
Global Corruption Survey Finds No Improvement In Armenia

By Anna Saghabalian
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Endemic government corruption in Armenia has not decreased in the past year despite Armenian leaders' assurances they are addressing the problem in earnest, according to an annual global survey released by an international anti-graft watchdog on Wednesday.

The Berlin-based Transparency International again rated countries of the world on a 10-point scale, with zero indicating an extremely high degree of corruption as perceived by experts, entrepreneurs and ordinary citizens.

Armenia and five other states ranked 99th out of 180 nations covered by Transparency International's 2007 Corruption Perceptions Index. It was assigned a score of 3.0, faring slightly worse than it did in the previous CPI released one year ago. The score is based on seven corruption-related surveys conducted in Armenia by other organizations, including the World Bank.

Armenia was again judged to be less corrupt than most other ex-Soviet states, including Russia and Azerbaijan. The latter occupies 150th place in the rankings. By contrast, Armenia's other ex-Soviet neighbor, Georgia, jumped to 79th place, having seen its CPI score rise from 2.9 to 3.4.

Amalia Kostanian, head of Transparency's Armenian affiliate, the Center for Regional Development (CRD), said the findings of the latest survey are a further indication of a lack of progress in the Armenian government's stated anti-corruption efforts. She said those efforts have proved ineffectual because of their heavy emphasis on legal amendments and what she called a lack of government commitment to rule of law.

Kostanian argued that prosecution of senior government officials on corruption charges remain extremely rare. "Risks involved in corrupt practices remain very low," she told reporters.

The government unveiled in late 2003 and claims to have successfully implemented a three-year plan of actions aimed at tackling bribery and other corrupt practices. However, there is little evidence that the set of mainly legislative measures has had a major impact on the situation on the ground.

Earlier this year, Kostanian resigned from a government body monitoring the program's implementation in protest against its perceived inactivity. The resignation followed the publication of a CRD opinion poll which found that nearly two-thirds of Armenians believe that corruption has actually increased in recent years.

In a December 2006 interview with RFE/RL, the late Prime Minister Andranik Markarian admitted that his government's anti-corruption drive has not been "as effective as we hoped." He said Yerevan will ask Western donors to help it draw up a new strategy that will "ascertain mechanisms for putting the [anti-graft] legislative framework into practice." It is not clear if his successor, Serzh Sarkisian, intends to do that.
