



**EURASIA  
PARTNERSHIP  
FOUNDATION**

# The Public Perceptions on Freedom of Expression and Censorship in Armenia

Findings of a Qualitative Research

2009

# Major Questions of the Research



- ❑ To reveal the public perceptions on the Freedom of Expression (FoE).

Via Focus group Interviews (16)

- ❑ To reveal the state of the FoE in different spheres of human activity: censorship, obstacles to FoE etc.

Via In-depth (expert) Interviews (31)

# Attitude Towards FoE differs according to:



## ❑ Individual image

Personal style, individual qualities, etc.

## ❑ Private relationships

Family, kin, friends, community etc.

## ❑ Institutional relationships

- Art, literature
- Political field
- Economic activity, social security
- Legal field (social protection)

# Ideal Types



Depending on to what extent the respondents consider FoE permissible:

- in individual image,
- in private relationships,
- in institutional relationships,

the following main ideal types can be distinguished in today's Armenian society:

- Traditional (patriarchal)
- Political
- Liberal

# The Three Ideal Types



- ❑ **All three types** state the importance of FoE in the spheres which secure financial prosperity (**economy, social welfare**).
- ❑ **All three types** state the importance of FoE in the **legal field** as a tool for protection of FoE in the spheres securing welfare.
- ❑ **Traditional and Political types** differ only in their attitude toward FoE in the **political sphere**. The first consider it a danger to statehood\*; the second consider it a means for the development (normalization) of the state.
- ❑ **Liberal type** implies that FoE must be instituted according to the Constitution, Legislation, and that any other mechanism of regulation of FoE (public opinion, tradition, etc) is unacceptable.

\*"We are such an emotional nation that emotions always win until something very bad happens. History has shown that freedom is prohibited to such emotional nations; even democracy is wrong for us".

# Part One



## In Depth Interviews

# Methodology of Sociological Research

## In-Depth Interviews. 31 Respondents

### Criteria



| Categories       | Spheres                      |                              |                                      |                                |                                |                                |
|------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| NGO              | Human Rights (Yerevan)       | Ecology (Yerevan)            | Health / Vulnerable Groups (Yerevan) | Community Development (Gyumri) | Education, Youth (Gyumri)      | Human Rights (Vanadzor)        |
| Political Party  | Pro-government Parliamentary | Pro-government Parliamentary | Pro-government Extra Parliamentary   | Opposition Parliamentary       | Opposition Extra Parliamentary | Opposition Extra Parliamentary |
| Art / Literature | Cinema                       | Theatre                      | Music / Dance                        | Painting / Sculpture           | Literature                     | Literature                     |
| Academia         | Humanities (NAS RA)          | Humanities (IHE)             | Humanities (IHE)                     | Exact Sciences (NAS RA)        | Exact Sciences (IHE)           | Exact Sciences (IHE)           |
| Mass Media       | TV (pro-government)          | TV (Opposition)              | Press (pro-government)               | Press (opposition)             | Radio (pro-government)         | Radio (opposition)             |
| HRD              |                              |                              |                                      |                                |                                |                                |

# Description of In-Depth Respondents Ideal Types



*Distributed in the following manner, in decreasing order:*

**Traditional**, found in all categories

“This is also a form of free expression which does not conform to any... logic. Irrespective of everything, you feel that whether the person in that position has attained that post through fair means or foul, nevertheless there is the issue of stability (of the country)”.

“I have decided not to subscribe anymore. On one of the last pages of the newspaper "X" we read: "Devoted to virginity and the 'red apple': complexes, typical for the Armenians". It means, that this newspaper is specializing on the issues of promoting adultery and fornication... They want to destroy the family, because they say virginity is unnecessary. If the virginity is not necessary, than the fornication is normal”.

**Political**, found in all categories

**Liberal**, more characteristic in representatives of the arts and literature

“Sex is not discussed; it doesn't exist. With us, procreation occurs vegetatively or, I don't know... They cut the barrel and bury it in the soil. The sex organs do not exist. No one speaks about it ... everything is done in a closed, repulsive, pathological way. Probably, if Freud had been in Armenia, he would have written two extra volumes”.



# Non-Governmental Organisations and The Institute of The Human Rights Defender Censorship and Obstacles to FoE



## ❑ (State) censorship present in mass media

“I sent an article to the ‘Republic of Armenia’ newspaper about the accounts of Lake Sevan to show... how much inaccurate information they are giving to the government. The editor... has said, “yes, not bad, it’s good, but a pity that I have already printed an anti-government article this year”. Do you understand? The (*official*) press which in fact serves the state... is carrying out anti-government and anti-national activities”.

## ❑ Coercion and threats by state structures

## ❑ Authoritarianism of high-ranking officials, rigid mind-set, intolerant of other viewpoints

“In all discussions... they switch off the microphone. For example, that X ... in the Presidency chamber of the National Academy of Sciences, in everyone’s presence, said , ”I won’t allow, *respondent’s name*, to speak as his viewpoint does not correspond to our viewpoint”.

## ❑ The inadequate level of civil consciousness in society

“Let’s assume... if we talk about the rights of prisoners... both in society and among intellectuals, this is very difficult to comprehend. They immediately assume, “Are you defending the rights of criminals?””

# Political Parties

## Censorship and Obstacles to FoE



### *Pro-government*

#### Internal “Glavlit”\*

#### Avoidance of being taken advantage of by other powers

“I cannot be absolutely free when discussing my issues with a representative of another political power as I will have my doubts that it may in some way, somehow be exploited. And that creates some sort of impediment. An impediment is placed in relationships”.

### *Opposition*

#### Coercion, violence and threats by the authorities and law-enforcement bodies

“It is continually violated... Right now, if I want to call a meeting, they won’t allow it. If I want to disseminate an announcement about that meeting through the media. They won’t permit it...”.

\*Main Administration for the Protection of State Secrets in the Press under the USSR Council of Ministers was the official censorship and state secret protection organ in the Soviet Union. The censorship agency was established in 1922 under the name "Main Administration for Literary and Publishing Affairs".

# Mass Media

## Censorship and Obstacles to FoE



### *Pro-government*

#### Internal “Glavlit”

#### “Sensing” the acceptable boundaries of FoE

“When, 5 years ago, Tigran Naghdalyan said harsh things, the next day they shot him. Today I am saying the same things but they are not killing me. And if tomorrow someone comes and says even harsher things, but they shoot him, then my sense of what is allowed and therefore my freedom is at the acceptable level for today. If they don’t shoot him, then we will go toward higher levels of freedom”.

“It is very important... before implementing FoE... to assess the risks and assess the limit”.

### *Pro-government and opposition*

#### Coercion and violence by the authorities and law-enforcement bodies

#### The authorities ordering of information to be, or not to be, published

“Prior to each election. Grigor Amalyan and the president’s administration, collect all the heads of the mass media and say, “You must do this, you must do this...””.

# Art, Literature

## Censorship and Obstacles to FoE



### ❑ Clan norms existing in the mass media and the art critic-literary community

“This kind of gangish, hoodlumy relationship, an unprofessional approach, unprincipled... And an absence of taste ... What a lot of bad things I said, right?”

“In Armenia, one television company may not broadcast the song, saying ‘the other company is broadcasting it and I don’t like their boss...’”.

### ❑ Low level of competence and fettered (not free) thinking in the art critic-literary community

### ❑ Absence of financing, budgetary tightness

“Since there are great thoughts, compositions... There is no one who will help officialy or legally... there is no financer for my idea to be implemented”.

# Academia

## Censorship and Obstacles to FoE



- ❑ The inviolability of historic, “national” myths
- ❑ Taboo of themes which may result in the destruction of “the Armenian” character

“(During analysis) you come across issues which are not to the liking of Armenians. Because our ethnologists are first and foremost traditional ‘grannies and grandpas’, they see heresy in that... They say we shouldn’t introduce that (*e.g. discussion on the ‘red apple’*) you are distorting the national culture... What are you passing on to the generations?”

- ❑ The professional obsolescence of the academic community

“(In order to be printed): the majority of (*Academic Councils*) have last read a book during the soviet period. God forbid, that they read what you have written. You are obliged to explain that such books already exist in the world. You say go and argue with Bourdieu. In order to appear competent, they are obliged to accept... But if you don’t approach them correctly, they say, go and put it into a scientific format”.

- ❑ The sacrificing of academic standards in the name of financial security

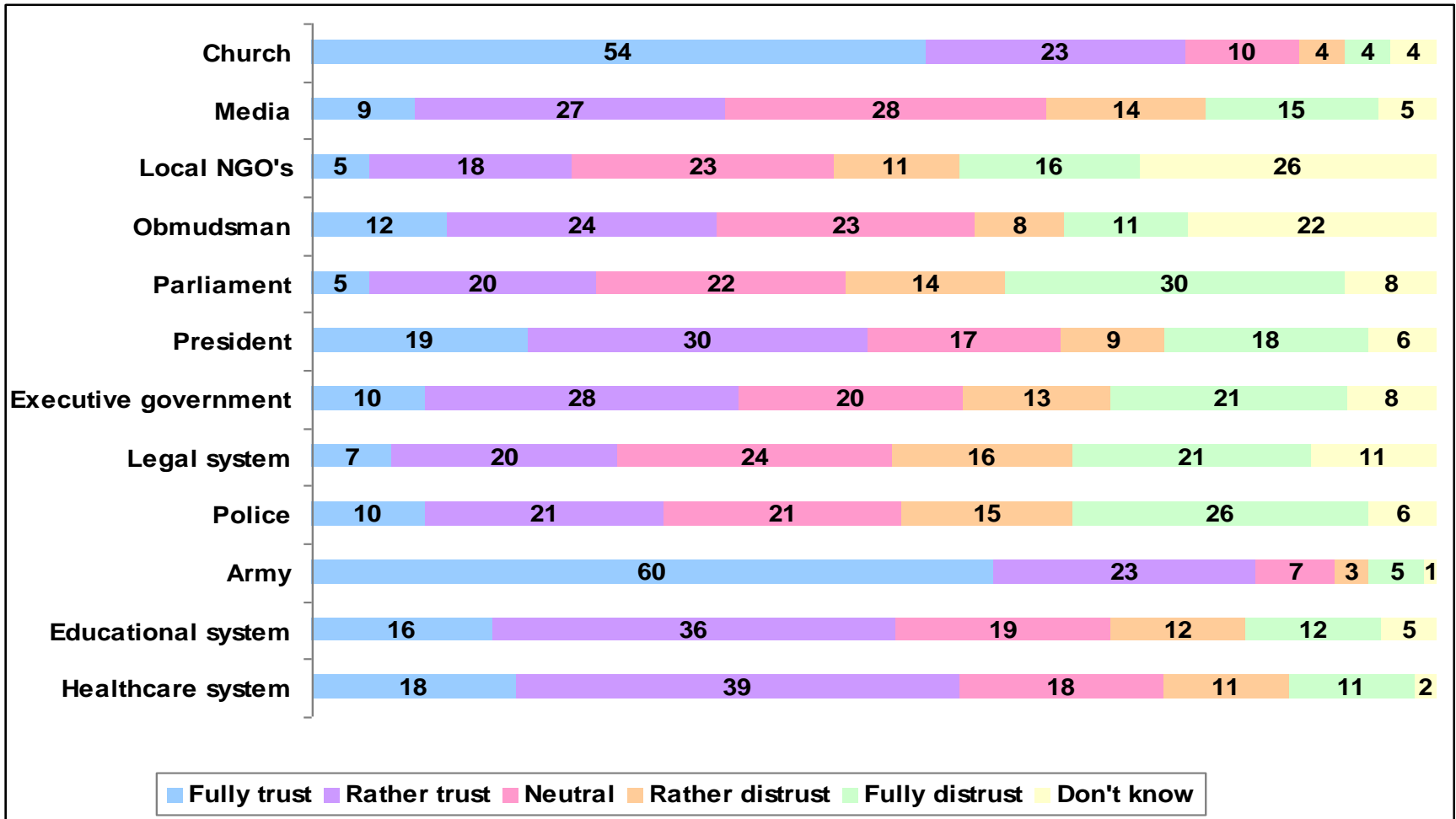
“Today when science and education is not financed, it is embarrassing to say, that we are reaching out to our students, the fee payer, thinking that he should pay our wages... Dismiss the paying student? It means that my salary will decrease”.

# Part Two



# Focus Group Interviews

*Additional Slide #1. CRRC Data Initiative 2008.*  
Trust Towards Institutions



# Methodology of Sociological Research

## Focus Group (FG) Interviews. 16 Focus Groups



### *Location of FG, distribution*

| Geographic position of the region |
|-----------------------------------|
| Capital city                      |
| Region close to the centre        |
| Region at a medium distance       |
| Border region                     |

| Type of settlement in each region |
|-----------------------------------|
| Regional centre                   |
| Town (1)                          |
| Village (2)                       |

### *Criteria for composition of FG, distribution*

| Education /<br>Age / Sex | Primary / Incomplete<br>Secondary / Secondary | Vocational / Incomplete<br>Higher Education | Higher Education |
|--------------------------|---|---|------------------|
| 18-30                    | Female/Male                                   | Mixed                                       | Female/Male      |
| 31-50                    | Female/Male                                   | Female/Male                                 | Female/Male      |
| 51 and up                | Female/Male                                   | Mixed                                       | Female/Male      |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>16 Focus Groups</b>                        |   |                  |



# *Main Results of Focus Groups*

## Main Associative Components of FoE



### Fear, psychological pressure, punishment

FoE is defined by the exclusion of the above mentioned negative phenomena

### Necessity for boundaries to FoE

FoE is valued when there are certain restrictions on it

### The pointlessness of FoE

FoE is equated to the ineffectiveness and lack of success of speech and actions in personal lives

### The impossibility of FoE

FoE is perceived as a “fairy tale” which never occurs in real life

# Desirable Regulation of FoE

## According to the Ideal Types



- ❑ How should FoE be regulated?
- ❑ What should be the acceptable level of restriction of FoE?

# Liberal Character

*Typical for overwhelming minority of respondents*



## They use the following ideological legitimization

### The liberalisation of 'the Armenian'

The patriarchal system is considered a social injustice. Liberalisation is considered a mechanism for the development of state, culture , etc.

### Democratization of Armenia, creation of a civil society

Civil society is considered important within the context of the development and competitiveness of the state

### Welfare of society

A free environment for economic activity is considered important for securing prosperity

### Implementation of rights

The social and legal protection of the individual is considered important

*Liberal Character:*

## Desirable Regulations of FoE



FoE should be regulated according to principles of democracy and civil society: Legislation is the key

- ❑ In individual, e.g. personal style
  - ❑ In private relationships
  - ❑ In institutional relationships
- 
- On the whole it is characteristic to women age 18-30; less frequently, to young men.
  - In private relationships it is mainly characterised by tolerant attitude towards non-traditional behaviour by others;
  - rather than by a desire to personally behave in that manner.\*

\*"Recently there was a 'burial of the red apple'... Elderly women were speaking on TV, saying 'Oh, a curse on them'... You know, we ourselves also think that after all something is holding you back from taking that step. But... there are girls who want to live freely. Let them live. It's their life and their right."

# Traditional and Political Characters

*Each of these is typical for almost half of the respondents*



## Ideological legitimization

- Preservation of Armenian Identity: Non-distortion of the character of 'the Armenian'**

Defined by traits considered appropriate and inappropriate, suitable and unsuitable to 'the Armenian': dignity, shame, humility, etc.

- The survival of the nation: non-destruction.**

The preservation of 'the Armenian' character is considered the guarantee of the survival of the nation. Deviation is regarded as the basis for the destruction of the nation.

- Welfare of society**

A free environment for economic activity is considered important to secure welfare

- Implementation of rights**

Social and legal protection is considered important for economic activity and social security

## *Traditional and Political Characters*

# FoE in Individual Image and Private Relationships

### Acceptable boundaries to FoE:

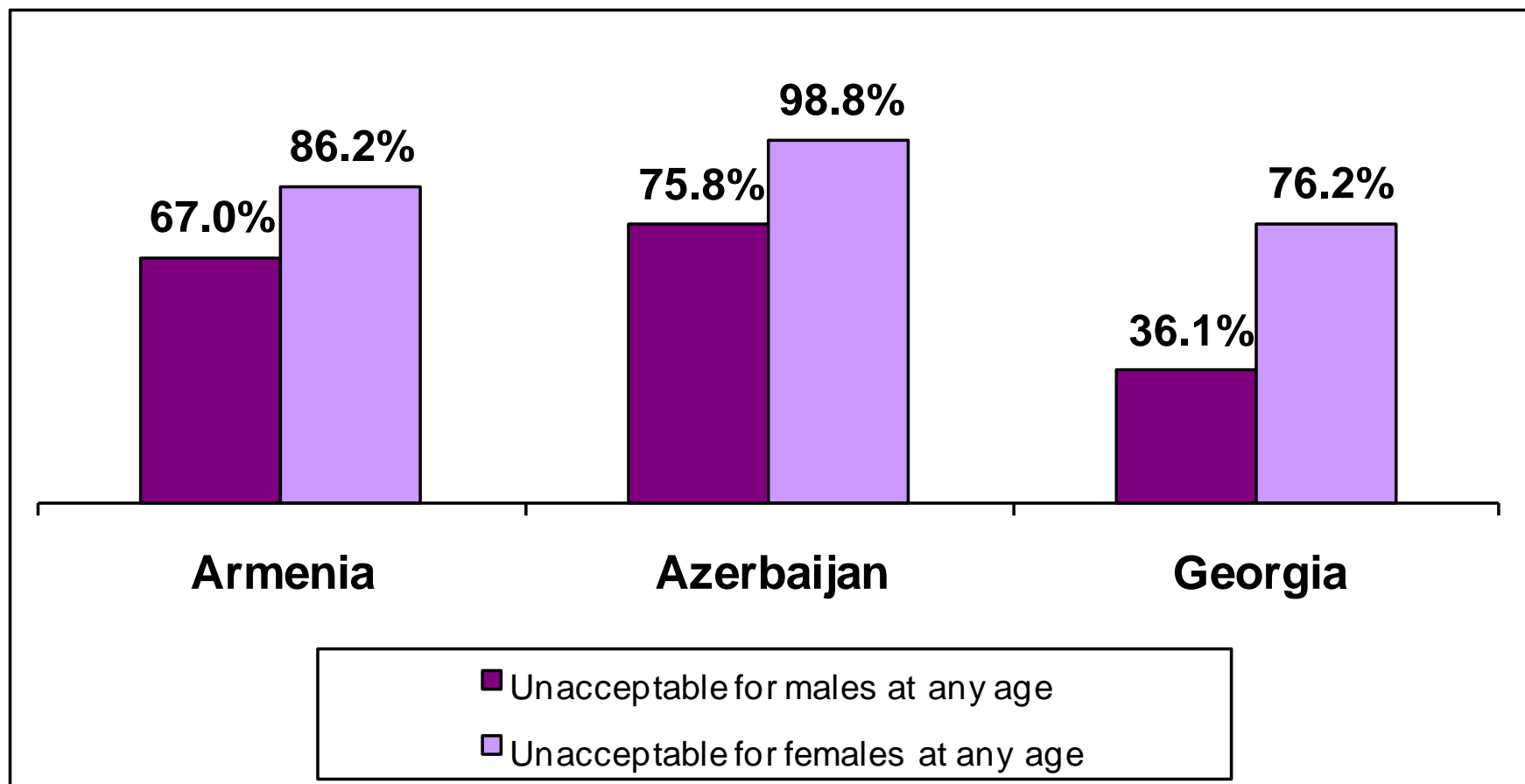
FoE should be restricted:

- In individual's sex life: pre-marital, extra-marital, homosexual etc.\*
- In personal free style and behaviour
- In the following relationships : Adult-juvenile, parent-child, man-woman (familial, community).
- In religion: e.g. not Armenian Apostolic belief, etc.

I.e. in all those spheres which may result in the destruction of Armenian traditionalism and introduction of foreign culture and mores.

\*"France, under the name of 'developed', comes to us 'undeveloped' Armenians and preaches to us that we can bury the 'red apple'. And one day they may insist that homosexuality is the only option, so that they can ruin this nation".

*Additional Slide #2. CRRC Data Initiative 2006.*  
The Acceptable Age for Having Pre-Marital Sex



## Dangers leading to the destruction of Armenian traditionalism:

- Mass media: sitcoms, films, advertisements\*
  - The showing of sex scenes and accessories, adultery etc.
  - The glorification of slang, the world of gangsters and criminals, etc.
- Free style clothing and accessorising
  - In the case of men: long hair, jewellery etc.
  - In the case of women: revealing or masculine clothes , etc.
- Non-Armenian dances
  - Erotic movements and attire
- Bars, strip clubs, brothels
- Sects
- Homosexuals
- Drug addiction

\*Here we come across the 'third person effect', according to which, people are inclined to believe that the mass media has a greater effect on others than on themselves; no one in the FG groups mentions the changes in their own behaviour, brought about by the mass media.



# FoE in the Political Field: 'should'



**For Traditional character** the acceptable restrictions to FoE are:\*

- Protest demonstrations, marches, political actions etc.
- Criticism, ridicule, etc. of the authorities (particularly in the mass media)
- Political opposition (being anti-government)

**For Political and Liberal characters** above mentioned restrictions are unacceptable.

**For Political and Liberal characters** the acceptable restrictions to FoE are:

- Unlawful and arbitrary acts of the authorities
- Immunity and privileges of persons in authority

\*"At that time when Khrushchev was the king... Khrushchev gave freedom of speech, the right to free expression... this was the exact opposite of Stalin's thesis... It was from that point that socialism crumbled".

# *Traditional, Political and Liberal Characters*

## FoE in the Economic and Legal Fields\*



### Acceptable methods of restricting FoE:

- ❑ Constitution, Legislation

### Unacceptable methods of restricting FoE:

- ❑ Unlawful acts ('unwritten laws') of the state and non-state system:

#### *Towards the individual or kin*

- Physical violence: beatings, imprisonment, etc.
- Administrative pressure: dismissal from work, reduction in pay, etc.
- Psychological pressure, threat
- Abuse of position, particularly in establishing a monopoly
- Arbitrary decision-making by the authorities, officials, etc.

\*In the given field, there are no other acceptable limitations than those activities prohibited by law. Here we discuss the methods of restriction of FoE that are frequently implemented.

# Empirical Regulation of FoE

How does it happen in the 'real life today'  
according to the Ideal Types



- ❑ What ARE the main obstacles to FoE?
- ❑ What methods ARE implemented to regulate FoE?

# *Traditional, Political and Liberal Characters* In Individual Image and in Private Relationships



The main empirical obstacle to FoE is self-censorship:  
There exist the following reasons for self-censorship:\*

- Ridicule, insult, blame
- Discredit, gossip
- Isolation, alienation
- Physical violence
- Direct prohibition of actions, speech (silencing)
- Close social network in the community (tight personal space)
- Dependence on community relationships (getting a loan, calling for help, etc.)
- Upbringing (habitualized inhibitions, humility, etc.)

\*According to E. Noelle-Neumann's "spiral of silence" theory, the individual is inclined to avoid expressing himself, if he believes he will not receive social support".

# *Traditional, Political and Liberal Characters* In the Political, Economic, Legal Fields



## Methods of obstructing FoE:

- Dismissal from work (individual or kin)\*
- Threats against individual or kin
- Punishment of kin (also in other establishments)
- Physical violence against individual or kin
  - Beating, killing, imprisonment etc.
- Administrative arbitrariness, vindictiveness
  - Deprivation of pension, benefit and other privileges, non-provision of documents, deliberate carelessness, etc
- Bribery
- Hostility, defamation

\*"My husband is a member of a political party. They were saying to him, 'No, you have to come to this side. If you don't, we will dismiss you from your job.'... Then, (*when*) he didn't go, they dismissed him".

*Traditional, Political and Liberal Characters*  
In the Political, Economic, Legal Fields



Reasons for self-censorship:\*

- Fear of losses
- Prevention of lawless acts, violence
- Defense of kin
- Uselessness of expression
- The ineffectiveness of attempts at reinstating FoE
- Lack of trust in the court, legal defense and other systems
- Community norms (pangs of conscience about bringing complaints against acquaintances, etc.)

*Traditional, Political and Liberal Characters*  
In the Political, Economic, Legal Fields



Sources of 'horrific' stories:

- Personal experience
- Experience of kin or acquaintance
- Well-known scandalous incidents\*

\*"Those who spoke were detained; those who spoke were killed; those who spoke, were put under pressure. They have such intelligence, are university graduates, they are clever people (compared to us), what can we do if they can't do anything?"

*Traditional, Political and Liberal Characters*  
In the Political, Economic, Legal Fields



The most effective strategy when encountering breaches of FoE

*In the overwhelming majority of respondents:*

- Avoiding action
- Keeping silent

*In the minority of respondents:*

- Struggling within the framework of the law



## *Traditional, Political and Liberal Characters*

# The Personal Traits and Conditions Necessary for Free Expression in Armenia

### *In the overwhelming majority of respondents:*

- “suicide volunteer” , “Kamikaze”
- “crazy”, “hole in the head”, “mad”, “reckless”
- “fearless”, “brave”, “audacious”, “bold” (also, daring to disregard or despise public opinion)
- “alone” (without relatives)
- “having a backer”, “being well covered”, “having the support of a patron”
- “having money ”, “ready to flee”\*

### *In the minority of respondents:*

- “chameleon”, “double-faced” (able to change opinion in time)
- “stubborn”, “strong-willed”, “responsible”,
- “educated”, “intelligent”, ”someone who knows the law”
- “just”, “honest”
- Also “drunk”, in the case of men

\*”(He/she should have) a country, a safe heaven, where one can flee knowing that he will never return”.

# The Ranking of Armenia against Other Countries, with Respect to FoE:

State of affairs according to respondents



1

2

3

Low level of  
FoE

Medium level  
of FoE

High level of  
FoE

1. Muslim, African, Central Asian and other countries
2. Armenia, post-Soviet countries (except the Baltic states)
3. Europe, USA, China, etc

# Desired Ranking of Armenia against Other Countries with Respect to FoE



| 1                | 2                   | 2' | 3                 |
|------------------|---------------------|----|-------------------|
| Low level of FoE | Medium level of FoE |    | High level of FoE |

1. In close to half cases **the present level (2)** is desirable:

- ❑ Movement toward 1 is considered regression because of the excessive restrictions to freedom (private for women) characteristic to those countries
- ❑ 3rd ranking for Armenia is considered loss of “national character” leading to the path of possible annihilation of the country.

2. For a large part of the remaining half of cases, the following is desirable:

**“A little” Europeanization (2')**

- ❑ 2' is considered the desired level of rule of law without the degeneration characteristic to liberal countries.
- ❑ Sometimes 2' is desired to reach a certain ‘harmless’ level of liberalisation in private relationships.\*

\*”If, so to speak, a woman wants to work, strives for education... Let them give her freedom in those things. But to stray from the path... or go to bars, let them not give her freedom. But..., where there is a calling toward family, a love of studying, a desire for work, let there be freedom”.

# Methods for Improving the State of FoE

## Recommendations



1. To produce a series of reality-based T.V. programs highlighting the fact, that in other countries even high-ranking officials are “equal before the law”. These programs, films will show trials punishing that sector of society which in Armenia is considered “unpunishable” (presidents, ministers, etc.) and will depict the “privileged class” being subject to the rule of law (e.g. the fact that even the daughters of George Bush were fined, etc.).
2. To produce computer games ensuring victory/success via the defense of human rights and democratic values.
3. To create a communicative, interactive platform for like-minded members of society on the issue of FoE and to establish a social-intellectual network among them. This will bring together like-minded individuals now separated and will make its current marginal discourse all the more audible.

# Methods for Improving the State of FoE

## Recommendations



4. To produce advertisements, organize events, etc., aimed to foster tolerance in the choice of a personal (legal) lifestyle.
5. To come up with a list of “worst of” awards for law enforcement bodies; e.g. the “worst judge”, the “worst prosecutor” of the year award, etc. d to transform the experience of FoE into customary practice.
6. *Donor organizations:* Prior to the financing of the NGO, conduct an evaluation of the quality of its human resources (evaluative tests, etc.) with the aim of revealing whether or not the staff’s value system corresponds to the overall focus of the NGO. This will help avoid inappropriate stakeholders/grantees and the squandering of financial and other resources.

# Methods for Improving the State of FoE

## Recommendations



7. To launch a debate program entitled “Who is an Armenian?”. Invite experts who raise “taboo themes” concerning the Armenian society (the influence of other nations on Armenian customs, the disclosure of censored events, etc.). This will help overcome the “inviolability” of existing stereotypes regarding the Armenian nation and its history and the uniformity of opinion.
8. To establish an interactive theater aimed at widening the possibilities of individual (“non-elite”) FoE and to transform the experience of FoE into customary practice.
9. To assemble the “foolhardy” individuals (those who fight for FoE), who will reinforce the public censuring of law-breakers.