

Challenges of Transition in Post-Soviet Armenia: Protest Movements, Power, and Society

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Street protests or protest movements are not new in Armenia. Withdrawal from the Soviet Union and gaining independence by Armenia was accompanied with multi-thousand protest movements:¹ mass rallies and protests, started in 1988, finally led to multi-party parliamentary elections in 1990, for the first time in the entire 70-year-long Soviet period, and proclamation of independence of Armenia in 1991. Since then street protests as one of the main forms of protest manifestation have not stopped in Armenia. By a wide scope of reasons, in particular, in relation to key political events, such as presidential and parliamentary elections, the opposition expressed doubts on their legitimacy and legality and disagreement with their results through protest marches and rallies. Sometimes street protests also had a civic nature, as related to the popular discontent with the policy of authorities, touching upon various spheres of life.

However, my studies, in particular, the data of expert interviews, allow to conclude that since 2007-2008 a new phase of street protests has started, distinct from previous ones with relevant forms of struggle, goals, and principles of self-organization, and with framing and representation of the collective identity. The main distinctive feature of protest movements in the new phase was not just organization of passive rallies and protest marches, but actions of resistance, preventing implementation of decisions, adopted by official bodies.² This article aims at highlighting typical features of street protest movements in Armenia and assessing their role in the context of post-Soviet transition of the Armenian society. The post-Soviet transition is often characterized as an economic and political

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¹Some scholars notice elements of civic society in it. See, in particular: Levon Abrahamyan, Gayane Shagoyan, *From Carnival Civic Society toward a Real Civic Society: Democracy Trends in Post-Soviet Armenia*. Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia, Vol. 50, Issue 3, Winter 2011-12, pp. 11-50.

²Aghasi Tadevosyan, *Civic Activism and New Technologies in Armenia* (in Armenian), 2013. Available at: http://www.osf.am/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Aghasi_Tadevosyan_Policy_Paper.pdf

phenomenon; however, theoretical concepts of transition³ cannot be considered comprehensive as long as they actually ignore the idea of transformation of public and cultural life, which is really very significant in transition from the Soviet type of society to a new one. The issue of societal transformation, if ever discussed in some cases, is treated as something secondary, just accompanying the democratization and marketization processes. In the discourses, introduced to Armenia by international or local mediator structures, the issue of civic society has never been considered equal to democratization and marketization; only a few authors attach priority to this issue.⁴ It seems reasonable that transition theories and the policies in post-Soviet states, based on them – along with some other shortcomings – were criticized quite soon for ignoring social and cultural aspects of the transformation process.⁵

In this article the problems related to the establishment of the civic society will be considered within the context of transformation processes in Armenian society and practices of public life. In particular, the following questions will be analyzed: How do manifestations of the new phase of protest movements impact the transformation of the post-Soviet Armenian society? What kind of new social practices are used in protest movements, and how do they impact the establishment of civic practices in public life? How do protest movements of new generation influence, on the one hand, the practices of self-organization of public life, and on the other hand, the practices of relationships with formal authority institutes? And finally, the key question is the role of newly appeared practices in the process of transition from the Soviet to the post-Soviet society in Armenia, in particular, which of social practices, inherited from the Soviet era, are

³See, in particular: John Pickles, Adrian Smith (eds.), *Theorizing Transition: The Political Economy of Post-Communist Transformations*. London: Routledge, 1998; Claus Offe, *Capitalism by Democratic Design? Democratic Theory Facing the Triple Transition in East Central Europe*. In: *Social Research*, 1991, Vol. 58, Issue 4, pp. 865-892; Taras Kuzio, *Transition in Post Communist States: Triple or Quadruple*. In: *Politics*, 2001, Vol. 21, Issue 3, pp. 168-177.

⁴Armine Ishkanian, *Democracy Building and Civic Society in Post-Soviet Armenia*, London, Routledge, 2012. Evgenia Paturyan, Valentina Gevorgyan, *Armenian Civic Society after Twenty Years of Transition: Still Post-Communist?* Yerevan: American University of Armenia, 2014.

⁵M. Burawoy, K. Verdery (eds.), *Uncertain Transition: Ethnographies of Change in the Post-socialist World*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999; V. Bonnell, *Identities in Transition: Eastern Europe and Russia After the Collapse of Communism*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1996.

forced out from the sphere of public relations, and which innovations are gradually becoming habitual.

As a whole, 36 civic initiatives have been organized since 2008 up to the fall of 2015: preservation of public and cultural places (12 initiatives), human rights protection (14), ecology (6), 2 initiatives were cultural and 2 others were social.

This article is based on the data,⁶ received from field studies, held in 2012-2015. Three different protest movements have been studied. The first movement was triggered in 2012 by the problem of preservation of the green area in a square in the Mashtots Avenue in the downtown of Yerevan. The second case (summer, 2013) was related to the struggle against the decision of the capital city authorities and the Armenian government to raise the fare for public transport in Yerevan. And the third case to be analyzed are the summer, 2015, protests against the decision of the Armenian government to raise the tariffs for electricity in favor of the monopolist company in the energy sector of the republic.⁷

Thus, the first selected case is related to the struggle for preserving the square in the Mashtots Avenue that started in February, 2012; it lasted three months and ended with victory.⁸ This case was chosen because it attaches integrity to the collective experience of civic initiatives, operating since 2008. This civic initiative had the

⁶When studying, 45 in-depth interviews with participants of these movements, 12 expert interviews and engaged observations have been conducted. In addition, articles and interviews, published in press in that period, have been used. During the interviews with activists of protest movements the term "civic initiative," not "civic movement" was used that is why the same term "civic initiative" is used in this article.

⁷Some specifics of this initiative were discussed in: J. Andreasyan, G. Derlugyan, *Fuel Protests in Armenia*. In: *New Left Review*, 2015, Issue 95, pp. 29-48.

⁸This initiative was also studied as a case by Ishkanian and Glasius. Particularly, they discuss the relationship between NGOs, political parties and civic movements. M. Glasius, A. Ishkanian, *Surreptitious symbiosis: engagement between activists and NGOs*. In: *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 2015, Vol. 26, Issue 6, pp. 2620-2644. A. Ishkanian, M. Glasius, *Reclaiming Democracy in the Square? Interpreting the Movements of 2011- 2012*. London: London School of Economics, 2013, pp. 26-27. See also: A. Ishkanian, *Self-Determined Citizens? New Forms of Civic Activism and Citizenship in Armenia*. In: *Europe Asia Studies*, Vol. 67, Issue 8, pp. 1203-1227.

largest resonance: almost all active participants of previous civic protest movements joined the struggle to save the mentioned square. The main cause for discontent was the decision by the Mayor of Yerevan to destroy the green area of the square, located at one of the main streets of the capital city, Mashtots Avenue, and to construct a business center in its place. However, already at the very first stage of construction works young people, experienced with civic struggle, gathered in the square and demanded from the City council to preserve the square, stop cementing its territory and setting metallic pavilions, disassemble the already set up pavilions and develop the square, preserving it as a public area. Protesters argued that it was impossible to build private trade pavilions in the public area, insisting that the public space should not serve to private business. They also questioned legality of the relevant decision of the municipality.

Soon the number of participants of the protest action increased, reaching several hundreds. Despite the cold weather, activists remained at the place day and night, resisting the attempts to resume construction works. This initiative was unique due to the public's response to the struggle: the number of its supporters reached several thousands. In the most critical moments protesters quickly assembled in the square, providing assistance to the initiative. The protest action found itself in the focus of local and international structures. In March, 2012, activists started their "offensive" actions. They moved through the fence, guarded by the police, appeared at the construction site and began dismantling half-built metallic pavilions.⁹ Finally, the President of the country intervened: he visited the square and ordered the Mayor of Yerevan to stop construction of the business center, to preserve and develop the square as a public recreation zone.

The second research case is related to the protest against the Yerevan public transport fare rise in 2013.¹⁰ These protest actions continued and developed the traditions of civil disobedience, shaped in the struggle for preservation of the square of the Mashtots Avenue. Although the nucleus of this civic initiative was consisted of young people, who were previously engaged in the struggle for the square, they were supported by new people. This protest was caused by the decision of the Yerevan municipality to raise the fare for public

⁹*Analyses: Mashtots Park Civic Struggle Unfinished*. Institute for Democracy and Human Rights, 2012. Available at: <http://organize-now.am/en/2013/02/19/853>

¹⁰Aghasi Tadevosyan, *Civic Activism and New Technologies in Armenia* (in Armenian) 2013. Available at: http://www.osf.am/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Aghasi_Tadevosyan_Policy_Paper.pdf

transport in the capital city by 50 percent without wide public discussions. On the very first day when the decision came into force, a number of young activists, already having the experience of civic struggle, organized groups and initiated protests at the most crowded bus stops along the central avenue of the city. In the first days, due to the lack of human resources, actions were held only at two most crowded stops in the center of Yerevan. Holding posters, activists called the passengers not to obey the decision of the municipality and not to pay the new price explaining why it was illegal and groundless. Young people, entering mini-buses and buses, tore off the stickers with the new fare and fixed the old one instead. Some activists explained to drivers that the fare, raised by 50 percent, would negatively influence the social condition of drivers' families, because their relatives would also pay more. In a few days, the number of groups, calling for a public protest at bus stops, reached several thousands. Gradually the number of passengers, refusing to pay a higher fare, also increased. In the end the struggle covered the whole city. People also displayed social solidarity: a "free car" was the most famous action, when many car drivers offered people, waiting for public transport, to give them a ride to their destinations free of charge. Doing so, they joined the boycott of the new fare. The protest was supported by public transport drivers as well: they refused to demand from passengers paying the new price. The increased number of young people, who joined the initiative, allowed to hold protest actions in peripheral parts of Yerevan. As a result, the municipality was forced to refrain from its intention to raise the fare, keeping it unchanged.

The third case is related to the "Electric Yerevan" civic initiative in the summer of 2015. It was aimed against the increase of price for electricity in the entire territory of Armenia. After the rally in Yerevan against the change of electricity tariffs, a group of young people (several hundred) decided to organize a march along the Baghramyan Avenue, where the Presidential palace and the Parliament building are located. Protesters blocked this street and began a sit-in demonstration, demanding from the authorities not to let the tariffs grow. At night the police made an attempt to disperse young protesters by force, but it had a reverse effect. The use of force caused public discontent, and the same day the Baghramyan Avenue was blocked by several thousands of city residents, mostly youth. The authorities did not dare to use force against such a number of protesters; after several days of protests, they made some concessions. The protest wave

gradually subsided when a compromise option to settle the problem was made by the government and was accepted.

Problem of the collective identity

One of the most important novelties, appeared in the public life of Armenia as a result of civic initiatives, has become the shaping of a new collective identity. The collective identity is crucial for the success of social movements. Thanks to it, the connection of participants of action with the activities, around which people are united, becomes more definite. The collective identity also regulates the problem of people's participation.¹¹

The key part in shaping the collective identity is played by agreement of thoughts¹² on the given action, as well as the context or the field, created in the process of the given action.¹³ Such factors as ideas, values, and the common world outlook that have been put into circulation are also considered important factors.¹⁴ Some scholars argue that the emotional connection, emerging in the process of concrete actions among participants, is also significant for shaping the collective identity.¹⁵ First of all it relates to joint overcoming of difficulties, displaying a group heroism, mutual support and defense and in many other critical situations. All mentioned factors played an important role in the civic initiatives in question. The key factor was, in particular, the unity around the activities, aimed at achieving the goal of the action.

¹¹Alberto Melucci, *The Process of Collective Identity*. In: *Social Movements and Culture*. Edited by H. Johnston and B. Klandermans. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995, pp. 41–63.

¹²D. Barr, J. Drury, *Activist Identity as a Motivational Resource: Dynamics of (Dis)empowerment at the G8 Direct Actions, Gleneagles, 2005*. *Social Movement Studies*, 2009, Vol. 8, Issue 3, pp. 243–260.

¹³N. Van Dyke, R. Cress, *Political Opportunities and Collective Identity in Ohio's Gay and Lesbian Movement, 1970 to 2000*. *Sociological Perspectives*, 2006, Vol. 49, Issue 4, pp. 503–526. S. Valocchi, *Individual Identities, Collective Identities, and Organizational Structure: The Relationship of the Political Left and Gay Liberation in the United States*. *Sociological Perspectives*, 2001, Vol. 44, Issue 4, pp. 445–467.

¹⁴B. Seel, A. Plows, *Coming Live and Direct: Strategies of Earth First!* In: *Direct Action in British Environmentalism*. B. Seel, M. Paterson and B. Doherty (Eds.). London: Routledge, 2000, pp. 112–132.

¹⁵S. Hunt, R. Benford, *Collective Identity, Solidarity, and Commitment*. In: *The Blackwell Companion*, 2004, pp. 433–460. J. Adams, *The Bitter End: Emotions at a Movement's Conclusion*. *Sociological Inquiry*, 2003, Vol. 73, Issue 1, pp. 84–113.

Another significant factor is the concord and unity around the certain civic behavior and practices. By the way, not only internal unifying factors were important, but also the factors, distinct from the external public environment and institutes. In this sense the discussions of whether the civic initiatives are political or not pose a huge interest. The question of whether participants of a civic initiative should be permitted to politicize the movement or not was one of the key issues in all three analyzed cases.

Participants of the initiative found it important to prevent its politicization. They did not rule out participation of members of various parties, but only as private persons, not representatives of their parties.¹⁶ In this sense participants of the initiative decided to accentuate just the civic identity against the party identity. Such a phenomenon was also noticed in relation to NGOs representatives. The fact that connections are available between the civic initiatives and NGOs was noticed and studied in the professional literature on the example of the square of the Mashtots Avenue.¹⁷ It is important to consider this problem in the context of collective identity. Thus, in both cases – with political parties and with NGOs – the importance of civic participation but not the membership in these organizations was especially underlined. Such a definite differentiation of the civic initiative from political parties and NGOs played an important role in shaping their collective identity and recognition as autonomous and independent subject that carries out its own action in society.¹⁸

Remarkably, the formation of the new collective identity also influenced the individual identity of activists of civic initiatives. In our interviews many participants pointed out the transformation of their individual identity. For many of them the identity of *an independent or sovereign citizen* or simply *citizen* became priority in the components of their own identity. We encountered the first manifestations of that kind at the square of the Mashtots Avenue. Afterwards this phenomenon was developed and spread out in the process of initiatives against the rise of public transport fare. As a result of civic

¹⁶Ishkanian, Glasius, *Reclaiming Democracy in the Square? Interpreting the Movements of 2011- 2012*, pp. 26-27.

¹⁷Glasius, Ishkanian, *Surreptitious symbiosis: Engagement Between Activists and NGOs*, pp. 2620-2644. Ishkanian *Self Determined Citizens? New Forms of Civic Activism and Citizenship in Armenia*, pp. 1203-1227.

¹⁸A. Tadevosyan, *Civic Activism and New Technologies in Armenia* (in Armenian). Available at: http://www.osf.am/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Aghasi_Tadevosyan_Policy_Paper.pdf

movements, formation of publicly-significant statuses became a novelty in the public life of Armenia. Such statuses influence public relationships, attaching them a civic nature. Before the emergence of civic initiatives a civic activist as a publicly significant status was unknown for the society at all; nowadays it is recognizable and respected in it. In the newly emerged significant statuses, which did not exist in the past or treated as unimportant, could be singled out the statuses of a civic activist, citizen, self-determined person, ecologist.

Against the practices of the "street"

Besides such an important novelty as the formation of civic identity, introduced by civic initiatives, there is also representation of this new collective identity in the public sphere.¹⁹ Representation is performed by means of an absolutely new type of practices for Armenia. Very often in relationships with officials, participants of initiatives positioned themselves as citizens; this forced the authorities to change the practice of interaction with other persons and the practice of execution of power. As a result, representatives of power often had to turn from vertical hierarchic ways of interaction to the horizontal civic one. Remarkably, representation of the civic identity in the public sphere not only impacted on establishment of interaction practices between citizens and representatives of power, but also, in some cases, on the interaction with informal street authorities, cooperating with formal authorities.

Most obvious it was in the course of the civic initiative against the rise of the public transport fare. There were cases, when half-criminal authorities, performing as allies to the city officials, tried to engage participants of this civic action into a conflict, using relevant street criminal language and behavior. However, these provocations failed: activists opposed a "civic language" to the language, typical for the street criminals. Another important point was opposition to the practices of establishing interactions typical to the criminal "closed" public sphere, by the practice of "open" sphere.²⁰ For example, at one

¹⁹The concept "public sphere" is used here by Ju. Habermas's definition. See: Ju. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989; Ju. Habermas, S. Lennox and F. Lennox, *The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article*. New German Critique, 1974, Issue 3, pp. 49-55.

²⁰See in more detail about the "closed" and "open" spheres in: Karl Popper, *Open Society and Its Enemies*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1962, Vol. 1, pp. 176-180.

of bus stops several young people, using sexual abuse language, tried to engage participants of the civic initiative into a conflict. However, when activists refused using swearwords, instead changing the direction of "conversation" to the rule of law, at the same time video-recording it, i.e. made this incident open and public, the young provocateurs preferred to leave the place as soon as they could. Thus, one of the most remarkable peculiarities of these initiatives was not only the struggle against representatives of the authorities, but also against street criminal elements, who neglect the law and legal discourse. It was so obvious that was reflected in the *Facebook* discussions, in which it was proposed to consider the street criminal as an obstacle for development of the Armenian society. Some discussants even insisted on considering the struggle for civic values and against criminal values as one of the most important goals of the transit Armenian society.

Turning point in practices of the authorities and shaping new practices

One of the innovations, appeared in the public life due to civic initiatives, was the change of practices of the authorities. It is important to note that they not only related to the practices, used by official bodies, but also the practice of interaction of citizens with the authorities. Participants of civic initiatives often refused to obey the orders of public officers. It was a very unfamiliar phenomenon for the executives, as long as the unquestioning obedience to an order of a public officer. The practice of refusal was displayed in various ways. The most widespread cases were when activists demanded from public officer to refer to the law and not to rely on the imaginary advantage of his/her position. Particularly those officials, who had no experience of interaction with the youth who insisted on their civic viewpoint and used a civic language, were embarrassed by that. As one of such examples could be taken the debate between participants of the action against the rise of tariffs in public transport and a secretary of Yerevan municipality. One of the activists observed that according to a relevant law, the secretary had no right to smoke in the office. The official was shocked by both – the remark, made by an ordinary citizen, and the discussion with him from the position of law. His answer – "it is my office and I'm doing here what I like to do" – put him in a ridiculous situation, which was reflected in a series of cartoons, published in mass media and posted in the *Facebook*. Another example is the refusal to obey orders of the police, if the latter did not justify their demands with references to relevant laws. Such an approach of activists forced

the police to change the rhetoric and to refer to relevant articles in the legislation, when demanding anything from citizens, and to begin any communication with participants of protest actions with the words "dear citizen(s)."

Civic initiatives and new discursive practices

Formation of public discursive platforms is considered one of the important results of civic initiatives. Such a precedent was created in the process of civic initiative, aimed at preserving and restoring the square of the Mashtots Avenue: horizontal decision-making practices were implemented during civic actions. Very often they were realized through an open public debate, when discussions were held exclusively on the basis of rationality of arguments,²¹ introduced by a speaker, and not the latter's status or authority in society.

These practices continued to be applied during the struggle against the rise of fare for the Yerevan public transport. Daily evening discussions, held by the activists of "Pay 100 Drams" initiative, allowed to establish a new platform to enable any participant sharing his or her viewpoint on the given issue. Taking part and saying a word in the exchange of opinions was allowed to persons, who represented themselves and not any group or organization (such as a political party, NGO, research institute or a state office), were allowed to address the public and participate in the discussions. It was a unprecedented phenomenon in comparison with all other rallies and street protests, where the right to speak from a stage was provided to representatives of political forces or public groups. There were several other peculiarities as well: Any thought and any opinion was taken seriously and as a valuable one.

These discussions were absolutely transparent and open for participation. They were held in the territory of the square and any person could take part in debates, listen and share one's own opinion.

The hierarchic assessment of opinions and thoughts was rejected; horizontal practices were applied instead. A person, who found himself/ herself in the circle of discussants, was equal to all participants and was obliged to respect the established order. Deputy head of the Yerevan police, chairman of the Public Council and others

²¹The concept "rational argument" here is similar to Ju. Habermas's definition. See: Ju. Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1990, pp. 65-66. Ju. Habermas, *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1993, p. 31.

made their statements as citizens, not as representatives of governmental bodies.²²

Formation of publicly identifiable signs and representation

One of the most important achievements of civic initiatives can be considered the fact that in the course of time they have developed their own signs, by which they became identifiable by the public. Among such signs it is possible to single out the following: a) denying violence; b) representing the right and law; 3) ecological ones.

The signs denying violence particularly appeared during the actions against the the use of violence. In both initiatives – for preserving the square and against the rise of tariffs – the actions rejecting violence have had a pronounced symbolism. It was visible in protesters' interactions with the police as a power structure, implementing the signs of violence, and pro-governmental street "authorities." The signs, demonstrating the right and law, first were shown during the struggle for the square. At that time the key symbolic function was assigned to the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia. In the process of the initiative, copies of the text of the Constitution were distributed among participants. Public readings of the Constitution were also organized at the square of the Mashtots Avenue. Such readings played a significant role during the struggle against the rise of fare in public transport. One of the actions, organized during the sit-in demonstration, was dedicated to reading of the articles of the Constitution.

Ecological signs are also quite typical for civic initiatives. The struggle for the square also started with the appeals to preserve green areas. These signs were widespread because of the civic initiative against enlarging activity of the mining industry at the expense of ecology of Armenia.²³

Formation and circulation of new meanings

Civic initiatives have also motivated the understanding and re-thinking of numerous phenomena. They are related to the meanings of

²²A. Tadevosyan, *Civic Activism and New Technologies in Armenia*. Available at: http://www.osf.am/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Aghasi_Tadevosyan_Policy_Paper.pdf

²³See details of the Armenian ecological movements in: A. Ishkanian, with E. Gyulkhandanyan, S. Manusyan, and A. Manusyan, *Civic Society, Development and Environmental Activism in Armenia*, Qaghaqi Gratun, 2013, Gyumri, Armenia.

public life, having civic content, such as power, citizenship, civic culture, law, relationship between political and civic elements, right to the city,²⁴ perception of public interest, etc. The following newly circulated meanings, which were spread out in the process of civic initiatives, can be singled out:

-A person in power is not a master, but a servant. He/ she must serve, not to reign over people. The authority is obliged to serve public interests and implement them. People pay state officials, so they must serve, not reign.

-The authority must be accountable to the society.

-It is not the authority, but citizens, who decide. The appeal "We decide" was widespread.

-All citizens have equal rights. An official is an ordinary citizen. An official has no priority rights over others.

-Human rights are prior to all norms, even the law. Relationships, based on the right, is superior over all other types of relationships.

-Public interest is superior over private or group interests.

-Authorities are obliged to be transparent, accountable, and responsible.

-Public awareness is obligation of the authorities.

Main shortcomings of civic initiatives

Civic initiatives have a number of shortcomings. First, they tend to be more reactive than proactive. They mainly react to the policy of government or local self-governmental bodies, but they don't initiate any movement or action, originated from their ideas. That is why they do not have long-term or strategic programs and goals. Second, although some civic initiatives had serious achievements in self-organization, creating decision-making mechanisms, practices of the struggle, interaction with the authorities, they could not ensure their continuation and spreading. Third, civic initiatives failed to attract intellectuals and experts, meanwhile they fell short of their own resources for development and coordination of ideas and invention of their own texts. As a result, these shortcomings brought about a decline and crisis after the rise of civic initiatives in 2008-2013. It became obvious after the most recent initiative "Electric Yerevan" in the summer, 2015.

²⁴A. Tadevosyan, *Influence of the Market on the Formation of Cultural Landscape*. In: *Market Beyond Economy*. Yerevan: "Gitutyun" Publishing House, 2014, pp. 34-35.

Conclusions

Civic initiatives had an evident impact on the public life of Armenia. Unlike such institutes of the civic society as NGOs, their actions made the forms and signs of the civic contents much more widespread and identifiable. However, one should not overestimate the impact of civic initiatives on public relations or argue that they have led to qualitative changes in the Armenian society. At the same time, this fact cannot be ignored: it is owing to them that civic meanings, practices and signs have appeared in the public life. Another fact is also significant: due to the activities of civic initiatives there are precedents that citizens, struggling for their interests, have achieved such substantial results as preservation of the green square in the center of Yerevan, prevention of the rise of tariffs for public transport or electricity. Non-governmental organizations have never achieved such tangible results, and their rating in the society is not very high.

Despite the positive role and achievements of civic initiatives in the life of the Armenian transit society, they also have had a number of substantive weaknesses. The latter complicate the preservation, transferability, and reproduction of the achieved positive results, as well as the ability of groups to influence significantly transition processes.

According to expert interviews, one of the main reasons causing such a problem is the lack of ideas and strategic goals. Another shortcoming is dissociation of these initiatives and inability to solidify positive results, achieved by previous initiatives. To overcome the mentioned shortcomings, it is possible to consider formation of a civic movement instead of civic initiatives, operating separately. By the expert opinion, it could be a movement, aimed at popularization of civic values, ideas, practices, and ensuring continuity and reproduction of new positive results, achieved in the course of civic initiatives.