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Speech

Leveraging the OGP to promote information integrity and media freedom – Armenian perspective

Hello everyone,

It is a great pleasure to join you today for this **timely** discussion. I would like to thank the Open Government Partnership and the Forum on Information and Democracy for bringing together such a diverse group of people committed to transparency and freedom of expression.

Challenge

Open governance is only as good as the people who shape it. When we take a quick look at those shaping it across the world, it's easy to feel a deep sense of pessimism. In these days, when disinformation floods in— sometimes originating from the highest political leaders and spread by social networks—manipulating the minds of those lacking knowledge and education.

Media and civil society have never faced such challenging times of the undermined public trust, growing threats to journalists, cutting of the financial means and the loss of sustainability. Addressing these issues requires a coordinated effort—one that bridges the open government and information integrity communities. This is both the most crucial and the most difficult moment for OGP and the Forum on Information and Democracy to act together.

Current initiatives/Armenia

I am happy to present the Armenian perspective on how we leveraged the OGP processes for ensuring information integrity hoping that it can serve as a good example for many others.

For creating strategic responses and building national resilience against information disorder in the post-war and crisis situation, by closely working with the civil society, the Armenian Government adopted a comprehensive Concept and the Action plan for uniting the efforts of the government, civil society and citizens to combat disinformation.

The coordinated response is built upon three strategic pillars:

1) Strengthen the capabilities of state institutions of Armenia to detect, analyze and expose disinformation.

Civil society and the government collaborated to integrate key actions of this **pillar** in the **OGP Armenia Action Plan**. Among these initiatives is the **introduction of a FOI self-assessment system**, aimed at enhancing transparency, access to information, and greater accountability in the fight against disinformation. The system developed by the FOICA and was invested in the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, and the Ministry of Economy. This tool enables government bodies to self-evaluate the implementation practice of freedom of information and ensure compliance with minimum ATI standards.

The second commitment that also became an integral part of the OGP Action plan was Investing strategic communication new architecture of the Government aimed at comprehensively reforming the structure and work for communication departments; develop and invest communication protocols; establish a dedicated department within the Prime Minister's office to coordinate Government communication at a strategic level, support state bodies in ensuring unified, coordinated, secure, accessible, inclusive and proactive public communication.

Under the 2nd pillar of the Concept it was planned to **2) Improve cooperation, to engage and mobilize the private sector to tackle disinformation**. Through active cooperation with both the government, civil society, the private sector can take over the role of developing innovative tools through automated solutions and artificial intelligence for combating disinformation.

And finally, under the 3rd pillar it is envisioned **3) to raise awareness and level of education on media freedoms and media literacy by constituting societal resilience towards information disorder**. It is planned to implement activities aimed at development of media literacy, by integrating it in general education system, conduct trainings for teachers, working with groups excluded from general education, to strengthen capacities of the state employees.

What needs to be further done by leveraging the OGP to address the challenges.

I would like to present a few recommendations from my side on the key directions in which our collective collaboration could develop.

1. **First of all, access to information should be fostered. ATI is the golden key and one of the core values of OGP. Without access to reliable information we can't enjoy all other rights and the** fight against disinformation becoming a house of cards. Governments must fully guarantee the public's right to access accurate, timely, and reliable information. In addition, proper measures should be taken to ensure proactive access to information.
2. **Media and AI Literacy – this has a central** role for equipping both children and adults with the skills to combat harmful information.

Nobody argues the necessity of learning math at school. The basic calculation skills we learn at school, and likewise, every child in the school has a right to gain media literacy and AI competences. As deepfake technology, and new forms of digital manipulation evolve because of AI tools, Governments and civil society should collaborate to integrate fact-checking and AI skills into general education system to empower citizens against manipulative narratives.

3. **Public broadcast media – I’d attribute a leading role to the Public broadcasters in promoting information integrity** and open government partnership core values to educate the people by virtue of their objectives and mandate. Bring high-quality, educational and insightful content to help people obtain fact-based, verified and reliable information.
4. **Transparency of the media ownership** –Another key area where OGP has done tremendous work so far. People has limited information who owns the media and what ownership chain exist in the media environment including engagement of politicians and public figures. Transparency in the media enables people to use information to better understand the different influences on the production, collection, curation and dissemination of the content. The **OGP** has played a crucial role in supporting **Armenia’s reform on beneficial ownership transparency, including in the media sector**. Through OGP’s multi-stakeholder approach, Armenia was able to introduce an economy-wide holistic reform as a part of the government’s efforts to combat corruption. The Government has included a commitment in the Open Government Partnership 4th National Action Plan 2018-2020 to ensure beneficial ownership transparency of all business sectors including the media. Through OGP’s **co-creation process**, civil society organizations, journalists, and government agencies worked together to develop a **legal framework** requiring media companies to disclose their true owners. This ensured **broad participation and public trust** in the reform and Armenia became one of the pioneering countries investing BO reform in all sectors of the business.
5. **The next key area which needs our collaborative efforts is financial instability of the media, in light of the sudden freeze of USAID funding**. This has sent shockwaves through independent newsrooms across the world. Many smaller outlets face closure, while larger ones stay for financial strain. In the meantime, the decline in independent news outlets will lead to an increase in disinformation, as the reliable sources for information will be decreased. Moreover, autocratic leaders in some countries may seize the moment to tighten the media control. We should joint and mobilize our efforts to find quick

and viable solutions (including engaging European institutions and private donors) to fill the sudden gap and prevent long-term damage to media pluralism.

6. **It is more than obvious that no single actor can address the current challenges.** Governments, civil society, media, private sector and technology platforms must work together to co-create solutions that ensure free, independent, and transparent media ecosystem. The OGP and Forum on Information and Democracy may closely work with the governments for creating a more favorable environment for the media and civil society by launching diversified incentives to ensure financial sustainability and providing technical assistance in this new reality. And only through collaboration we can ensure that governments uphold their commitments to transparency, independent media, and access to information.