

Regional seminars

PROMOTING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN ARMENIA

Yeghegnadzor, Yeghegnadzor Branch of Armenian State University of Economics, 14 July 2015

Background

'Strengthening local elected representatives' leadership' is a programme implemented by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in the framework of the Council of Europe project 'Support to consolidating local democracy in Armenia'. The project is part of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Armenia and is funded by the Government of Denmark. The programme is aimed at improving local political governance in Armenia, strengthening leadership capacities and nurturing confidence and trust in local authorities, generating a spirit of co-operation, horizontally and vertically, among local elected representatives and with central authorities.

Council of Europe and citizen participation in Armenia at local level

Armenia became a member of the Council of Europe in 2001 while signing, among other documents, the European Charter of Local Self-Government (CETS No. 122), which entered into force on 1 May 2002. On 13 May 2013 Armenia ratified the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (Utrecht, 2009, CETS No. 207). The provisions of the Additional Protocol became part of the Armenian legislation (RA Law on local self-government) on 19 June 2013. On 26 March 2014 the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe adopted Recommendation 351(2014)¹ on the state of local democracy in Armenia, which, inter alia, recommends Armenian authorities to apply instruments promoting citizen participation at local level, and to seek opportunities to stimulate local residents' interest in their work and achievements. In order to assist communities to put into practice the aforementioned provisions and recommendations, the Congress has developed several initiatives, including two Regional Seminars. Moreover, the Congress is currently supporting 4 Armenian communities to implement pilot citizen participation initiatives, which may become replicable for other local governments in Armenia.

The regional seminars

The purpose of the regional seminars is to enhance the level of citizen participation in the decision-making at local level in Armenia. During the opening plenary session the local and international organizations and experts will present tools and best practices of citizen participation at local level, including the pilot citizen participation initiatives supported by the Council of Europe. In group sessions, the participants will discuss participatory budgeting at local level, the role of municipal councillors and civil society in promoting the participation of citizens in the decision making process, and the role that can be played by information and communication technologies. On the basis of the tools and initiatives presented and discussed during the regional seminars, "Citizen participation guidelines" will be developed and disseminated to participants and other interested parties.

¹ Recommendation 351 (2014): English version: <http://goo.gl/tYx6L1>; Armenian version: <http://www.coe.am/docs/clrae/report1.pdf>

Four thematic debates

Participants will be invited to take part in one of the four thematic debates. They will have the opportunity to give their views and opinions, and to share their concerns and practices in citizen participation.

*Steps to
build a participatory
budgeting in communities*

*The role and privileged
position of municipal
councillors in creating
opportunities for
engagement and
co-decision*

*Getting engaged with
civil society:
practices and hints for
addressing challenges*

*Promotion of citizen
participation by using
information and
communication
technologies*

Partners

The seminars are organised by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in cooperation with:

- RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Emergency Situations (MTAES)
- Communities Association of Armenian (CAA)
- Armenia Municipal Councillors' Association (AMCA)
- Communities Finance Officers Association (CFOA)
- Local Democracy Agency Foundation, Armenia (LDA)

Participants

Each seminar will be attended by approximately 100 mayors and municipal councillors. Representatives of associations in the field of local democracy, intercommunity organisations, international organisations and NGOs active in the field will also be participating.

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The **Congress of Local and Regional Authorities** of the Council of Europe represents local and regional authorities and promotes grassroots democracy. It has two chambers, the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Chamber of Regions, and brings together 324 full and 324 substitute members representing more than 200,000 European territorial communities
<http://www.coe.int/t/congress>

Programme

Registration and coffee: 10:30 – 11:00

Plenary session (11:00 – 13:00)

Moderator: Armen Varosyan, Senior Project Officer, Council of Europe

Welcome

Davit Harutyunyan Mayor of Yeghegnadzor

Ashot Giloyan, Head of the department of Local Self – Government, RA, Ministry of Territorial Administration and Emergency Situations

Natalia Voutova, Head of the Council of Europe Office in Yerevan

Citizen participation: international standards and best practices

The European perspective on citizen participation.

Juliana Hoxha, Vice-President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Albania

Introduction to citizen participation

Giovanni Allegretti, Senior Researcher, Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, Portugal; Co-chair of the Independent Authority for Participation of Tuscany Region, Italy

Practices and added value of citizens participation in Eastern Partnership countries

Antonella Valmorbida, Secretary General, European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA)

Citizen participation: the experience in Armenia

The role of the Armenian Associations of Local Authorities in promoting citizen participation

Emin Yeritsyan, President, Communities Association of Armenian (CAA), Head of the Armenian Delegation to the Congress

Legal framework for citizen participation: international commitments of Armenia and national legislation

Davit Tumanyan, Member of the Group of Independent Experts on the Charter of Local Self-Government, Deputy President of CFOA, Chief or Party of USAID Civic Engagement in Monitoring Local Government Reforms, Armenia

Initiatives in Armenian communities

Citizen participation for promoting active sports and leisure in the community

Rafik Andreasyan, Mayor of Urtsadzor

Involvement of citizens in decision-making: step by step

Haykaz Khachikyan, Mayor of Akhtala

Community discussions on Municipal services

Hovhannes Hoveyan, Mayor of Vardenik

Community polylogue on Municipal services in Artik

Arsen Abrahamyan, Mayor of Artik

Open discussion

→ Lunch Break

Thematic Break-out Session (14:00 – 15:15)

Steps to build a participatory budgeting

Co-moderators:

Giovanni Allegretti, Senior Researcher, Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, Portugal; Co-chair of the Independent Authority for Participation of Tuscany Region - Florence – Italy
Hayastan Stepanyan, Local government expert, Armenia

The role and privileged position of municipal councillors in creating opportunities for engagement and co-decision

Co-moderators:

Levon Barseghyan, Councillor of Gyumri, President of “Azparez” Journalists club.
Artak Petrosyan, Deputy President of the Association of Municipal Councillors of Armenia.

Getting engaged with civil society: practices and hints for addressing challenges

Co-moderators:

Antonella Valmorbida, Secretary General of ALDA
Lusine Aleksandryan, Director of the Local Democracy Agency, Armenia.

Promotion of citizen participation by using information and communication technologies

Co-moderators:

Grisha Khachatryan, President, Information Systems Development and Training Center (ISDTC), Armenia
Armine Tukhikyan, Local government expert, Armenia

➔ *Coffee Break*

Wrap-up Plenary session (15:45 – 16:45)

Moderator: Armen Varosyan, Senior Project Officer, Council of Europe

Feedback from the thematic sessions by the moderators

Open discussion

Final considerations

Juliana Hoxha, Vice-President of the Congress