

# NEWS LETTER

OSCE Office in Yerevan



## Marking the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act

High-level representatives from the government, OSCE Secretariat, civil society and media gathered in Yerevan on 16 September at a celebration organized by the Office to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, a founding document of the OSCE. A special commemorative OSCE postage stamp, postmark and envelope, prepared for the occasion by the Haypost National Operator of Armenia, were launched at the event, which also included a photo exhibition and a publication including messages from senior officials and information about the OSCE and the Office. University students competed nationwide on a 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary debate topic, and Model OSCE alumni convened at an informal “OSCE Café”.

## Visit to Syunik Province

On the occasion of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, the Head of Office visited Syunik province from 28 September to 1 October. The Office provides assistance in the province to address economic and environmental issues through its Programme Implementation Presence in Kapan. The Syunik governor and the Ambassador opened a four-kilometer irrigation canal that was rehabilitated in cooperation with UNDP to prevent pollution from mining tailings in a major agricultural village. The Ambassador visited the Syunik Regional Psychiatric-Neurological Dispensary, where a pilot solar thermal energy system was installed, ensuring considerable annual savings for the hospital (2 million AMD), improving sanitation issues for patients, and preventing 40 tons of carbon emissions per year. The Ambassador and the Governor were also hosted by the “Wool to Carpet” studio, established in Shinuhayr village by the Goris Women Resource Center with OSCE support. The studio provides jobs to 43 women from the local community who make carpets, socks and other items from the locally supplied wool.

## Domestic Violence, Police and Local Communities

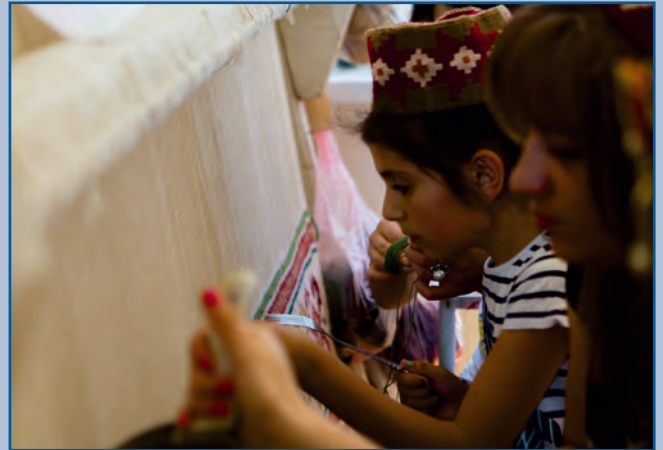
Domestic violence requires sensitized policing to ensure victims step forward. The Office has been working to streamline co-operation between the police and other community actors. Office-supported information corners have been opened in a number of police departments, offering resource publications about psychological, social, legal, shelter and other services. Trainings have also been organized for school inspectors, who are often the first to recognize warning signs of family violence. A handbook on organizations providing assistance to domestic violence victims and compact discs with electronic version of the database of organizations dealing with domestic violence has been developed and distributed to all juvenile inspectors of Yerevan's Police.



### Penitentiary Reform

To support penal reforms the Office, in co-operation with the Penitentiary Department of the Ministry of Justice, organized two workshops in Tsakhkadzor to enhance the work of some 50 penitentiary servants involved in rehabilitating and providing social assistance to convicts. The Office also assisted the Chamber of Advocates to provide free legal aid to persons deprived of liberty and socially vulnerable persons. In an initiative that facilitates the work of the Public Defender's Office and the Chamber of Advocates, 15 lawyers visited five penitentiary institutions in five regions and provided legal advice.

## Economic Empowerment of Women



In Syunik region, where women comprise two-thirds of unemployed people, an Office project has created job opportunities for over 120 women artisans in Goris, Kapan, Meghri, Sisian and Shinuhayr, who received specialized instruction on carpet making, crocheting, needlework, pottery and wool spinning.



## Exploring Economic Opportunities

As Armenia joined the Eurasian Economic Union, the Office prepared an analysis on existing legal and regulatory gaps in the trade frameworks, new market and investment opportunities for local and foreign businesses and creation of effective tools for overcoming the existing challenges for entrepreneurs.



## Constitutional Referendum

The Office helped raise awareness of the constitutional reform process and partnered with government and civil society actors to organize thematic discussions focusing on various chapters of the proposed amendments. Experts of the specialized commission on development of constitutional amendments, members of Government, parliamentary factions, NGO and international community representatives took part in the discussions and exchanged views on the substance of the reform.

## Transition to Digital Terrestrial Broadcasting



The Office has been supporting efforts to help address Armenia's transition from analogue to digital terrestrial broadcasting, which officially came into effect on 1 January 2016. On 12 November, the Office hosted a roundtable with participation of 60 representatives from the government, Parliament, civil society, media, international organizations and the private sector. The exchanges revealed that, while technical construction of the digital network has been completed successfully, issues concerning full public access to digital signal remain to be resolved. The discussion also highlighted the need for legislative amendments to allow regional broadcasters to continue operations and to promote media pluralism. The discussion led to amendments developed by the Ministry of Transport and Communication that were

adopted by the National Assembly on 17 December 2015. An international expert review was commissioned by the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media to assess the compliance of the new amendments with international standards and OSCE recommendations.

## Access to Justice in Environment

Guarantees of the provisions of the Aarhus Convention related to the access to justice were discussed at a September workshop organized by the Office jointly with the Centre of Economic-Legal Analyses NGO in co-operation with the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities. Participants shared experiences, identified challenges and explored possible ways to enhance the implementation of the Aarhus Convention.

## Security Sector Reform

From 10 to 13 November the Office, the Austrian Ministry of National Defence and Sport, the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces/International Security Sector Advisory Team (DCAF/ISSAT), the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy and the OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation jointly organized a workshop on exchange of best practice in security sector reform. Participants included representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defence, Police, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Emergency Situations and Territorial Administration, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Military Prosecutor's Office, Parliament and the Presidential Administration, as well as OSCE field presence representatives from Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro and Ukraine.

## Pilot Study on Forced Labour and Labour Trafficking

The Office supported a pilot study to identify forced labour and labour trafficking cases among adults and children. It was conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Centre – Armenia and supported by U.S. State Department donors, the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) and the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. The study provided a platform for the state Inter-agency Anti-Trafficking Working Group develop the 2016-2018 National Action Plan on Combatting Human Trafficking, a draft version of which emerged from an Office-supported workshop in December.

## Human Rights Day

On 10 December the Office together with the UN, Council of Europe and EU Delegation organized an “unconference” on human rights – HuRiCamp, the agenda of which was crowdsourced by the participants themselves. Human rights activists, defenders and civil society representatives coming from a wide range of backgrounds came together to speak on various human rights issues in a friendly, cooperative environment designed to educate, share learning and inspire collaboration.



## Case-law of the Cassation Court

In November the Head of Office, together with the Court of Cassation and the Judicial Department of Armenia, presented a volume of decisions of the Criminal Chamber of the Court of Cassation for 2014, the sixth such annual volume since 2008. The compilation serves as a useful resource for all criminal lawyers. Participants at the presentation discussed the activities of the Court of Cassation over the last ten years, including the fundamental decisions that paved the ground for ensuring predictable justice and creating legal mechanisms for effective human rights protection. The Office supported a workshop for 30 judges of the Cassation and Appellate Courts to discuss and present the major precedent decisions, relating to fundamental human rights principles.



The Office also helped develop a manual on judicial supervision over pre-trial proceedings and printing the publication on public participants of the criminal proceedings prepared by the Investigative Committee and the Annual Report of the Human Rights Defender's Office.

### About the OSCE

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

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

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