithuanian Seimas Ombudsman office paid a return visit to Armenia.

The Office will further closely cooperate with this institution and follow the nomination and appointment of the new Ombudsperson.

Assistance to the Prosecutor's Office. In November 2004 the Office and the ODIHR initiated an assistance program to the Prosecutor's Office of Armenia, with the aim of assisting the prosecutors and investigators to conduct their work in better compliance with international human rights and fair trial standards. In the framework of the Program the OSCE/ODIHR team assessed the situation (institutional structure, legal basis, capacity of the prosecutor's office, training potential). As a result in November 2005, the ODIHR and the Office organised training on investigating domestic violence at the Training Centre of the

Prosecutor's Office. The training addressed around 40 participants (prosecutors/investigators) from Yerevan and marzes. A number of consecutive trainings are anticipated to be conducted in 2006.

Defense Lawyers. The Office closely followed the elaboration of the law on Advocates that came into force in Jan 2005 and had several meetings with defence lawyers and representatives of international and local organizations in this regard. The Office and ODIHR supported participation of six defence lawyers at the SHDIM (Supplementary Human Dimension Implementation Meeting), which was held in Tbilisi and was devoted to the role of defence lawyers in promoting fair trial standards. In 2006 the Office together with ODIHR will organise trainings for selected public defenders.

National/Monitoring Visiting Mechanism for Penitentiary Institutions. Having organized a number of trainings for members of the Civil Monitoring Group for Penitentiary Institutions in 2004, the Office continues to closely follow the group's activities, attending their regular meetings from time to time. With the Office's support the group published its Annual report in Armenian and in English. The Office will continue to support the group, focusing on reporting skills and visits implementation.

Institutional and staff capacity building for the penitentiary system. The Office assists the Ministry of Justice in staff capacity building. In September 2005 the training centre for prison staff of the law institute of the Ministry of Justice was re-opened in Yerevan after renovation work supported by the OSCE Office in Yerevan. The newly-renovated training centre, with two auditoria and a computer classroom, will have a capacity to host approximately 300 employees of the penitentiary system annually. In addition, tailored, short-term courses will be organized for 40-50 new staff and 27 specialists working in the sphere of rehabilitation and reconciliation.

Alternative Sentencing. A detailed situation analysis, considering both legislative side and the public opinion was carried out by a NGO for the Office. This initiative helped to identify areas for priority action and also developed recommendations. Thus, key actors of the criminal justice field received ideas, which will help them shape their efforts to develop effective and efficient alternatives to imprisonment in Armenia. The report was published and distributed at the presentation, organized by the Office together with OSI and the British Embassy on 16 March 2005.

Introduction of Alternatives to Military Service. The Office assisted in elaboration of the new law and followed its implementation. In spring 2004, the Office provided the Ministry of Defence with an expert paper on options of alternative to military service and liability of alternative servicemen based on the experience from other countries. In early 2005, the Office visited two places, where alternative service was being performed and talked to the heads of institutions and higher authorities about possible improvements, such as preparatory training for alternative servicemen prior to their service. The Office equally monitored trials of cases related to alternative military service.

Human rights situation in the army. In 2004-2005 the Office monitored the human rights situation in the Armenian military, with the consent of the Minister of Defense. The project consisted of visits to military units including meetings with officers and soldiers. Attention was equally paid to the living facilities of the service personnel. The project further included

meetings with focus groups such as representatives from relevant international organizations, NGOs and former servicemen.

Freedom of Conscience, Religion and Belief. The Office closely follows the situation connected with Jehovah's Witnesses in Armenia and the elaboration of the draft Law on Religious Freedoms.

In October 2005 the Office together with the Armenian Foreign Ministry organized a thematic concert entitled 'Through culture to tolerance' in the Armenian National Opera House. The event underlined the importance of tolerance education and an open society as cornerstones of democratic development.

Human Rights Public Awareness. In July 2005, 3 TV talk shows were transmitted by an Armenian Public TV channel. The talk shows included discussion among experts from the government, NGOs and other civil society actors.

The talk shows, which were broadcasted on H2 TV channel, covered such topics as Tolerance and Freedom of Belief, Judiciary and Alternative Service.

Individual Human Rights Complaints. The Office continued to handle individual complaints on alleged human rights violations as in previous years. This activity allows for a better monitoring of the human rights situation in the country and provides information to better promote human rights protection and conceive relevant projects/activities. The cases handled by the Office mostly relate to alleged violations of civil and political rights. The Office works closely with the relevant Armenian authorities for the resolution of complaints.

Democratization Activities

Anti-trafficking. In 2005 the Office continued to assist the Government of Armenia in the development of effective implementation mechanisms and protection of trafficked victims' human rights. The Office prepared an analysis of anti-trafficking legislation and reviewed the draft amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code on victim and witness protection. The Office assisted the Government in developing a National Referral Mechanism, a comprehensive cooperation mechanism of state and non-state actors to protect and assist victims of trafficking. Next year, the Office will continue to strengthen the institutionalization of the national referral mechanism and provide technical assistance to the Armenian authorities and NGOs.

Migration. In 2005 the Office provided the Government with international expertise on the Draft Law on Employment and Social Protection in cases of Unemployment, which was adopted in fall 2005.

In the spring of 2005, the Office jointly with the Ministry of Labor and Social Issues held a workshop on Labor Migration. During this event, the Office discussed the preliminary results of its project to review Armenian legislation and administrative framework related to international migration as well as the results of a nation-wide sociological survey of households on labor migration. The Office intends to hold a press conference on the results of the survey in February 2006.

The Office, in cooperation with CIMERA NGO organized a series of roundtables on migration in three marzes of Armenia, which are characterized by high rates of migration and unemployment. The roundtables aimed to raise public awareness on migration related issues, such as migrants' access to overseas legal employment opportunities to repatriation and integration policies in Armenia. The final roundtable, held in December in Yerevan, finalized the recommendations to the Armenian authorities and other actors in the field.

Freedom of Media. In 2005 the Office continued to chair the Media Legislation Working Group - a forum for exchanging information on problems in the area. The working group, established in 2003, has sent numerous letters to the Armenian authorities expressing its concern over shortfalls of Armenian media- and freedom of information- related legislation and violence against journalists. In 2005, the Office commissioned a review of broadcast license bid regulations. This project will be followed up with a more comprehensive review of the broadcast license bid regulations and institutional decision-making of the broadcast regulatory bodies. In 2006, the Office will assist the Public TV capacity building. This will take the form of trainings targeting the Company's news editors and journalists in 2006, following an issue-based discussion on the role of public service broadcasting in democratization.

Gender. In the first half of 2005, the Office implemented a project with Center for the Development of Civil Society to raise students' awareness of gender issues in the society through essay writing competition in secondary schools of different regions in Armenia. In the second half of 2005, the Office and the UNDP Gender and Politics Programme in the Southern Caucasus jointly organized training on transferring skills to women interested in local elections. The series of trainings aimed to increase participation of women in local elections both as voters and candidates throughout all the regions ("Marzes").

Good Governance

Assistance to Electoral Reform. The Office continued its work in this sphere, focusing primarily on amendments to the Electoral Code, which were adopted in May 2005. A number of written opinions and recommendations were provided to the Armenian National Assembly through OSCE/ODIHR and the Venice Commission in the course of elaboration of these amendments. The Office contributed by providing its own expertise in electoral matters to the Armenian authorities and compiling recommendations from civil society. The Office also organized an expert discussion on this matter with the parliamentary factions and domestic experts. Major changes included the establishment of a voters' register under the Passport and Visa Department of Police and a new formula for the makeup of election commissions. Despite some improvement of the Code, international experts believed that there are areas which still could be amended to correspond to international standards.

While promoting reform of election legislation, the Office is also focusing on improvements in electoral administration and, in particular, the voters' register. The Office facilitated consultations between civil society and the authorities who are authorized by the new Electoral Code to maintain the voter register and hopes that 2006 will see further progress towards a register which is more accurate and complete.

The Office continued chairing the International Working Group on Elections, which comprises main international actors in the field of elections present in Yerevan. The Group

serves as a forum for exchanging information and coordinating activities as well as for cooperation among international players in providing election related assistance.

Support for Constitutional Reform. The Office closely monitored developments connected with the constitutional reform. Through the Office, the Armenian authorities were provided with comments of OSCE/ODIHR experts on the human rights section of the package of amendments. In addition, prior to the referendum of 27 November, the Office organized media campaign to assist in promoting participation of voters in the polling.

Following the reports of alleged violations observed during the referendum, the Office called on the Central Electoral Commission and the Office of the Prosecutor General for a thorough investigation into the reported cases.

Capacity building for the Standing Committees of the National Assembly. In 2005, building on the successful experience of the previous year, the Office continued its project of support to the Standing Committees of the National Assembly aimed at strengthening the professional capacities of the parliamentary professional staff. This activity was carried out in cooperation with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. The first phase was a three-week comprehensive training course in Yerevan last June for the professional staff from three standing committees and two departments. A second phase was a practical follow-up – visits to the Slovenian National Assembly arranged for selected participants with a stopover in Vienna for briefings in the Austrian Parliament and the Vienna Office of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. The Office also donated specialized literature to the library of the National Assembly. Similar one-week professional training was organized by the Office for the staff of the Armenian Foreign Ministry.

Promoting freedom of assembly. Experts from the OSCE and the Council of Europe expressed the view in a number of joint opinions that the 2004 law on Conducting Public Gatherings, Demonstrations and Marches was overly restrictive and did not meet all relevant international standards. Accordingly, the Office has been working with the National Assembly to encourage a number of amendments that would improve the legislation. At the National Assembly's request, international experts provided several packages of recommendations. In addition, the Office, the Council of Europe and OSCE/ODIHR organized a number of discussions by experts and an international roundtable on “Freedom of Assembly: Legislation and Practice.” These events provided a forum for broader discussions on freedom of assembly in Armenia and contributed to the law being amended in October 2005. Experts from OSCE and the Venice Commission noted that most of their recommendations were taken into account, however they stressed that the most essential aspect of ensuring freedom of assembly was the spirit in which it was implemented and interpreted. The Office will continue following this issue in 2006 and hopes that the amendments will result in greater freedom for individuals to publicly gather and express their opinions without any undue restrictions.

Anti-corruption. Apart from chairing the international anti-corruption working group of all interested multilateral and bilateral missions, the Office focused its activities on strengthening civil society in the fight against corruption. In particular, the Office assisted members of the NGO coalition comprising 10 NGOs to implement a number of initiatives to raise awareness on combating corruption in the field of traffic police, healthcare, transparency of Government, higher education. As well, to assist both the Government and civil society in improving and implementing the National Anti-Corruption Strategy, the Office jointly with

the General Prosecutor's Office translated and published the Armenian version of the publication "Best Practices on Combating Corruption", produced by the OSCE coordinator for Economic and Environmental Affairs. The Office also published jointly with the Civil Service of Armenia a manual on 100 arguments to fight corruption in this field.

On November 29-30, the Office, together with the Office of the Co-ordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA) and the Monitoring Commission for the Implementation of Anticorruption Strategy of the Republic of Armenia, held an International Workshop on "National and International Anti-Corruption Legal Instruments and Best Practices" in Yerevan.