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ADDENDUM to
**the ANALYTICAL BASE-LINE REPORT
ON THE CULTURE SECTOR
AND CULTURAL POLICY
OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA**

**Studies and Diagnostics on Cultural Policies
of the Eastern Partnership Countries**

The document is prepared by the Regional Monitoring and Capacity Building Unit of the Eastern Partnership Culture Programme

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PREFACE

This document complements the Analytical Base-line Report on the Culture Sector and Cultural Policy of the Republic of Armenia prepared by the Regional Monitoring and Capacity Building Unit of the Eastern Partnership Culture Programme (RMCBU) in August 2012 and revised in January 2013. The report was published at the Programme's web-site (<http://www.euroeastculture.eu/en/database-of-materials/view-armenia-analytical-base-line-reports-on-the-culture-sector-and-cultural-policy.html>).

The Addendum reflects the major changes that occurred in the country's cultural policy context since 2012. The content of this document is the sole responsibility of the RMCBU and reflects the opinion of contributing experts. It can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission. The document was prepared by Ms. Seda Papoyan, RMCBU Expert with contributions by Mr. Luciano Gloor, RMCBU Team Leader, Ms. Tetiana Biletska, RMCBU Capacity Building Expert, and Mr. Terry Sandell, RMCBU Expert responsible for methodological guidance for the studies.

In 2013 the RMCBU published the Regional Research Report on Cultural Policies and Trends of the Eastern Partnership Countries and six Analytical Base-line Reports on the Culture Sector and Cultural Policy of the EaP countries. The reports were intended for a broad range of audiences that includes all culture stakeholders in the countries of the Eastern Partnership and the European Union. The documents summarised results of the *Studies and Diagnostics on Cultural Policies of the Eastern Partnership Countries* carried out by the RMCBU from October 2011 to March 2012 in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The studies were focused on the national cultural policies of these countries and practically orientated to provide strategic guidance to the entire Eastern Partnership Culture Programme and to all activities of the RMCBU Project. A tailor-made system to analyse the current situation in the culture sector of the EaP countries was elaborated by the RMCBU. It was primarily based on conceptual comparative analysis of the countries' specific policies with applicable international standards exercised by the RMCBU in cooperation with six local experts and guided by an international expert. Preparation, publication and further promotion of the reports stimulated comments and contributions from the Programme's stakeholders and other interested parties, leading to debate on cultural policy matters for the EaP countries and beyond. No doubt, in the course of implementation of the Programme, the dialogue on cultural policy matters contributed to promoting better integration of culture into national, regional and local development policies of the Eastern Partnership countries.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past three years there have been several different forces and developments affecting the cultural environment in Armenia. They represent a complicated picture as there were some positive changes while in other areas there was little or no impact and nothing in reality changed. Others may be seen later to have set a particular course for the country's cultural destiny. As of the beginning of 2015 one could say that cultural policy in Armenia is being put to the test, hopefully positively.

THE EAP CULTURE PROGRAMME AND THE TRANSFORMED ATMOSPHERE OF CULTURE IN ARMENIA

With the Eastern Partnership Cultural Programme, among others, one very important thing needs to be mentioned and praised: for the first time in the history of the independent Armenian Republic, at least in the framework of the Programme, Culture was in the lead and was approached accordingly. Various attempts have been made by a number of cultural actors to confirm and in some cases establish a proper understanding of Culture as an invaluable base for change and development. Among those attempts, the biggest role had first of all the collaborative projects granted by the EC under the Eastern Partnership Cultural Programme I, which provided fruitful platforms not only for cross-border cooperation, but also for learning and shared experiences, which then were brought back and localized in national realities. In this context Armenia can be considered to have had the biggest impact from the grant projects at least with the fact that it had the biggest number of participating partners compared to all other EaP countries – partnering in 13 projects out of overall 15 granted projects.

All those projects brought an “unforgettable” and positive fling to the cultural sector of Armenia. But with all the respect for their vivid impact, it has to be acknowledged that any “project” has a life-span and comes to an end at some point, in contrast to cultural policy reforms that could have a deeper and lasting structural impact on the culture sector of the country.

Going through the baseline categories of the analytical base-line report done in 2011/2012, we can observe some undoubted positive changes in almost all categories. The following main indicators shall serve to illustrate those positive changes:

- more and proper attention towards culture by the authorities and in the country in general;
- rise of awareness about the role and power of culture among citizens;
- high importance of internet and other communication technologies for the whole Armenian society,
- the new wave of diaspora repatriates that bring new culture of living in general.

Within the period of about 3 years no huge and visible changes have taken place in the climate of the Armenian cultural sector, though a number of shifts can be observed that can root right directions.

The whole cultural sector is still ruled by one main law “On the Fundamentals of Cultural Legislation” without any additional specific laws or policies for Cinema or for Theatres, for example.

The Ministry of Culture remains the main decision maker and actor in the sector with the main roles of supporter and executer of culture. There's no cultural policy documented yet, and the main course is still focused on preservation of cultural heritage. But even here, not always has the Ministry enough power to act appropriately whenever there are more powerful forces engaged: an example here is the transformation of Yerevan's oldest market building – the *Closed Market* - listed on the State List of Immovable Historical and Cultural Monuments of Yerevan, into a supermarket owned by one of the country's oligarchs and a member of parliament.

The Ministry of Culture is planning a Conference on Cultural Policy in the summer of 2015, which is a positive sign that indicates that this state institution starts to direct efforts towards more structural changes in the sector, rather than just acting as the organizer or supporter of cultural events and

initiatives. On the other hand, similar to other EaP countries, there is still a lack of dialogue between the Ministry and civil society organisations which could lead to a joint new updated, systematic and professional vision on the development of the culture sector.

Recently, a certain rise in cultural participation has been recorded which is the direct result of a more active cultural life that is due to the activities of a big number of various cultural collaborations within the country, to which also international cultural organizations contributed. Many of these cultural activities have been initiated by NGOs or private commercial organisations, but also by local governments. The municipality of Yerevan is especially active, which is trying to create new traditions for the ancient capital by organising various festivals, concerts, city events etc. On the other hand, even with the big impact of the projects granted under the EaP Culture Programme in the regions of Armenia, the gap between the capital Yerevan and the rest of the country is still huge in terms of cultural provision and participation.

That the Armenian authorities attribute culture and cultural identity a higher relevance compared to some years ago is proven by the comprehensive program of the Armenian government to establish the Brand Armenia, designed to build a distinctive brand image through a far-reaching identity program for the country. The government understands this branding initiative as a platform to promote tourism via Armenian culture, history and a set of national values.

There is another trustworthy factor that promises further developments of the arts and culture sector – the digitalization trends and the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). During the recent several years most of the cultural institutions if not all of them have acquired their “digital passport” by starting their digital existence in the internet. They built their capacities not only to just produce and manage simple websites but in some cases to making use of the newest achievements of modern digital technologies. Some organisations started to reassess the cultural value of Armenian heritage in comprehensive projects like *360ARMENIA*, showcasing the best touristic destinations of the country in very new and fresh style by using multimedia technologies.

Armenia is also proud to have another achievement in the field of non-tangible cultural heritage: in November 2014 the traditional Armenian thin bread – the lavash – has been inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity as “Lavash, the preparation, meaning and appearance of traditional bread as an expression of culture in Armenia”.

Added to the situation described above, there is another important point in the current cultural atmosphere in Armenia, which is maybe unique and typical Armenian compared to other EaP countries: it is the phenomenon of the world-wide-spread Armenian Diaspora and the new wave of Armenians repatriating from all over the world and trying to set up their life in their historical homeland. With their definitely different approach to things and the will to support the country, repatriates have been positively changing the Armenian cultural atmosphere a lot in the course of recent years: they set up new businesses, got engaged in social, cultural and even political life of the country and most importantly have a clear vision of being a part of the bright future of this small country.

CONCLUSION

In talking of cultural policy in Armenia being ‘put to the test’ the question is whether new policy is developing and whether the various cultural stakeholders who believe in and are trying to promote such a process and direction are going to succeed in implementing the changes necessary for a positive long-term, sustainable future. These doubts are nurtured not only by the lack of structural changes or visionary, forward-looking plans that could be seen on the horizon, but also by further political factors that are external to the culture sector. In first instance this concerns the U-turn in the official external relations of the Armenian government – the shift from the plans to associate with the EU to signing in to the Russia-led Customs Union. This gives base for anxious thoughts about a possible “return” to a soviet-style of thinking and of doing things at the top level processes in the country which might affect culture as one of the first sectors. At the moment of this report Armenia has just signed the agreement to join the Customs Union, and changes in consequence of this step are still ahead and not foreseeable yet.

It will now depend on the culture sector, to which extent it will manage to preserve and extend the recent achievements. This will also depend on Armenia maintaining the values that are at the basis of

these achievements. An open and collaborative mood, which is open to new practices, is one of the conditions that will lead to visible and perceivable change. The Armenian society still has to confirm that in its reality it conceives culture as a cross-cutting platform that contributes to social and economic growth of the country and that it attributes art and culture the appropriate role.