

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF PARLIAMENTARY CULTURE FROM AN AXIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE: INTERVIEW WITH MARIAM MARGARYAN

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EUCACIS in Brief publishes opinion pieces and short articles written by fellows of the EUCACIS PhD Support Programme, alumni of the Master Programme „The European Union and Central Asia in the International System“ (EUCAIS) and other members of the wider EUCACIS network. It aims at making the debates within the network, notably during the EUCACIS conferences and PhD schools, accessible to a wider public. The papers are available on the programme website: [www.eucacis.eu](http://www.eucacis.eu)

## About the Author

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*Mariam Margaryan is the Head of the Chair of Political Governance and Public Policy at the Public Administration Academy of Armenia. She holds a PhD in Political Science and is specialised in the issues on the political elites and the problems of democratic transition in the Republic of Armenia. Dr Margaryan gives a scientific assessment on the democratisation issues of political culture within the framework of parliamentary governance.*

## **1. What is your interpretation of the concept of parliamentary culture**

**M.M.:** Parliamentary culture, being a component of political culture that in its turn is a part of a corporate culture, is a socio-political and ideological phenomenon. It includes not only the institutional and functional prospects of civil society development, but also the level of political competence of deputies, that is having skills, knowledge and ability to foster the efficient development of parliamentary performance. Parliamentary culture embodies the functional field of political culture: it is based on the necessity of forming and developing a cooperative culture between the parliament and the society, as well as among citizens, regardless of their political party affiliation. The functional framework includes the functions of consolidation and guidance of political interests, legitimisation, political socialisation, representation, orientation, integration, educational and communication functions. Due to these functions, parliamentary culture modernises public discourse, within the framework of establishing gaming cooperation anticipating exercising a method of decision making to determine the essence of strategy and tactics of political actors.

Because of these two categorical concepts, the term “parliamentary political culture” is formulated, which in the context of parliamentary governance creates more space for political analysis. Consequently, parliamentary political culture includes a person’s socialisation and the modernisation of the values in the multi-level space, where the political elite is functioning. The necessity of the democratisation of parliamentary political culture is conditioned by the need to ensure the effectiveness of parliamentary performance. The latter considers two issues: 1) a person’s political socialisation and 2) modernisation of the discourse of elite-electorate.

## **2. Are there necessary preconditions for the establishment of parliamentary political culture in the Republic of Armenia from the cultural perspective?**

**M.M.:** The democratisation of parliamentary political culture is not a mechanical process. It is not only the subjective expression of political content, but it is also being transformed to the conscious level after it is embodied in the behaviour of both citizens and political actors. As a constituent part of a citizen’s political activity, the adoption of political values simultaneously bears the specific influence of public demands. At first, it happens on the basis of adoption of normative rules of the political system including not only the contemporary demands, but also past experiences, due to which the future vision has to be designed. The above mentioned provides the inheritance between the past and the future, uniting the society as an integrative organism with its past, present and future expectations.

Due to there-evaluation of the development of cooperation, political culture solves the problems of publicising of state authority guaranteeing the person’s continuous socialization and the life-long civic education. From this perspective there is a need to consider the German experience of civic education, according to which after the Second World War citizens feeling demoralised, having lost confidence and hope, were able to re-establish their attitude towards the state institution as well as their own role in the process of state-building.

The development of parliamentary culture considers the transformation of public policy, the aim of which is the provision of public security. It is widely accepted that within the framework of current political processes taking place especially in the post-Soviet states, the concept of public security is considered from a wider perspective. It goes beyond the traditional military aspect. From my point of view, under the concept of public security one should consider the citizens’ equal opportunities of self-realisation, self-expression and self-development in political, socio-economic and cultural spheres that lead to the strengthening of society’s potential.

In this regard, I guess that ensuring the realisation of the above-mentioned opportunities is conditioned by the quality of

cooperation between the political elite and civil society institutes. In the framework of parliamentary governance the political elite—in cooperation with the institutes of civil society—should modernize the political culture analysing past failures of decision-making, and develop a civil society based at greater civic participation, engagement, inclusion and debate. The latter will give the opportunity to get rid of the Armenian “donor-based civil society” perception. According to Armenian experts, during the 27 years of independence the main function of the foreign funded civil society was the thwarting of natural political processes and the imposing of a particular model of civil society.

In this context, it is worth mentioning the contradictions of civilization of Western and Eastern political cultures. The Western culture has brought the philosophy of free participation (*laissez-faire*), according to which there is an existence of the rule of law that forms the style of governance, the guarantee of a person’s self-determination, free market development, and state neutrality towards the sustainment of a civil society. Eastern culture is based on the need of mediation of a charismatic teacher between the citizen and the authority and on the acceptance by the citizens, that authority is a divine gift.

The mentioned shows the evident contradiction between Western and Eastern cultures. Although there is a need to emphasise that there are also successful examples of both, effective cultural and civilizational interrelation such as Japan, where in order to overcome the consequences of the post-war occupation period, the state elite implemented the industrial and technological experience to transform Japan’s traditional political culture into liberal democratic system of values. In the form of integrative culture, in order to provide the active and conscious participation of citizens as well as for the provision of effective governance, Japan’s political elite transformed the national and traditional system of values according to liberal-democratic ideas.

### **3. What are the values of Armenia’s parliamentary political culture within its continuously transforming institutional design, aimed to ensure the advance of democratic transition to consolidation?**

*M.M.:* The experience of constitutional reforms in the Republic of Armenia indicates the following issues: 1) the lack of a citizen-centred approach, 2) the crisis of constitutional legitimacy, and 3) the alienation of society from the participation in the political processes. Although, after the constitutional reforms that led to a parliamentary system of governance for now, such a character of political culture is not satisfying. In all stages of development, political culture implements its main function that is the person’s political socialisation. The entry of both ordinary citizens and politicians into the decision-making process is being realised through an existing system of cultural values and norms, through political behaviour examples, and through the acceptance of political values.

In its turn, the entry of new generations to the Armenian political life ensures political socialisation, highlighting the inheritance of the political development of the society. It creates a multi-level dialogue between the state and the citizen, which, by guaranteeing political stability, enables the ruling elite to act as a bearer and creator of democratic political culture as well as to take the responsibility for cooperative culture.

In this regard, the multidimensional values of a person’s socialisation are of great importance in the process of parliamentary governance of Armenia. If this mechanism works successfully, the individual acquires not only the necessary educational and professional trainings, but also motivating goals, associative ties and values that are identical to this or that social group. The logic of the multidimensional socialisation process, which is based on the establishment of liberal values, has been violated in the Republic of Armenia, or rather: it is made with flaws and fragmentation. It leads to the fact that a person enters politics not only by the isolated and mutually exclusive value system, but also from the indifferent and limited social acceptability as the need for the harmonisation of liberal and traditional cultural values is ignored.



#### 4. What are the obstacles of establishing a parliamentary culture in Armenia?

**M.M.:** First of all, it is worth noting that a poor level of legal and political consciousness, the absence of conscious political participation and the de-socialisation of the aging groups of the society limits the prospects of the development of citizenship, civic stance and civic culture, as a result of which the individual is in a quest for continuous cultural and ideological harmonisation.

Secondly, polarisation of political opinions and the imprecision of values continue to occupy a key place in Armenian political culture. Parallel, the process of establishing parliamentary governance is accompanied by the ineffectiveness of social dialogue and a fractionated value system not promoting the functional development of the civil society.

As a result of institutional but not functional development of the civil society in the RA, the behaviour of political actors bears elements of both populism on the one hand, and nationalism and cosmopolitanism on the other hand. Due to these factors, separate groups of the governing elite use the complex of inferiority of marginal strata integrating them into their parties and party activities. This takes place because of ineffectiveness of social representativeness between the electorate and decision-makers. According to the above-mentioned, both newly appointed politicians and experienced political actors implement communicative and media manipulation functions in favour of meeting of social and identity modernisation imperatives. Even in the framework of the new political reality, politicians continue to have mutually agreed oligarchic benefits.

#### 5. What steps should the governing elite implement in order to overcome the issues in the development process of parliamentary political culture?

**M.M.:** First, to provide the effectiveness of parliamentary governance, there is a need to democratise the value system of the public relations (PR) and government relations (GR) technology elaboration, reducing the level of manipulation. The basis of the elaboration

and development of PR and GR technologies is the continuous modernisation of political discourse. If the latter does not undergo modernisation, the overcoming process of the crisis of political development is being extended. Thus, in the process from democratic transition to consolidation, the governing elite as the main actor of modernisation aims at a discourse to provide social dialogue, solidarity of generations, and the implementation of a culture of the authorities that needs to undergo a humanisation.

From this perspective, the governing elite should openly recruit persons able to change the culture of their authority meeting current imperatives. They are the very persons responsible for the implementation and modernisation of the political culture and are interested in developing the civic culture. Therefore, it is pretty realistic that this discourse is viewed as a communicative interrelationship between political actors to re-establish their own position and to consolidate the public good. Political discourse has supervising and legitimising authority, legitimacy functions that are periodically publicising the results of the implemented agenda, due to which political elites have acquired state authority and orientated civil society to democratic consolidation.

Second, to get public support, the governing elite should ensure for the Armenian citizens the opportunities of individual's social mobility, creating effective ways of communication and practically showing the substantiation of their own ambitions towards authority.

Third, deputies should initiate relevant legislative amendments and initiatives aimed at raising the quality of life, which meet the society's demands. This is the way to prevent the dissatisfaction with the allocation of public goods and consequences of adopted decisions that is accompanied with alienation, poverty, emigration and demographic crisis. Otherwise, the adopted laws will not embody the real needs of the society and will not empower it.

Summarising the results of political amendments taking place in Armenia, there is a need to emphasise that parliamentary governance gives an opportunity to the political elite to implement public policies in the transition-consolidation paradigm.

The effectiveness of this process should be accompanied with humanism, enabling

1. a harmonisation of political processes and public expectations, analysing the goals of political development both regionally and globally,
2. a systematisation of priorities of political activity and the formation of democratic reforms avoiding situational and personalised solutions, and
3. a reduction of marginalisation of public relations ensuring parliamentary and civic supervision of the activities of the political elite.

Therefore, parliamentary culture through the formation and development of cooperative culture creates an opportunity to prevent the entry of ambitions of marginalised politicians bringing a fake political agenda and making artificial noise to distract public attention from real issues.