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The Influence of the EU Eastern Partnership (EaP) Program

on the reinforcement of the Civil Society in Armenia

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By Tsovinar Nazaryan

(Student ID: 0538013)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis studies the European Union's support to the Armenian civil society for democratization of the country. Since Armenia joined the EU Eastern Partnership in 2009, civil society organizations are more strengthened partially by the EU's extensive support. Still, a significant progress of the democratic situation in Armenia has not taken place. The EU leverage on the Armenian government is found limited in the of lack of political will of the Government to implement political and economic reforms foreseen by mutual agreements. To ensure reforms in Armenia, the EU relies both on the leverage on the government and linkage with the civil society, as well as on governance model of administrative cooperation in sectoral reforms. Lack of political competition in the country limits the civil society's effectiveness in promoting reforms. While the CSOs are more radical in their strive for profound democratic transformation, EU focuses on "tangible outcomes" in good governance and socio-economic reforms. The CSOs and the Government are divided by mutual mistrust but episodically get around the table only by the facilitation of the EU to work on EU-supported reforms which reflects an overlap of linkage and leverage. The use of linkage has strengthened the Armenian civil society but its bottom-up effort is limited by a glass ceiling of political conditions in the country. The EU-supported CSOs have managed to raise public awareness and sensibility in many problems of human rights and democracy but the long-term effects of this success and establishment of a civic culture should be studied in the future.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

"We wanted a ring of friends but we got a ring of fires", this statement has been often heard from the European Union officials sharing their thoughts about the European Neighborhood Policy. In September 2014, following the Ukrainian crisis, *The Economist*[1] brought up this play of words (referring to the song "*Ring of Fire*" of Johnny Cash) in an attempt to analyze why the EU fell "so far" short of its goals to bring about friendship through "trade, aid, and political reform" to its southern and eastern neighbors (*The Economist*, 2014). This play of words shortly became a cliché adopted and internalized first by the media and then by the politicians and EU officers.

This cliché was a reflection of the political turn on the Eastern Neighborhood (Eastern Partnership) of the European Union where Russia demonstrated its political interests through the use of hard power. In 2013, after successfully completing Association Agreements with the European Union, both Armenia and Ukraine refused to sign the AAs and a large-scale grassroots resistance named EuroMaidan took the streets of Kiev. The president tried to quell it through shedding blood but soon was forced to leave the country. Russia annexed Crimea and backed a separatist war in the Eastern Ukraine. Meanwhile, in Armenia, the resistance was of a small-scale and brought no change in the country, rather, Armenia was dragged into the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). Partly as a result of these events, the EU had to review its European Neighborhood policy in 2015 and now emphasizes downscaling liberal-democratic expectations while concentrating more on stability and security issues (European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), 2016).

Apart from free trade with the EU, facilitated visa regimes, and other benefits, the EU intended to bring about more democracy to its neighboring countries heavily affected by the Soviet non-democratic heritage in the East (EEAS, Eastern Partnership, 2016). For this purpose, EU diplomacy relies heavily on the domestic civil society organizations thus

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[1] http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21618846-european-unions-neighbourhood-more-troubled-ever-europes-ring-fire

promoting democracy from the bottom-up while the work with governments aims at promoting change from the top-down. However, democratic progress has reached different levels and different depths in different Eastern Partnership countries. To contribute an understanding of why and how this happens differently, this thesis will study the EU's democracy promotion through civil society in Armenia.

Study objective

Since the launch of the Eastern Partnership Program in 2009, the Armenian civil society has received large support from the European Union, as well as from member state governments. It has been supported also by other Western governments and organizations such as the United States and non-EU-member states. Due to this support, the NGOs have been able to conduct permanent monitoring on a number of policy areas and to bring their participation in opinion-making activities. Additionally, the emergence of vocal grassroots movements in 2010-2011 demonstrated an endemic movement for democratic change in Armenia. Unlike other Eastern Partnership countries such as Azerbaijan and Belarus, both of which declined a closer association with the European Union, demand for democratization, public protest and willingness to participate in decision making are strongly existent in Armenia.

This thesis hypothesizes that the EU's support for the civil society has strengthened Armenia's civil society organizations and has resulted in a significant change in the democratic situation of the country. "Strengthening" of the civil society will be assessed based on the qualitative data available from official reports and on the interviews with Armenian CSO members and EU officials. "Significant change" as such will be measured against the assessments (annual reports, indices) of the democratic situation and of the certain policy areas (fight against corruption and conduct of elections are chosen as democracy *indicators*) where the CSOs played certain role with the support of EU (EaP).

Further the thesis will examine the support itself and how effective it was in advancing democracy in Armenia. I will examine international and CSO reports to evaluate the changes and will interview both the Armenian CSO members and EU officials responsible for EaP Armenia to understand how support to the civil society works, what results it brings,

and why. In other words, the thesis will study the quality of that support and the reasons for it.

The study aims at finding out:

- How effectively the EU's contribution strengthened the civil society in Armenia and its reasons;
- How effectively the EU's contribution in the civil society brought democratic change (since the launch of the EaP in 2009) and its reasons.

Definition of Terms

As far as many concepts and terms discussed in this thesis find very diverse definitions in academic and expert circles, their meanings for this thesis are explained here:

Civil society – a country's associations of formal (NGOs) and non-formal (initiatives, groups, movements) organization of citizen for policy

Democracy promotion – foreign policy tool of developed countries in developing and underdeveloped countries

Democratization – establishment of a nation as a democracy through internal and/or external efforts

European values – As defined in the Article 2 of the Treaty.

Grassroots – refers both to professional CSOs and non-professional citizen initiatives

Leverage – top-down democratization effort through conditionality (rewards for costs)

Linkage – support to civil society for bottom-up democratization

Thesis Structure

The thesis will consist of five chapters. An introduction to the thesis provides an overview of the Eastern Partnership of the European Neighborhood Policy, the background of the EU-Armenia relations in general and the EU's support to the Armenian civil society in particular. The problem, i.e. the hypotheses and the research questions are introduced, as well as the rationale for the study. The study objective and hypothesis will be introduced as well as defined terms needed for further explicit understanding of their use in the thesis.

Literature Review (Chapter II) will discuss the academic research on the subject. A theoretical framework will be derived and discussed in the light of other related research. The literature review will introduce the gaps in the research done previously in which the current study seeks to fill. Quoting (here and throughout the thesis) will be formatted according to the APA style (APA, 2009). The Methodology chapter will explain how the hypotheses will be tested and how the research questions will be answered. The tools used for the research (survey, interviews, data collection and analysis, etc.) will be explained in detail.

The following chapter will introduce the findings from the collected data, as well as analysis. And in the last (V) chapter, conclusions will be drawn from the findings.

Background

In November 2006, as a journalist I was present at the historical signing of the first Action Plan of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) between the Armenian and EU parties in Brussels (EU, 2006). Vartan Oskanian, then the minister of foreign affairs of Armenia, stated: "I've said on many occasions that if we manage to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by this program, in five years Armenia can be a politically and economically different state. And we, indeed, must be consistent in its realization." (Tamrazyan, 2006)

Soon the ENP was split in two different regional programs for the eastern and southern neighbors of the EU. Since 2006, but particularly since the launch of the Eastern Partnership Program in 2009, Armenian civil society has received large amounts of support from the European Union, as well as from the EU member states' governments. Due to this support, Armenian NGOs have been able to conduct permanent monitoring on a number of policy areas and to provide their opinions in forming policy decisions. These areas were promised to be reformed according to European values and the country's commitments undertaken against the European Union, as well as the Council of Europe where Armenia became a member in 2000.

The United States was the largest donor for Armenia until 2011 when the U.S. had to revise its Millennium Challenge Program, as Armenia failed to enact the required reforms.

Meanwhile, the European Union increased the aid to Armenia. In 2010, the latter started negotiations on an association agreement which included the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) (Borshchevskaya, 2013).

For three and half years the Armenian government successfully negotiated an association agreement with the European Union. Although the situation with human rights, corruption, rule of law, elections and other primary policy areas did not progress much, both the Europeans and Armenians believed that the situation would improve after the signature of the Association Agreement. Meanwhile, just on the eve of the expected signature, on September 3, 2013, the Armenian president Serzh Sargsyan visited his counterpart Vladimir Putin in Moscow and made a statement that Armenia would join the Russia-led Customs Union (eventually it turned to be the Eurasian Economic Area). As a result, small-ranged manifestations (protests) took place in front of the ruling party's headquarters and two activists were followed by masked and well-muscled men and severely beaten next to their home. A few days later, Commissioner Stefan Fule (Štefan Füle) visited Yerevan, the capital of Armenia and in an off-record meeting with a pool of Armenian civil society organizations, where the author of this thesis took part as a civic activist, Fule promised that whatever happens with the EU relations with the Armenian government, it would not abandon the civil society and would stand for the pro-European voices.

In the face of the new turn in the relations with its eastern partners and of the Ukrainian crisis, the European Union reviewed its European Neighborhood Policy in 2015. The reviewed ENP was thought to be more realistic and downscaled expectations from the neighbors. The new ENP underlined security and stability issues. However, "defending the EU values and human rights" remained a priority and itwas the first of the four priority domains of the ENP: Good governance, democracy, rule of law and human rights; economic development for stabilization; security; and migration and mobility (European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), 2016).

The European Union (namely the European Commission and the High Representative) and Armenia restarted negotiations in areas compatible with the EEU in 2015. These political and trade negotiations led to the pre-signature of a new agreement titled "Comprehensive

and Enhanced Partnership Agreement" which will replace the PCA (EEAS, 2017). Signature of the agreement is expected in the fall of 2017.

To strengthen Armenian democracy, the Armenian civil society organizations (CSOs) have been supported mostly by western governments, namely the United States, the European Union, some EU member states and other non-member European governments (Norway, Switzerland, etc.). This support has been supplied in both political and financial forms with the Armenian government receiving much larger grants, from the same donors, for democratic reform. However, the reports by respectful international organizations such as the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, the Human Rights Watch, the Freedom House, the Transparency International, the U.S. state department's annual report, and partially ODIHR/OSCE, observe little progress in the situation of the progress of Armenian democracy.

On the other hand, compared to the other Eastern Partnership countries, Azerbaijan and Belarus, who declined to sign the Association agreement, joining rather with Russia, Armenian civil society is rather vibrant: despite police crackdowns on peaceful protests and other unlawful actions against oppositionists, public manifestations of protest are very frequent, and grassroots opposition groups openly criticize the Government.

Armenian civil society organizations (CSOs) are in many ways different from the Armenian government in the commitments and obligations undertaken by Armenia in the EaP framework. Lack of resources in the country puts the government of Armenia in a state of dependency from global powers, including the EU; thus, there is some extent of tolerance toward grassroots activism as a partial international commitment. However, the civil society organizations (CSOs) mostly have to rely on their European (and other external) partners in order to reach out to influence the Government as their attempts of directly making influence often are ignored and thus prone to failure.

The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between Armenia and the European Union was signed in 1999 but the newly launched ENP (in 2004) gave a new impetus to the mutual relations (PCA, 1999). Armenia was already a member of the Council of Europe and the relations with the European Union took Armenia's European integration to a new level.

European integration was declared to be a dominant component of Armenia's foreign policy (Oskanian: Euro Integration Key Direction of Armenia Foreign Policy, 2006).

The European Union invited Armenia "to enter into intensified political, security, economic and cultural relations with the EU, enhanced regional and cross border co-operation and shared responsibility in conflict prevention and conflict resolution." (ENP Action Plans)

The document conditioned the ambition level of the EU-Armenia agreement with "the degree of Armenia's commitment to common values as well as its capacity to implement jointly agreed priorities, in compliance with international and European norms and principles." (ENP Action Plans)

Strengthening of democratic structures, of the rule of law, including reform of the judiciary and combat of fraud and corruption were named as the Priority area number 1, while Priority number 2 emphasized the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, in compliance with international commitments of Armenia (PCA, CoE, OSCE, UN) (ENP Action Plans).

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

What are the means and effects of promoting democracy through the civil society, in a Neighborhood country? How does the EU's support for civil society institutions strengthen the latter and how does it reflect civil society's aspirations for democracy? And, equally as important, how effective is the EU's support, to civil society institutions, in bringing about democratic changes? These questions will be reflected on through studying the case of the Republic Armenia, in this thesis.

The academic literature review shows that there is a consistent pool of studies on the promotion of democracy by the EU, both in the civil society in the post-communist countries and in Armenia, in particular. Armenian civil society is analyzed in the academic literature but with little focus on the EU's role in it (works of Armine Ishkanian will be discussed). Still, the majority of the research on the Eastern Partnership reflects on Armenian and European politics with little focus on the civil society (such as Lankina, Libman, &

Obydenkova, 2016; Giragosian, 2016; Kostanyan, 2017; Stronski, 2016, and others). The influence of European conditionality on the democratic development in the Eastern Partnership and in European Neighborhood countries in general is well studied but with little focus on Armenia, in particular. Additionally, these studies do not target the specific research areas of democratic indicators prioritized by the EU, such as elections, corruption, rule of law, and others (civil society is another indicator as such).

Studying the EU's support for Armenian civil society, as a tool for democratic change in Armenia, will fill in this gap in academia and will contribute to a better understanding of the effects of the EU's democracy promotion efforts through the civil society in general.

Theoretical Framework

The thesis will study how the EU as a normative power attempts to promote democracy in a Neighborhood country, namely Armenia, through the strengthening of its civil society. To explain the ways and effects of making that promotion, the thesis will rely on the trifold model proposed by Lavanex and Schimmelfennig in 2011. Lavanex and Schimmelfennig proposed that the European Union promotes democracy in third countries through the models or methods defined as linkages, leverages, and governance. This linkage model describes bottom-up initiatives that support "democratic forces" in Third World countries. The leverage model describes the top-down influence on the political elites through European conditionality and in the governance model they analyze "governance" as a new method of "functional cooperation between administrations" introduced by the European Neighborhood policy (Lavanex & Schimmelfennig, 2011).

The studied literature suggests that linkage is a necessary component of democracy promotion but does not provide enough support for a significant democratic change ("tangible outcome"). It neither results in change of the political regime (Lavanex and Schimmelfennig), nor in greater civic engagement (Ishkanian). The researchers point out various reasons such as the quality of linkage, leverage effects, competing linkage and leverage by other actors, political will of the domestic governments, and so forth. These analyses will be further discussed in the Literature Review. Most of the research, except for that of Ishkanian, departs from the European perspective. Ishkanian herself studies the perspectives of the Armenian civil society but she does not focus on their linkage to the

European Union. The linkage of Armenian civil society to the European Union will be the subject of this research.

I will argue that while having little immediate effect on overall democratic changes in Armenia, support to the civil society brings about a change in the civil society that may create a civic culture and result in significant democratic changes in a longer perspective. The more this support considers the self-generated agenda of the civil society, the more democracy promotion is effective.

The democracy promotion models of linkage and leverage were first theorized by Levitsky and Way in 2005. They defined "Western leverage" as a government's vulnerability to the exposure of external democratization pressure, and "linkage to the West" as the density of ties with the West on societal and institutional levels (Levitsky & Way, 2005).

Interestingly, they describe linkage, generally, as ties between non-governmental entities of the EU and the Third World countries, while in the further research the linkage with the third country's civil society is attributed to the "EU". Further, Levitsky and Way propose that the leverage method of democracy promotion is more effective when combined with linkage. For example, they believe that civil society is merely one out of five characteristics (dimensions) that are related to the linkage, these being economic, geopolitical, social, communicational, and "*transnational civil society*. This transnational civil society itself includes ties to international NGOs, churches, party organizations, and other networks" (p. 23). This thesis will study only the civil society dimension of linkage.

The authors argue that both linkage and leverage raise the cost of authoritarianism when both models are in the democracy promotion arsenal. Hence, linkage bears a great importance:

> Unlike leverage, linkage is primarily a source of soft power. Its effects are diffuse, indirect, and often difficult to detect. Yet where linkage is extensive, it creates multiple pressure points—from investors to technocrats to voters—that few autocrats can afford to ignore. As a result, the democratizing pressure generated by linkage is often more pervasive, and more persistent, than that generated via leverage alone. (Levitsky & Way, 2005, p. 25)

Levitsky and Way describe Eastern Partnership countries as authoritarian states with unfair elections, except for Azerbaijan which is entirely totalitarian and its exposure to democracy promotion does not result in democratic openings. They define also *competitive authoritarianism* as *semi-authoritarian* regimes with formal democratic institutions and pluralism but where the elections are faked and the opposition oppressed by the puppet courts and through other means. This refers to the post-soviet nations, too, which are found to be low-linkage and high-leverage countries (p. 33). This is also relevant for Armenia which is continuously assessed as "partly free" by the Freedom House[2] (This and other assessments by professional indices and reports will be discussed further in the Findings chapter).

Departing from the models proposed by Levitsky and Way, Lavanex and Schimmelfennig define democracy promotion models differently and find little value in linkage.

Lavanex and Schimmelfennig argue that:

> "while '**linkage'** has hitherto failed to produce tangible outcomes, and the success of '**leverage'** has basically been tied to an EU membership perspective, the '**governance'** model of democracy promotion bears greater potential beyond the circle of candidate countries. In contrast to the two traditional models, however, the **governance** approach does not tackle the core institutions of the political system as such, but promotes transparency, accountability, and participation at the level of state administration." (Lavanex & Schimmelfennig, 2011, p. 885)

Lavanex and Schimmelfennig define the "tangible outcome" of democracy promotion in terms of material and financial rewards. For example, such rewards could include the conduct and respect of free and fair elections, independent and competent courts, vocal parliament, and free media (Lavanex & Schimmelfennig, 2011, p. 893).

The authors propose that the leverage model, while well studied and effectively used, is declining in relevance and an effective alternative is needed. They propose the governance method be that alternative (p.899).

They believe that the leverage model is only effective for the EU candidate countries, but for those with no perspective of membership, the leverage is "reaching its limits" (p. 903).

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[2] See here: https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/armenia

To Lavanex and Schimmelfennig, the linkage model cannot be an alternative as its implementation is "patchy" and not consistent. This assumption based on the "patchy evidence" is predominately about the Southern neighborhood where the civil society is accessed by the EU only through the partner governments (p. 900).

This trifold model of linkage, leverage, and governance is introduced by Lavanex and Schimmelfennig in an article which serves as an introduction for a special issue of the journal, *Democratization,* edited by the same authors. It was written in 2010 and published in 2011, during the period of the "Arab Spring"[3]. A special Postscript was added to say:

> "[T]he anti-regime movements have in some countries opened up new opportunities for the impact of linkage that we considered highly unlikely when we planned this issue. Yet, given the weakness of civil society in the region and of the EU's ties to the anti-regime movements, direct linkage will be difficult to implement; and indirect linkage is by definition a long-term project." (Lavanex & Schimmelfennig, 2011, p. 904)

In the linkage model defined by Lavanex and Schimmelfennig, the EU (or any other external actor) plays an empowering role for internal actors not related to the government enabling them to carry on advocacy and any other type of work for democratization. This bottom-up support to democratic forces (linkage model) rests on *direct* and *indirect* pillars of democracy promotion. The authors define *indirect* channel as extensive exchanges between democratic and third countries mostly aiming at social and economic development that will enhance preconditions for democracy and modernization of a nation. Support to the civil society and opposition parties is defined as *direct* promotion. Direct linkage channels support of financial and technical nature to the civil society organizations. This includes money for conducting projects, organization of seminars, trainings, conferences, study visits, studies, and capacity building measures such as providing technical equipment, money and trainings for the CSO members.

Hence, the authors hypothesize that the linkage method of democracy promotion will be more effective if the EU provides the pro-democratic grassroots with *direct* support and

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[3] Publication details are introduced online:
http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13510347.2011.584730?src=recsys&

contributes in a given country's modernization through aid, economic diversification, investment and people to people contacts.

> "However, in order to be possible, and to produce demand for (more) democracy from below, these contact, exchange, and support activities require a modicum of transnational openness on the part of the target country and of autonomy of the civil society. Linkage efforts will not reach civil society if a country is isolated from the outside world and civil society has no freedom of maneuver. Thus, the *effectiveness of the linkage* also *increases with the external accessibility and domestic autonomy of civil society*" (Lavanex & Schimmelfennig, 2011, p. 891).

Unlike the linkage model, the authors confess, the top-down method of leverage hardly fosters civic culture or strengthens civic associations or the public space: "Even if it is successful, leverage might thus contribute to a formally functioning democracy that is, however, not necessarily underpinned by democratic culture and society. Leverage mostly relies on the conditionality which implies a bargain that engages information, promises, and threats" (p.889). In order to change the behavior of a foreign government or, as framed in the article, of actors in target country:

> These target actors are assumed to weigh the benefits they derive from democratic change against the costs and comply with process in which an international actor teaches domestic actors democratic norms and practices in order to persuade them of their superiority. Democratic change then results from a change in normative and causal beliefs (Lavanex & Schimmelfennig, 2011, p. 889).

The authors distinguish these three models of democracy promotion on <u>four dimensions</u>: the target system of democracy promotion, the envisaged outcome, the main channels, and the typical instruments. Along with other models, the linkage model is distinguished on all four dimensions.

To Lavanex and Schimmelfennig, democracy promotion can **target** the *polity* (such as electoral practices, division of power, ensuring rights of freedoms of the population), *sectors* (governance of specific policy areas) and *society* (bold and italic – mine). At the society level, the democracy promotion aims at economic growth and larger socio-economic preconditions for democratic progress, education, mainstreaming of liberal values, and eventually, the organization of civil society and public sphere.

On the dimension of **envisaged outcome**, the linkage is distinguished as resulting in "a democratic, 'civic' culture and meso-level institutions such as civic associations, parties, and a democratic public sphere" (Lavanex & Schimmelfennig, 2011). Democratic institutions guaranteeing rule of law and accountability (including free and fair elections) are the result of targeting the polity level and targeting the sectors results in "democratically legitimate political-administrative behavior" in specific policy areas which includes accountability and societal participation.

Linkage method of democracy promotion is **channeled** transnationally while the channels of leverage and governance are intergovernmental and transgovernmental, respectively.

The **instruments** used for democracy promotion differ, too. "Socialization" is used in the linkage and governance methods, while the leverage (and partially, governance) method relies on "conditionality". Unlike conditionality, socialization is not based on coercion, but on persuasion: "While conditionality follows the *logic of consequentiality*, socialisation is based on the *logic of appropriateness*. In other words, socialisation is a process through which the partners internalise EU values and norms through conviction and not coercion" (Kostanyan, Assessing the European Neighbourhood Policy: Perspectives from the literature, 2017, p. 15).

For effective linkage, the Lavanex and Schimmelfennig argue, the EU should provide support to the civil society and socio-economic development and intensive transnational contact, and the partner country should provide openness, accessibility and autonomy of its civil society (p. 898).

To summarize the ideas of Lavanex and Schimmelfennig, the linkage model is the most effective in promoting democracy in the civil society and has long-term effect on forming civic culture but it is the least effective out of the three models in short-term run for democratization of a nation with no perspective of membership to EU. The authors admit that the linkage model is less studied and less appreciated in the academia, which is also true for their article and the entire special issue of *Democratization*. This thesis will contribute to filling in this gap in the academia.

Published in 2011, the article (and the special issue) could not reflect on the dynamic change of realities that came up later. Armine Ishkanian observes that Armenian society faced a

boom of civic movements especially in 2010-2011. These movements were marked with non-formal (not registered) self-organization, large autonomy and in large part, refusal of external donors (Ishkanian A. , 2013). This was also the historical moment when the EU was negotiating association agreements with the Eastern Partnership countries (re)born as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union. In 2013, both governments of Armenia and Ukraine, under the pressure of Russia, declined to sign Association agreements. Civic resistance in Ukraine took to the streets ending with bloodshed but also with the victory of pro-democratic and pro-European populations. These and other historical turns on the struggle for democratization were to be studied by further research.

The importance of the linkage model of democracy promotion and its role in democratizing a country in the core and essence rather than formally, is underpinned by further study. In the same year of 2011, Gwendolyn Sasse analyzed the international linkage of democracy promotion in the EU's Eastern Neighborhood (Sasse, 2013)[4]. She departs from the fact that the EU is not the only provider of direct and indirect linkages to the partner countries. Its support often overlaps with support from other sources including, but not limited to, that from the West. She proposes two alternative hypotheses and finds them to be verified. First, the diversity of linkages can contribute to the democratic openings for other methods of democracy promotion and democratization. Second, international linkages may cause resistance of regimes against democratization, if these regimes do not face strong political opposition and pluralism. Extending Sasse's hypotheses to Armenia, the lack of political competition impacts democratic openings for the civil society: in spite of growing discontent with the socio-economic situation in the population, the opposition has never taken the power through elections after the first elections in post-soviet Armenia; the ruling Republican Party is on the power since 1999. Domestic political preconditions for the effectiveness of the linkage strategy are also found to be important by Lavanex and Schimmelfennig who argue that: "*A government introduces democratic changes in state institutions and behavior according to EU conditions if the benefits of EU rewards exceed the domestic adoption cost*" (2011, p. 893).

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[4] See the details of submitting the paper next to the title of the article.

Sasse analyzes that *stateness* issues such as unresolved conflicts and tangible stake of other powers (Russia in the case of all Eastern Partnership countries) have decisive influences on the activation or de-activation of linkages in a given country, i.e. democratization may be directly affected by the *stateness* issues (pp. 556, 580). I find her arguments relevant for Armenia facing unresolved conflict over Nagorno Karabakh, blockades by Turkey and Azerbaijan, and a heavy dependence on Russian energy and security supplies.

T me, Lavanex and Schimmelfennig did not sufficiently consider the influence of other external actors. The moment at which Sasse did her research, the European Union had just started to enlarge its presence in the Eastern Partnership countries. The U.S. was a larger provider of development aid and democracy to Armenia, and Russia was (and still is) the largest security (and the only conventional security) provider for the country. "The economic and security linkages with Russia outweigh the importance of the Western linkages, and ironically both sets of linkages are aligned with the current regime and not anchored in domestic political competition. Both Russian and US linkages are tied to one side of the stateness issue– the Armenian position on the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict – thereby limiting the scope for alternative positions. The EU's recent emphasis on conflict resolution and regional stability has not changed this balance" (Sasse, 2013, p. 576).

A recent study of Risse and Babayan on the effects of Western democracy promotion in Third World countries challenges the perceptions that the West (EU for this thesis) is committed to the democracy and human rights promotion while the regional non-democratic powers (Russia for this thesis) are simply "autocracy supporters". "Successful democratization is possible if there is no major power in the region opposing democracy. However, and partially in line with the emerging literature on 'autocracy promotion', we do not assume that counteracting democracy promotion necessarily implies fostering autocracy as an alternative regime type. (Risse & Babayan, 2015, p. 385). They propose that 1. Western democracy promotion might make the non-democratic powers feel their geostrategic interests or their regime challenged. 2. It often neglects the security and stability needs that may shadow the need of democracy. 3. Domestic political posture plays big role in the effectiveness of democracy promotion as the non-democratic power will countervail democracy promotion with strengthening non-democratic groups in the target country

(which may turn to be counterproductive as we saw in the case of Ukraine), the authors argue.

Some research finds that the Russian factor is often overestimated and the lack of political will of governments is undermined. Del Medico suggests that Armenia provides a clear example of this. In the face of the Armenian government's "complementary" foreign policy, Russia gave it what it prioritized – security: "On the one hand, EU democracy promotion took the form of governance, thus being in itself of limited impact. On the other hand, Russia's linkages and leverage had the effect of reinforcing, rather than engendering, the prevailing domestic aversion for political competition" (Del Medico, 2014). However, Del Medico neglects to mention that the leverage and linkage models are also in the EU's arsenal for democracy promotion in Armenia.

The Armenian government, which is lacking economic resources, must rely on Western money and tolerate international linkages with the domestic civil society organizations. But the result, Simão argues, brought about an "'imitation of democracy', aimed at maintaining external assistance, crucial to the survival of the regime, but unable to assure more freedoms and equity within society" (Simão, 2012). Others find that "the political regime (a non-competitive political system dominated by oligarchic groups) would probably not survive the reforms" in Armenia (Delcour & Wolczuk, 2015).

Armine Ishkanian brings up a broader understanding of 'civic culture' and 'democratic atmosphere' as an outcome of linkage proposed by Lavanex and Schimmelfennig. The civic culture is not described by mere number of meso-level institutions but by a broader engagement of the society. Ishkanian argues that the West has put in place many resources for strengthening civil society in other countries but it did not result in greater participation, engagement and inclusion of the society (Democracy promotion and civil society, 2007, p. 22). Western democracies prefer to cooperate with and invest in "westernized" civil society organizations, thus producing what she calls a 'genetically modified civil society':

> With the injection of external funding (the growth hormones), these genetically engineered civil societies experienced spectacularly rapid growth that would have not occurred organically. Similar to genetically modified crops, they also began to colonise and squeeze out all indigenous competitors, becoming the dominant type in their environment. (Ishkanian A. , 2007, p. 16)

The author explains that depending on the Western funding and technical support, the professionalized NGOs were viewed as unintendedly donor-driven as they had to adapt their agenda with that of their donor which may differ from that of the communities they serve and the society at large. Other civil society groups not replicating liberal values were marginalized by donors (2014, p. 3). Since 2010-2011, a large-scale emergence of grassroots movements in post-soviet countries echoed this gap of agendas. Civic initiatives significantly differed from the NGOs: they were informal, loosely organized, committed to horizontal decision-making mechanisms and entirely voluntary. While they raised specific issues such as protection of parks, they targeted larger policy concerns such as corruption, rule of law, public good, etc. (2014, p. 6). This led to self-proclamation of the birth of self-determined citizens in a fight for a public park in Yerevan, Armenia's capital. In a further study inspired by these movements (Self-determined citizens? new forms of civic activism and citizenship in Armenia, 2015), Ishkanian discusses how the civic initiatives distanced themselves from NGOs and refused donor money based on the belief that the NGOs were often labeled as Western puppets and "grant-eaters" in Armenia. However, many NGO members joined the initiatives and many NGOs provided their logistics and other capacities for the use of civic activists (who run their movements with almost no budget). Thus, the endemic non-formal grassroots "organizations" often used the facilities of west-supported NGOs which were paid for by Western money. Ishkanian concludes:

> "I argued that civic activists are rejecting the neo-Tocquevillian-inspired model of civil society that was promoted by donors in the 1990s and which emphasised service delivery and non-confrontational forms of advocacy and campaigning. Instead, I demonstrated how the activists are embracing a more political understanding of civil society and embracing a concept of citizenship which emphasizes self-organisation, independence and solidarity" (2015, p. 1224)

Studying the effects of democracy promotion, I support Ishkanian's approach that a larger engagement of the society in democratic agendas can be envisaged as another tangible democratic outcome in the longer-run perspective. I argue that the linkage model is not always the most effective but it is the only one that can support the endemic struggle for democracy which exists in Armenia, as the social movements and the work of CSOs show. As to the manner of democracy promotion, I will argue that socialization should focus more on supporting domestic civil society agendas than generating these agendas for democratic change.

While agreeing with Lavanex and Schimmelfennig that the linkage alone cannot directly result in significant democratic change or a "tangible outcome", such as free and fair elections and/or a change of regime, I will argue that the *linkage* cannot be replaced either by the normative power of the EU expressed more in the *leverage* model, or by the *governance* model. It can and should be complemented by other methods of democracy promotion – leverage, governance and other forms of linkage. Its results may be more profound and consistent in the longer perspective. Political dialogue for top-down democratization and conditionality can ensure democratic openings for bottom-up democratization by domestic civil society enjoying enough autonomy and resources.

To understand why the linkage is more effective in some cases and less in others, this thesis seeks to answer the research question concerning the reasons for the EU linkage with the civil society in Armenia (see more details in the Chapter III: Methodology).

A hypothesis can be driven from the literature review that the EU's use of the linkage method, with respect to the support to the civil society, has strengthened the Armenian civil society and resulted in a significant change in the democratic situation of Armenia. The research will focus only on the civil society dimension of the linkage model and will study the envisaged outcomes and the instruments of linkage beyond the meso-level civic culture and socialization instruments (respectively) proposed by Lavanex and Schimmelfennig. The reasons of the linkage effects will be questioned and discussed.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Hypothesis and Research Question:

This thesis **hypothesizes** that the EU's support to the Armenian civil society has strengthened the civil society and thus has significantly changed the democratic situation of the country. It will aim to discern how EU linkages with Armenian civil society were created, how they are functioning and the results therein. In sum, the following research question is proposed:

RQ: What are the reasons of the quality of the EU linkage with the civil society in Armenia?

Study method:

The thesis will involve qualitative methodology to explain the quality of the EU linkage with the Armenian CSO. Quantitative research will be incorporated to reveal the democratic progress made in Armenia as a result of linkages with the EU. It will include analyses of democratic dynamics expressed in numbers and indices in the period from 2009-2017.

The author[5] was a participant in Armenian grassroots civil society movements from 2008 to 2014, witnessed many grassroots actions and had access to the most impactful and significant actors and events of civil society actions, affiliated and non-affiliated with the EU (including an off-record meeting with the Commissioner Stefan Fule in 2013). Thus, a retrospective participant observation method will be involved for specific observations and for sampling interviewees.

Period of time:

This research examines EU support to the Armenian civil society in the period of 2009-2017 with a more extensive focus on the period from 2013 to 2017. In 2009, Armenia joined the EU Eastern Partnership program but its relationship with the EU changed, in 2013, when the Armenian president decided to move Armenia into the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Area. As a result, the EU proposed another agreement, which it initialed in early 2017 and is expected to get signed in autumn 2017. The research will shed light on the understanding of how the linkage works and will contribute to the understanding of its influence in EU-Armenia relations.

Data:

To explain the quality of the EU linkage with the Armenian civil society, and the reasons for its existence, in-depth interviews will be conducted with Armenian CSO and EU representatives. These interviews will comprise the pool of primary data. As to the secondary data, the thesis will rely also on the previous research, technical reports and index-based studies, media reports, and official statements that illustrate historical examples of linkage with the EU (interviewees will be asked to provide such data as well). The secondary data will be the key for assessing Armenia's democratic progress and testing the

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[5] See here: http://www.civilnet.am/news/2013/08/09/tsovinar-nazaryans-search-for-justice/171915 and here: http://www.counterpart.org/clinton-praises-counterpart-in-recognizing-work-of-armenian-civic-activists/

hypothesis and will also be used to complete the understanding as to the quality of linkage, as proposed by the research question.

<u>Interviews:</u>

Interviews will be in-depth. A list of open-ended topic questions will be prepared, in advance, and I will seek a more profound coverage of the questions through additional enquiries. In general, the respondents will be asked to introduce the EU and its Armenian civil society priorities, to assess the work done toward democratization, explain how the linkages work in Armenia, reflect on the success and challenges of democratization through the civil society, explain the method by which they choose partners/donors and how they deal with third-party actors such as the Armenian government and with other external actors. The topic list of the interviews will be attached in the Annex of this thesis.

The interviews will be voluntary and conducted in an anonymous fashion in order to get the sincerest answers possible. Individual requests for interviews will be sent (emailed) to EU officials, both in Brussels and in Yerevan, with the objective to glean the opinions of EU officials dealing with the Eastern Partnership, civil society and Armenia. Officials from the European Commission, European External Action Service (EEAS), and EU Delegation to Armenia will be asked to answer open-ended questions in a personal meeting. Depending on the officials' availability and chosen communication method, the interviews may be conducted via Skype, telephone and email, as well. As the interviews are voluntary, the study will rely on the statements of the officials who positively reacted on the interview requests.

Individual requests for anonymous interviews with Armenian civil society representatives will also be pursued. The requests will be sent by email and other online communication means, mainly to advocacy CSOs and individual activists who have been actively advocating for Armenia's democratization, as well as for its European integration. These include not only member organizations of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, but also non-member organizations and a few individuals from social movements not affiliated to any external donor. To accurately verify the author's observations about the activism of the interviewed CSOs, the sampling will involve a snowball (spill-over) method: each interviewee will be asked to name other representatives of Armenian civil society whose

opinions are worth being heard. Interviews will be conducted until a "saturation threshold" is reached, i.e. they don't provide the interviewer with new knowledge. If needed, a diverse set of actors will be engaged for more interviews. Interviews will be conducted on Skype or by other internet-based alternatives as the author will be in Brussels.

Studied linkage:

The thesis studies the civil society component of linkage. It focuses on two dimensions proposed by Lavanex and Schimmelfennig – instruments and envisaged outcome. For instruments, the thesis will study socialization as defined by Kostanyan (logic of *appropriateness* rather than consequality, and *persuasion* rather than coercion). And for outcome, civic culture will be studied as proposed by Lavanex and Schimmelfennig (meso-level creation of organizations) and by Ishkanian (broader engagement of the society).

Research Questions:

To answer the major research question proposed by this study "What are the reasons of the quality of the EU linkage with the civil society in Armenia?", the following research questions will be addressed:

RQ1: How is the linkage constructed between the EU and the Armenian civil society?

This question seeks to study the instruments of linkage. To answer RQ1, large amounts of data will be used. First, the EU policy of support to the Armenian civil society will be studied on the declaratory level, i.e. in official documents and public statements. For this, the study will rely on the European Neighborhood and Eastern Partnership official (policy) documents and agreements signed with Armenia. Next, it will look at the instruments created by these documents and at their functioning. After having described the existent formal framework of the EU support to the Armenian civil society, the study will conduct interviews with the EU and Armenian CSO representatives to explore, in-depth, the quality of the linkage(s).

Hypotheses:

The hypothesis "the EU's support to the Armenian civil society has strengthened the civil society and thus has significantly changed the democratic situation of the country" will be split in two parts:

H1. The European Union strengthened the civil society in Armenia.

H2. The EU support to the civil society significantly changed the democratic situation in the country.

To test the H1 ("The European Union strengthened the civil society in Armenia"), the second research question will be proposed:

RQ2: How has the EU support strengthened the Armenian civil society?

"Strengthening civil society" is a term cited from the agreements signed between Armenia and EU (PCA, 1999).

This question is designed to disclose the *outcome* of the linkage(s). For revealing meso-level changes in the Armenian civil society, I will study Armenian official statistics and any other relevant study that shows the change(s) of CSO numbers in the country. For revealing whether a broader engagement of the society has taken place in civic agendas, the thesis will rely on the most up-to-date research and reports, as well as on the interviews with the above-mentioned stakeholders (Armenian CSO and EU representatives). The qualitative assessments on the strengthening the civil society by EU support will be requested from interviewees for answering this research question. As there are many actors and donors working with the civil society in Armenia, the role of the EU in strengthening the Armenian CSOs will be explained through counter-factual analysis.

For testing the H2 ("The EU support to the civil society significantly changed the democratic situation in the country"), progress in Armenia's democratic performance will be viewed as a "change". The idea of "democracy" will be examined through *democratic indicators* prioritized by the European Union in its agreement with Armenia and advocated more by the Armenian CSO: *free and fair elections, and reduction of corruption*. The situation of the *freedom of civil society* is another indicator of democratic level in a country but it will be studied under the RQ2. To see if the EU linkage with the civil society made an impact on the democratic situation of the country, I will first examine the overall democratic change (focusing on the above-mentioned indicators) in Armenia since it joined the Eastern Partnership:

RQ3: Has a significant change taken place in the policy areas (democracy indicators) of fight against corruption and conduct of elections in 2009-2017?

A positive change in the democratic indicators' performance (expressed in indices) over the time will be considered a "significant change". The change in the two policy areas will be studied separately but will help to infer conclusions about the change in the democratic situation of the country. This question seeks to identify the democratic progress of Armenia. "Significant change" will be explored in the periodical studies conducted over the period of 2009-2017. These studies include technical reports by international non-governmental and governmental organizations, as well as governments. Domestic CSO reports will also be studied. The thesis will explore the Armenia "progress reports" by the EU, reports by the Council of Europe, Freedom House, Human Rights Watch, human rights reports of the U.S. State Department, corruption indices by Transparency International, election assessments by the OSCE/ODIHR, Electoral Integrity Project, and domestic election observers, and other reports and indices. In some cases, a challenge will be finding up-to-date reports on the Armenia's democratic progress since most periodical reports assess developments of the preceding year, which means that the freshest assessments will reflect only on 2016. Additionally, some periodic reports have not been brought consistently up to date and thus do not reflect all the years studied in this thesis. The EU "progress reports" on Armenia are an example.

If the revealed change (i.e. progress) in Armenia's democratic performance is not significant, or is negative (i.e. a regress) or did not happen at all, the H2 is falsified and further research is no more needed. However, the H2 cannot be found verified yet, if a significant change is revealed. As there are many actors and factors trying to make impact on the democratic situation of Armenia, further research is needed to determine the role of the EU's linkage in this progress. To examine what has been the share of EU support to the civil society in the democratic situation of the country, the following research question will be proposed:

RQ4: What has the civil society organizations done with the EU support in the policy areas (democracy indicators) of reduction of corruption and conduct of elections?

The work of the CSOs in these three policy areas will be studied separately. For identifying this work, the thesis will rely on the publicly available information about projects and funding by the EU and Armenian CSOs, as well as on the information gathered from the

interviewees. The impact of the EU-supported CSO will be measured through counterfactual analysis of the change in these policy areas.

Other variables:

The thesis focuses mostly on the EU's linkage as an independent variable, and CSOs as both dependent (H1) and independent (H2) variables. The democratic indicators are introduced as dependent variables here. However, it must be acknowledged that the dependent variables may be and are influenced by other (f)actors, too. The study aims at contextualizing the studied variables and enquires broader knowledge about them. Thus, because of this research, other variables can be found, too.

Analysis of the data:

Summarizing the data and analysis, I will show whether the hypotheses are verified or falsified. Most importantly, I will address the major research question ("What are the reasons of the high quality of the EU linkage with the civil society in Armenia?"), relating the findings to the theoretical framework designed for this thesis.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

The European Union is the biggest trade partner of Armenia, the largest provider of aid, and the strongest supporter of reforms in Armenia, as noted by Federica Mogherini, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (Council of the EU, 2017). Meanwhile, the European Union is only on the third place of Armenian multilateral foreign policy priorities after the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). The fourth favorite partner of the Armenian government, Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), is also a Russia-led club of former Soviet nations (Program of the Republic of Armenia 2017-2022, 2017).

A new EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) is expected to be signed at the Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels in November 2017. The values underpinning it are shared by the European Union and Armenia, the official statements say, including their "commitment to democracy, human rights, rule of law" (EU-Armenia Cooperation Council - Highlights, 2017). The negotiations on the new agreement

were launched in 2015 after the failure of Armenia to sign an Association Agreement with the EU which would replace the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) signed yet in 1999. The signature and implementation of the CEPA has been called the priority number 1 by the EU officials interviewed for this research.

Four priorities were identified by the Riga summit of Eastern Partnership Countries: strengthening institutions and good governance; mobility and people-to-people contacts, market opportunities; and interconnectivity in energy, transportation and climate change action (Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit, Riga, 2015). The same four priorities served as focal points in identifying 20 key deliverables for 2020 for the Eastern Partnership. The civil society is viewed as a "cross-cutting" deliverable aiming at CSOs' more structured and constructive engagement with governments at local, national and grassroots levels: "A vibrant civil society sector is crucial for private sector development, economic growth and social innovation. Additionally, high-quality sector reform dialogue can only be achieved through increased technical expertise and stronger leadership of civil society organisations (CSOs)" (Joint Staff Working Document: Eastern Partnership - Focusing on key priorities and deliverables, 2016). The Brussels summit 2017 will review the progress foreseen by the Riga summit in 2015.

Since Armenia became a member of the Eurasian Economic Union, the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA, an integral part of the association agreement) and any free trade perspectives had to be excluded from the negotiations agenda. Still, the EU officials assure that despite of downscaling expectations regarding trade, the political expectations remain the same, if not bigger. The CEPA will include "joint commitments further strengthening fundamental freedoms, human rights, democratic principles, rule of law, good governance; joint commitment to promote further the political, social, economic and institutional development of Armenia through engaged development of civil society, institution building, public administration, civil service reform and fight against corruption" (Interview with EU official, 27 July 2017).

European Union and Armenia are also negotiating Partnership Priorities (PP) which will determine the next cycle of financial aid (Single Support Framework 2017-2020). The PP will set new mechanisms for civil society organizations (CSOs) to monitor the

implementation of the agreements between Brussels and Yerevan (capital of Armenia). Meanwhile, the EU Annual Action Plan 2017 is likely to focus on three programs: Education, Justice and Technical Facility Cooperation aiming at assisting in the implementation of the CEPA. An EU official underlined a strong conditionality for reforms in the justice sector to the effect that the Armenian government will be supported if it commits to strengthening the independence, transparency, efficiency, accountability and public trust of the Armenian justice system in line with the EU best practices (Interview with EU official, 25 July 2017).

Democratic openings are essential for creating a civil culture. In the 2017 report on the ENP, reviewed in 2015, it states aiming at "shrinking space available for civil society action throughout the Neighbourhood and champions the rights to freedom of expression and association to enhance a vibrant and resilient civic culture" (Report on the Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy Review, 2017). According to the interviews, the CSOs are expected to monitor the Government's implementation of the EU-funded reforms, to signal about shortcomings, to provide expertise on respected subjects and to inform the public about these reforms (Interview with EU official, 27 July 2017).

The EU Linkage

"Armenia can be proud of its civil society activism; it is very important for the development of the country", Head of the EU Delegation to Armenia, Ambassador Piotr Świtalski stated at the official launch of another EU-funded program aimed at strengthening the civil society in Armenia (Bridge for Srengthening the Armenian CSOs, 2017). The Ambassador stated that the civil society activism is the Armenia's visit card in the post-Soviet area and the new law on CSOs put Armenia on the top of the list of post-Soviet nations. The support of Armenian CSOs is part of the EU's long-run commitment, he underlined (Հայաստանը կարող է հպարտանալ իր քաղաքացիական ակտիվիզմով. Պյոտր Սվիտալսկի [Switalski: "Armenia can be proud of its civil society activism"], 2017).

The EU's perceptions about the CSO's role in the EU-supported reforms in Armenia, its commitment to and expectation from the civil society are defined in the financial document of the European Neighborhood Instrument: "Efforts will be made to support civil society capacities and engagement, as appropriate, in the development, implementation and

monitoring of national sector strategies, including through participation in policy dialogues and service delivery schemes (Single Support Framework for EU Support to Armenia 2014-2017).

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) is a major channel for EU linkage in Armenia. It was established in 2010 to strengthen the EaP civil society and to foster their cooperation and exchange of experiences across the Partnership. Channeled internationally, the civil society organizations joined in the EaP CSF are expected to bring about their expert engagement in the EU external polices in the East. At home, they are expected to improve the political environment by "holding governments accountable and promoting fundamental freedoms, participatory democracy and human rights" (About Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, s.d.). The CSF is composed of national platforms (NP) and five working groups specified in a number of policy areas, and the Armenian national platform, with about 200 member CSOs, is one of the most engaged. They are actively participating in the working groups, particularly in Working Group 1 ("Democracy, Human Rights, Good Governance and Stability") and Working Group 4 ("Contacts between People").

The 2014-2017 Road Map for engagement with the Armenian CSOs expands the expectations from the EaP Civil Society Forum to "increasing the diversity of voices heard, acting as a bridge between politicians and citizens and giving more visibility to the Eastern Partnership" (Armenia: EU country Road Map for Engagement with the Civil Society 2014-2017, 2014).

As seen above, the civil society is viewed mostly as a watchdog for implementation of the reforms promised by the Armenian government in its relations with the European Union. Additionally, they are expected to bridge larger society with the EU-backed reforms' agenda, and to raise the EU's visibility in the country. The EU linkage with the Armenian civil society is constructed based on this reform agenda and on the EU perceptions about the CSOs' role and potential.

These reforms include not only issues directly linked to democracy but also the transformation to and the improvement of the liberal economy. In a 2013 research, Hrant Kostanyan observed that in Armenia, the EU focuses more "on elections, state administrative capacity followed by civil society and socio-economic development than on

political and civil rights, horizontal accountability and stateness" (Neither Integrated Nor Comprehensive in Substance: Armenia and Georgia, 2015, p. 144). Hence, the EU promotes good governance and other reforms rather than democratization. The logic is that, for instance, judiciary reform will significantly contribute to the improvement in human rights protection and serve to enhance a democratization agenda. An EU official explained this approach as following: "In general, across the EU, we are not very good at conceptualizing what constitutes a proper support of democracy, which is why we have been focusing more on governance and especially now, with the new review of the ENP, on shared interests" (Interview with EU official, 4 August 2017).

Interestingly, almost all interviewees from Armenia believed that the EU's agenda in Armenia is to promote democracy and human rights. Even those critical about EU's foreign policy were concerned that the EU is not enough committed to its mission in Armenia which, they believed, was democracy promotion. An EU representative noted in our interview that economic development can take place without a desirable level of democracy, and China is a vivid example for that. Meanwhile, the Armenian civil society representatives, when interviewed, tried to tie social and economic prosperity with democracy. "You cannot be safe, careless and prosperous in Turkmenistan", an interviewee stated (Interview with CSO representative, 20 July 2017).

The "civil society" concept has a shared understanding in the European Union's official discourse. It is defined as "non-governmental groups such as trade unions, employers' associations and other social groups" through which the citizens may actively participate in setting the political agenda (European Neighbourhood Policy And Enlargement Negotiations - Civil Society, 2016). While the EU perception of civil society is shared also by some Armenian CSOs, others underline the importance of differentiating between "real, independent" NGOs and GONGOs ("governmental NGOs", i.e. NGOs affiliated to and pursuing the agendas of the government). The interviewed EU officials did not question the real intentions of the civil society organizations that aspire to get involved in EU-funded projects.

Most CSO representatives interviewed for this study have been satisfied with the level of their communication with the European Union. The EU officials periodically invite CSOs

for consultations on various subjects. This is relevant both for the EU Delegation in Armenia and for Brussels officials making visits to Armenia. Some thematic platforms are set for periodic consultations between Government, NGOs, and international donors. Most CSO representatives noted that the current quality of communication is an improvement compared to earlier period of communication. Most of them related this to the personality of the current Head of Delegation, Ambassador Piotr Switalski, and his team, and only one respondent explained this difference with the dynamics of the EU's foreign policy in Armenia.

The EU encourages the Government to cooperate with civil society organizations in pursuing EU-funded reforms. However, the EU officials acknowledge that this is not an easy task. A policy paper of 2014 notes that the Armenian civil society organizations face politically and financially "not very promising environment": "The relationship between the CSOs and the various level of governance is affected by government distrust (lack of constructive attitude and professional competencies). […] the perception of most governmental officials towards co-operation with CSOs is rather negative that leads to a similar cautious approach" (Armenia: EU country Road Map for Engagement with the Civil Society 2014-2017, 2014, p. 3).

The Government is more open for civil society organizations if/when the EU facilitates or encourages their cooperation. In these terms, almost all CSO respondents stressed the importance of the EU's political and moral support that they receive although only a few of them have been recipients of EU funds (Interview with CSO representative, 21 July 2017). On the other hand, EU has to make efforts to bring the CSOs to a constructive dialogue with the Government, too. Some CSO representatives told me that they are sometimes asked to limit their criticism toward government after having achieved a little acceptance of their recommendations. "They [EU officials] are becoming more result-oriented. But to me, better not to have such law than to check another box", a CSO representative said. The logic of this approach explained to their civil society partners by EU officials is that when one move forward is done, advocating and ensuring the next step will be easier, in other words, it is better to have something than nothing. Meanwhile, interviewed advocacy CSOs explain their approach with the desire to make sure that reforms are done properly and will have long term effects (Interview with CSO representative, 25 July 2017).

Some NGO representatives interviewed shared impressions that the EU has to consider the Government's preferences about NGOs: if it does not want to work/cooperate with a certain NGO, then the last will be excluded from the project. Another CSO representative explained their exclusion by their own refusal of cooperating with the Government. On the contrary, all EU respondents assured that the Government never imposes pressure on them for choosing partners among the CSOs. While some CSOs appreciate that they are periodically requested to provide consultations to the EU representatives, they often loose contest for EU-funded projects to GONGOs that rarely or never show up in those consultations, they said (Interview with CSO representative, 24 July 2017). The European Union has a more technical approach in funding the civil society organizations, as explained an EU official. It publishes call for proposals and chooses the best proposal without checking whether the applicant is a GONGO or not. They also can be invited for consultations on certain topics: "We don't have neither a policy, nor a methodology to exclude GONGOs from our cooperation. For us, when we are told this is a GONGO, from bureaucratic perspective, there is no GONGO, there is just civil society organizations" (Interview with EU representative, 4 August 2017).

However, in some cases the CSOs manage to have their voice heard in the government: when the discussed issues are not confrontational, they are sometimes invited to provide their expertise and to contribute in policy formulations, the authors of the Road Map propose. To get the civil society engaged in policy making for reforms in more effective ways, the EU policy makers suggest taking into serious consideration the overall economic and political limitations of the country. Because of high dependence on foreign funding, many CSOs don't have a clear mission and float from a project to project to fit the donors' agendas. Additionally, their contest for funding results in lack of collaboration with each other although ad-hoc alliances and networks are created to tackle specific causes (Armenia: EU country Road Map for Engagement with the Civil Society 2014-2017, 2014).

The European Union has also encouraged the NGOs to create alliances and networks for tackling specific policy issues. Particularly, strong NGO alliances were created for advocating a reform in the law on civil society organizations and for taking part in creation of the new electoral code. In both cases, the civil society succeeded to improve the drafts the best they could. Divisions between civil society entities are a sensitive issue for the EU.

EU officials made their best to make sure that local observers speak in one voice instead of composing two competing alliances (Interview with CSO representative, 25 July 2017). On the other hand, the CSOs observe a need of more donor coordination (Interview with CSO representative, 18 July 2017).

International donors are mostly, if not always, the only source of finance. Armenia has over 4000 registered non-governmental organizations and about 1000 foundations. A boom of registered CSOs increased the number of NGOs from 3032 in January 2009 to 3513 in January 2011 (National Statistical Service of RA, 2009-2017). In addition, in the same period, dozens of civic initiatives created non-formal (unregistered) CSOs on the scene to fight for specific causes. While the number of CSOs grow, international funds decrease. Closure of the Counterpart International Armenia, the Armenian office of the National Democratic Institution (NDI Armenia), and the Yerevan office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has challenged the strength of the Armenian CSOs. Especially the OSCE office was an important partner of the EU Delegation in Armenia.

However, the interviewed CSOs refused to relate themselves to the "genetically modified civil society", as Ishkanian frames the "westernalized" CSOs. Some of them acknowledged that donors' agendas predetermine their own agendas. The registered CSOs have written regulations, missions and strategies and they try to find overlaps with the donors' agenda to get some financial support. Apart from financed projects, the CSOs do large amounts of work with little or no budget, underlined a respondent (Interview with CSO representative, 22 July 2017). Another respondent, a civic activist suggests that resources are what matters and not just finances. Civil society needs human resources but none is granted from "burning out". These resources are mobilized in times of political active process but then they leave the field to a handful of committed citizen until the next political "opening" (Interview with CSO representative, 2 August 2017).

Thanks to the EU and civil society efforts, a new Law on Non-Governmental Organizations was adopted in 2016. It allows the NGOs to generate income for the purposes of their missions (ՀՀ օրենքը հասարակական կազմակերպությունների մասին [RA Law on Non-Governmental Organizations], 2016). This is considered an important democratic

opening particularly in the face of reduction of international donor support to the CSOs in the recent few years. Now, pilot projects of social entrepreneurship (SE) have started with the support of the European Union. EU respondents stress that the law contributes to the NGOs' independence and sustainability. These new projects aim at creating and/or strengthening civil society organizations in the regions of Armenia where the population is mostly detached from social, economic and political processes taking place in capital Yerevan (Bridge for Srengthening the Armenian CSOs, 2017).

In 2017, the parliamentary elections, where the EU invested about 7 million euros and political support engaging the civil society organizations, were marked with vast numbers of reports of vote buying which left little hope that a "self-determined citizen" is born in every corner of Armenia and with remaining big concerns that the high level of corruption had affected the larger population.

Both in Yerevan and Brussels, the interviews for this thesis shared the assessment that the population of Armenia desires socio-economic progress and stability in their lives while the civil society strives for democratization. "You cannot talk about the need of democracy to someone who has the need of daily bread", an Armenian interviewee draws attention on the high level of poverty in Armenia (Interview with CSO representative, 25 July 2017). Some CSOs underlined importance of advocating not only for fundamental rights and freedoms, but also for social and labor rights of the citizen which some of them already do.

Political life in Armenia is not marked with classic competition of parties. The opposition is weak and fragmented. In this situation, the CSOs often feel they are forced to replace the opposition to challenge the government and to make a change happen. Many are not satisfied with the results of their work: "Our episodic successes do not have systematic influence" (Interview with Armenian CSO representative, July 17, 2017). In December 2015, a referendum resulted in a change of the Armenian Constitution ensuring the ruling party would continue holding political power after the second, and last term, of the President. In 2016, an armed group occupied the Police Patrol Service base in Yerevan and demanded the resignation of the President and the release of political prisoners. This was largely interpreted as a signal that elections left no hope for change.

Many respondents claimed that the most (or the only, to some) tangible result of international support, including strengthening the civil society, was a stronger civil society. The other areas of country's life remain problematic. CSOs feel challenged to keep the achieved democratic spaces open as the Government tends to reduce them. Reacting to these tendencies, the CSOs fail to be more pro-active (Interview with CSO representative, 24 July 2017).

According to the "Nations in Transit" report by the Freedom House, an internationally renowned independent watchdog organization (based in the U.S.), Armenian civil society has always been much advanced than the other six indicators of democracy determined by the Freedom House methodology for assessing a country's democratic status. These indicators are national democratic governance, electoral process, civil society, independent media, local democratic governance, judicial framework and independence, and corruption. While Armenia has performed poorly (above 5 scores out of 7 where 1 represents the best performance, and 7 represents the worst) in all six parameters, its civil society has been scored 3.75 since 2009 (Nations in Transit 2017: Armenia, 2017). "As if we are implanted. If it goes like this, one day we will be found useless as appendix", said an Armenian respondent (Interview with CSO representative, 24 July 2017).

CSOs interviewed for this thesis demonstrated sharp self-criticism. In the face of malfunctioning of state, political and public institutions, they have to be more than "helpers" or a "bridge", a problem that absorbs their resources with little effect (Interview with CSO representative, 24 July 2017). At the same time, they expect the EU to take more solid political stance in Armenia. To them, the EU should use its leverage and conditionality more strictly and even to "punish" the Government when it does not implement its commitments. To some CSOs, the EU should also take more active part in addressing Armenia's stateness issues such as peace in Nagorno Karabakh, reconciliation with Turkey, reduction of Russian influence. Some other CSOs claimed that the EU's real interest is to balance Russian influence in the Caucasus and to ensure stability "for their business projects in the region" (Interview with Armenian CSO representative, 2 August 2017).

Both EU and Armenian interviewees agreed that the civil society in Armenia has much larger potential but limited resources to realize them. Particularly, the CSOs have limited

and sometimes no access to the Public TV and other nation-wide broadcasters that are controlled by ruling elites and self-censored (Freedom House, 2017). The internet-based media are diverse and they extensively cover the activities and opinions of the civil society but they are not available to large audiences. This explains why the ideas and values of the civil society are poorly known to and understood by larger public (Interview with CSO representative, 24 July 2017).

The Armenian democracy

The thesis proposes a hypothesis that Armenia has made a democratic progress since it joined the Eastern Partnership program in 2009. Indeed, with so much efforts and resources contributed for democratic transformation of the country both by internal and external actors, why shouldn't this change happen? To test this hypothesis, I will examine dynamics in the situations of three policy areas that are key indicators of democracy: human rights, reduction of corruption, and conduct of elections. These policy areas are well monitored and assessed by various international entities, and most importantly, by domestic civil society organizations. Apart from monitoring, Armenian CSOs have provided expert analysis and recommendations, raised public awareness and sensitivity on number of issues, contributed in political dialogue between the government and opposition parties, made efforts to improve legislation and legal practices, provided support to the citizen, and many more. This has been possible, in part, by EU political and financial support.

In 2008, one year before entering the Eastern Partnership, Armenia had a political momentum that provided large democratic opening for the civil society. It was due to presidential elections. The second term of the second President Robert Kocharyan was expiring and he backed then prime minister Serzh Sargsyan for presidency. This candidacy was strongly contested by another candidate Levon Ter-Petrosyan, the first President of independent Armenia. After the disputed elections marked with mass fraud, Sargsyan was named as the winner of the national vote. The opposition filed a legal complaint in the Constitutional Court and led mass protests in the capital Yerevan. On March 1st, the government used force against protesters, ten people were killed, hundreds injured and hundreds arrested. This was the first time after the Soviet Union that the government was

opening fire "on its own people" (Nazaryan, 2011, p. 61). A 20-day state of emergency was launched; the Liberty Square stayed closed for political rallies until 2011. Despite this crackdown on the political opposition, the mere fact of political competition, as well as growing availability of internet-based tools and media, provided a democratic opening for a boom of civil society organizations and civic movements often refusing to acknowledge the political opposition (Ishkanian A. , 2013). This was the political context of Armenia before entering the Eastern Partnership.

Nations in Transit Ratings and Averaged Scores

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
National Democratic Governance	5.25	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	6.00
Electoral Process	5.50	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	6.00
Civil Society	3.50	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75
Independent Media	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.50
Local Democratic Governance	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75
Judicial Framework and Independence	5.25	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50
Corruption	5.75	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.25
Democracy Score	5.21	5.39	5.39	5.43	5.39	5.36	5.36	5.36	5.36	5.39

NOTE: The ratings reflect the consensus of Freedom House, its academic advisers, and the author(s) of this report. If consensus cannot be reached, Freedom House is responsible for the final ratings. The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 7 the lowest.

1Armenia in 2008-2017. Source: https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2017/armenia

The Freedom House has always assessed Armenia as "partly free" in all its annual reports in the studied period of 2009-2017. Its ratings show a constant level of democratic performance between 5.21 and 5.43 (1=best and 7=worst performance) in 2008-2017. Overall democracy score for Armenia has been the same 5.39 in the first year of its involvement in the Eastern Partnership and now in 2017 while it was 4.79 in 2000. This score of 5.39 puts Armenia in the category of "semi-consolidated authoritarian regime". A slight declination in Armenia's national democratic performance is observed in 2008-2009

and in 2017. In 2017, Armenian performance in national democratic governance and electoral process declined a bit more both reaching 6 scores, while in 2008 they were scored 5.25 and 5.50 respectively (Freedom House, 2017). In sum, the Freedom House assessments show a stagnation in the democratic situation of Armenia in the time period of 2009-2017.

Elections

In the studied period, Armenia has had four national votes – two parliamentary elections in 2012 and 2017, a presidential election in 2013, and a constitutional referendum in 2015. Elections of Yerevan Council (and mayor) in 2013 was in the focus compared to other elections for local governments.

OSCE/ODIHR, the only intergovernmental organization professionalized in election observation, is traditionally invited to observe and assess the conduct of elections. They deploy both long-term and short-term observation missions. In 2013, the Armenian civil society organizations launched a coalition of local observers "Citizen Observer". Compared to the international observers, local observers are usually much more critical about the conduct of elections. In 2013, a group of civic activists occupied the stage of the Election Observation Mission presenting its preliminary findings on the parliamentary elections and loudly read a text that was a parody of the Mission's previous assessments. The text read: "One step forward, three steps backward, two steps right and half step left…" Thus, the activist denounced politically charged predictable texts of international observers (Activists Interrupt Press Conference: OSCE Observers Walk Out, 2013).

The 2015 referendum, although denounced by local observers and political groups and straight-forwardly criticized by the OSCE, changed the Constitution and foresaw transformation of Armenia to a parliamentary republic by the end of the second term of President Sargsyan. The government's attempt to change the electoral code faced a serious opposition. In a platform composed of government, opposition party and civil society representatives, negotiations led to some important changes (such as publication of the signed lists of voters) in the law that were proposed by the opposition and civil society. At the same time, the law included changes unacceptable for the civil society organizations which made them to abandon the negotiations on the half way. The European Union contributed about 7 million euros to the measures for fair conduct of elections: 4 million

euros for voter identification technologies, two million euros for installing video cameras to live stream polling stations, and 1 million euro to the civil society for election observation. (EU Invests unprecedented funds in Armenia's upcoming election, 2017). This time local observers were supported also by prominent diaspora actors (Canadian film-maker Atom Egoyan, actress Arsiné Khanjian, American rock star Serj Tankian, American film-maker Erik Nazarian and others[6]).

While the 2015 referendum was marked with all types of violations observed previously (ballot stuffing, vote buying, attacks on proxies, observers and journalists, and so on), the 2017 elections were marked with smooth voting process but largely observed vote buying and high turnout of voters. Unlike previous national elections especially presidential ones) and referenda, the 2017 parliamentary elections were not followed by public unrest. The Armenian National Congress led by the first president of Armenia Levon Ter-Petrosyan, that had lost popularity and did not win seats in the Parliament, filed a complaint about vote buying and other violations to the Constitutional court but did not win the case. The new opposition alliance "Yelk" ("Way out") winning a few seats in the parliament suggests that the results of the elections mirror the votes of the population (Gabrielyan, 2017).

A scandalous publication by the Union of Informed Citizens NGO demonstrated over 100 school principals' work for recruiting voters for the ruling Republican Party (Sahakyan, 2017). An audio record of "SAS" private company's stuff meeting was made public after the elections: the employer was requesting the employees to report about the numbers of voters they had recruited for the Republican Party. The request was accompanied by psychologic pressure and threats that they would lose their jobs if they don't "bring votes" for the company's owner and its Republican party (Նախընտրական ժողով «ՍԱՍ» գրուպում (ձայնագրություն) [Pre-election staff meeting in SAS Group (audio)], 2017). The local observers' alliances Citizen Observer and Independent Observer felt trapped in the observation of polling stations while the vote buying was taking place out of them both on the day of the vote and before that day The OSCE observation mission recorded overall lack of public trust and recommended "that authorities and political parties take measures

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[6] A pro-election press-conference of diasporan celebrities:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLnyF2elfy0

to discourage vote-buying and any form of pressure on citizens to attend campaign events or vote in a particular way" (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2017).

Ambassador Piotr Switalski also criticized the above-mentioned "moral crisis in schools", pressures on employees, violence against journalists and other shortcomings and suggested to consider a more trusted composition of the Central Electoral Commission (Hambardzumyan, 2017). Surprisingly, his criticism was met by a direct backlash of high officials: the ruling party's spokesman urged the Ambassador to "not intervene in our internal affairs" (Stepanyan, 2017). The Ambassador had to explain publicly that the EU's support was more than of financial nature and it was provided upon open request of the Government. He also suggested to publish the all the documents and agreements on the support to make clear to Armenians why the EU should have its say (Որ հայերն իմանան` ինչու ԵՄ-ն պետք է խոսի. դեսպանը կոչ է արել հրապարակել ֆինանսավորման մասին տվյալները [For Armenians know why the EU should have its say: the EU ambassador urges to publish the data on financing the elections], 2017).

In sum, the Government included some important suggestions of the opposition in the new Electoral Code, the overall design of the law and its implementation did not help to have free and fair elections despite EU's close support. Not surprisingly, the Freedom House found no improvement in the electoral process in 2017 (Freedom House, 2017).

Corruption

According to the Transparency International (TI), an international organization studying corruption across the globe, Armenia shared with Bolivia and Vietnam the 113th to 115th place among 176 nations in 2016. Its "corruption perception index" (CPI) was 33 in 2016, 35 in 2015 and 37 in 2014 which demonstrates a clear decline in the anticorruption performance of the country. The indices below 50 alert about systemic corruption in the country. Among 15 transition nations of the Eastern Europe – Central Asia region, Armenia was ranked the 10th (Corruption Perceptions Index 2016, 2017). It should be noted that the Freedom House observes no changes in the situation with corruption: in the same period of time, it scores the same high levels of corruption (5.50/7) in Armenia (Freedom House, 2017).
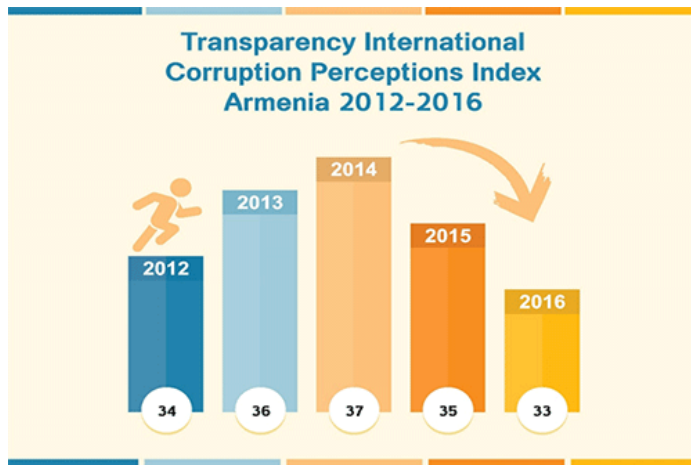
2The dynamics of corruption perception in Armenia. Source:
https://transparency.am/en/cpi

In the Global Corruption Barometer (GCB) report on Europe and Central Asia, Armenia is named among countries having "the most severe corruption problems" (Transparency International, 2016). The GCB survey found an overall public mistrust toward the government's anti-corruption initiatives. Moreover, the respondents proposed that the most corrupted persons are the officials in the Government, the President and his staff, and tax officials. Disturbing figures show that Armenians don't believe in reporting corruption as they don't believe that a change will happen therein (Global Corruption Barometer (GCB) 2016, 2016).

Azerbaijan's military attack on Armenia and Armenia-backed Nagorno-Karabakh in April 2016 disclosed that the Armenian military was not well prepared and raised public concerns about the expenditure of public funds that lacked transparency. There are no data on the corruption situation in Armenia for 2017 yet. In the country, where at least one third of population is increasingly under poverty line (43.2% in 2014, according to the World Bank), high officials possess assets and means from undisclosed sources. Some of them are sometimes fired but not brought to the court. A fresh example is Mihran Poghosyan, Armenia's chief judicial enforcer, who resigned after his name was disclosed in the worldwide corruption scandal known as "Panama papers" but soon became a Member of Parliament in the ruling Republican Party bloc (Nations in Transit 2017: Armenia, 2017).

General democratic performance

According to the Transformation Index of the Bertelsmann Stiftung (BTI) of 2016, Armenia performs quite well in terms of democracy and market economy, compared to the other post-Soviet transition nations. However, the situation with the rule of law and political participation are pretty much the same as the Eurasian average and its stateness is more challenged (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016).

Interestingly, Freedom House has always assessed civil liberties much higher than political liberties in Armenia although both liberties have always been rated less than half of the best possible assessment. For example, the latest available data published by the Freedom House assesses the political liberties as 5/7 (1=most free, and 7=least free) and the civil liberties as 4/7 (Freedom House, 2017). The press freedom status is assessed as not free and the net freedom as free, thus creating an aggregated score of 45 out of 100 (1=least free, 100=freest). In the 2016 assessment, the overall picture was the same with an aggregated score of 46 for Armenia. In the 2009 report, the Freedom House scored Armenian civil liberties 4/7 and the political liberties 6/7 because of the 2008 post-election brutal crackdown on the peaceful protest that left 10 dead, hundreds injured and hundreds arrested (Freedom House, 2009). A slight improvement of the Armenia's rating took place in the report from 2013.

The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) found a decline of Armenian democracy even below the score of that in 2008. According to the EIU democracy index, Armenia moved from being a hybrid regime to an authoritarian one in 2016 (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2017). The 2017 Social Progress Index analyzed that, while Armenia meets its population's basic human needs (85.83/100) and provides foundations of wellbeing (76.49/100) within expected range, it underperforms in opportunity openings (44.70/100) such as personal rights and freedoms (Social Progress Imperative, 2017).

According to the Human Freedom Index (HFI) created by the Cato Institute, "a public policy research organization — a think tank — dedicated to the principles of individual liberty, limited government, free markets and peace", the Armenian freedom index is slightly higher than the world average. Interestingly, its economic freedom is rated much higher (18th out of 159 nations) than its personal freedoms (81st out of 159 nations) in 2016. Personal

freedoms have received 6.92 points out of 10 where 10 represents more freedoms. This category includes the rule of law (4.64/10), association (7.50/10), expression and information (7.63/10), as well as religion, movement, relationship and at last security and safety which is given the highest score (9.01) in the category of Personal Freedom (Vásquez & Porčnik, 2016).

The above-mentioned data showed that democratic situation did not progress siginificantly. The democratic indicators remained the same or even worsened in the studied period of 2009-2017. Thus, further research for revealing the EU linkage's role in the democratic progress of Armenia is not needed. Still, apparent stagnation cannot automatically mean that EU's resources invested in the civil society of Armenia have been useless. On the contrary, they have contributed much in creating long-term effects on civic culture, as I will discuss in Conclusions.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

This thesis studied the support of the European Union to the civil society of Armenia for country's democratization. It focused on finding out how the EU creates and maintains linkages with the civil society organizations in Armenia, whether it strengthens the civil society and whether it results in a significant change of the democratic situation of the country. I examined a wide range of official documents laying grounds for the linkage, publicly available official statements, research and report on the proposed questions, as well as interviewed ten CSO representatives and four EU officials.

My research revealed that while the European Union mainstreams democracy and human rights on the political level (i.e. strategies, international agreements and other), on the policy level it is more focused on promoting good governance and socio-economic reforms aiming at ensuring stability in its neighborhood. It expects the civil society to pursue the EU agenda of reforms and to promote EU's visibility in the Armenian society. The civil society organizations have different perceptions about the EU's agenda. Most believe that the EU shares their own agenda of democracy and human rights promotion as the main priority in Armenia. This was the most unexpected finding of this study.

According to the findings, to pursue reforms in Armenia, the European Union uses all three models of democracy promotion – leverage, linkage and governance – proposed by Lavanex and Schimmelfennig. This means the EU uses conditionality in its political dialogue with Armenia, supports the civil society and brings reforms to the governance sectors. To ensure tangible results, the EU does its best to get the government and the civil society around the table for a constructive dialogue on the envisaged reforms. Findings show that this dialogue would be very limited and even not possible without EU's facilitation as the two Armenian entities are divided by thorough mistrust. In these settings, the civil society organizations often feel themselves as a tool of EU leverage on the Government rather than a real partner. As their agenda partially overlaps with that of the European Union, they take part in the EU-facilitated consultations with the government and still resist the idea of being "genetical modified", as framed by Ishkanian. They expect the EU to be stricter with the Armenian government and to use more conditionality as leverage, including depriving of promised funds for declining from implementation of the promised reforms. EU's limited use of leverage is explained with its priority to reach tangible outcomes such as adoption of a law even if it is not addressing all the challenges of the target issue. However, the case with elections showed that the leverage may fail to bring envisaged outcome and even may generate a backlash from the ruling elite, as proposed by Sasse.

The findings showed that meso-level changes took place in the civil society of Armenia since 2008. The number of registered CSOs grew significantly, and many unregistered civic initiatives emerged on the ground. This cannot be explained with only EU's role as many other actors and factors have contributed in civic activism in Armenia. The EU should clearly be credited for strengthening the civil society through extensive capacity building programs and mainstreaming its opinions in the relations with the Givernment. The interviewed CSOs assess themselves much more professional and empowered than years ago. However, in their strive for more democracy in Armenia, they encounter a glass ceiling of the political impotence and backlash of the government.

A stronger civil society does not result in significant progress in democracy. The research indices show a stagnation of the democratic situation of the country. Changes in the governance and society are episodic and of limited sustainability. Larger engagement of the society in civic agendas has not been observed neither in the research, nor in the media.

They seem detached from the agendas of the civil society, the government and the European Union. Public media and other broadcasters don't feel in this gap and the non-governmental entities have very limited resources to do so. However, apart from short-term results, the EU linkage resulted in public awareness and sensibility in a number of issues, such as discrimination and domestic violence, and in stronger and more professional CSOs. This is also the most tangible achievement for CSOs that hopefully will have more long-term effects on the civic culture in Armenia. To find these long-term effects on the civic culture, another research will be needed in a few years.

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APPENDIX I: Topic list of questions for interviews

What are the current EU priorities in Armenia (after its U-turn toward Russia in 2013)?

- How they differ from those before 2013?

What do you expect in terms of democratization from Armenia?

How would you assess the work of the Armenian civil society for democratization?

How do you choose partners/donors?

What are the achievements of the CSOs toward democratization?

To you, what are the reasons of these achievements?

What are the challenges and limits of democratization through the CSO?

Does EU make sure that the support to the top-down democratization of the country (conditionality) complements its support to the bottom-up democratization?

How the EU deals with the Armenian government to ensure the support to the civil society?

How do you evaluate the democratic progress of Armenia? Please, name some tangible outcomes.

APPENDIX II: Acronyms/abbreviations

AA – Association agreement

CEPA – Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement

CPI – Corruption perception index (developed by TI)

CSO – Civil society organization

DCFTA – Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement

EaP – Eastern Partnership

EEAS – European External Action Service

ENI – European Neighborhood Instrument

ENP – European Neighborhood Policy

EU – European Union

NGO – Non-governmental organizations

OSCE – Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

PCA – Partnership and Cooperation Agreement

RA – Republic of Armenia

TI – Transparency International