Inaugural Meeting

Strasbourg, 24 October 2018

FINAL STATEMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Pursuant to Article 365 of the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA)

The inaugural meeting of the EU-Armenia Parliamentary Partnership Committee (PPC) was held in Strasbourg on 24 October 2018, under the co-chairmanship of Mr Armen Ashotyan on behalf of the National Assembly of Armenia and of Mr Sajjad Karim on behalf of the European Parliament. The Committee heard Messrs Luc Devigne and Vassilis Maragos on behalf of the EEAS / EC, and H.E. Mr Tatoul Markarian, Head of the Mission of Armenia to the UE on behalf of the government of Armenia.

Having thus considered the state of play of EU-Armenia relations, the Parliamentary Partnership Committee agreed upon the following final statement and recommendations.

The Parliamentary Partnership Committee:

1. Recalls the crucial role played by the European Parliament and the National Assembly of Armenia, on the basis of their democratic legitimacy, in the development of the Eastern Partnership dynamics;

2. Recalls the signature of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (hereinafter referred to as the CEPA) between the EU and Armenia, on the side-lines of the last Eastern Partnership Summit on 24 November 2017, as a milestone in the history of bilateral relations between the EU and Armenia;

3. Stresses that the CEPA is based on the EU’s and Armenia’s common commitment to democracy, the rule of law, good governance and the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; stresses that the CEPA sets a solid legal basis to invigorate the political dialogue and broaden the scope of economic cooperation as well as joint work in sectors such as energy, transport, environment and climate change, creates a framework for new opportunities in trade and investments, and paves the way for increased mobility for the benefit of the citizens;

4. Notes with satisfaction that the CEPA was unanimously ratified by the National Assembly of Armenia on 11 April 2018, and that the Armenian side started to apply most of its chapter unilaterally as of 1 June 2018, despite the change of government which occurred in the meantime; encourages the Armenian authorities to finalise the Roadmap on CEPA Implementation, currently under preparation;
5. Recalls that five EU Member States have ratified the CEPA so far; encourages all remaining EU Member States to do so without undue delay; notes with satisfaction that the Members of the European Parliament gave their consent to the CEPA on 4 July 2018;

6. Emphasises the role of the newly-created EU-Armenia Parliamentary Partnership Committee to give new impetus to the inter-parliamentary co-operation between the European Parliament and the National Assembly of Armenia, under Article 365 of the CEPA, thus echoing the establishment of the EU-Armenia Partnership Council on the executive level;

7. Underlines that the conclusion of such a far-reaching agreement between the EU and Armenia demonstrates unequivocally that the EU’s Eastern Partners are by no means obliged to choose between their European aspirations and other partnerships, as Armenia remains an active member of the Eurasian Economic Union;

8. Commends the entire Armenian political spectrum, as well as civil society organisations, on their display of restraint and responsibility during the events, also known as “velvet revolution”, which brought about a peaceful political transition, the election of a new Prime Minister by the National Assembly of Armenia and the formation of a new government during the spring of 2018; recalls that freedom of assembly is a universal and fundamental right, which must be nevertheless exercised in a peaceful manner and in accordance with the law;

9. Calls on all Armenian political forces to show further restraint in order to avoid any escalation of tensions in the domestic political arena, and to refrain from any use of hate speech, intolerance or violence, so that the democratic stability of the country and the integrity of the Armenian society are not undermined; calls on the Armenian authorities to ensure that the next parliamentary elections will be democratic, fair and transparent, and to create fair conditions for all political forces, giving them the opportunity to conduct their electoral campaigns in serenity; notes that the National Assembly must be allowed to function within the framework of the Constitution; recalls the importance of the separation of the legislative, executive and judicial powers, in accordance with the Constitution;

10. Welcomes the ambitious reform programme which has been announced by the newly-formed Armenian government, with a view to make a clean sweep of the political, economic and social matters that plague the country;

11. Notes positively that the aforementioned programme lays much emphasis i.a. on the dismantlement of unjustified monopolies, the citizen’s active participation in public life, the eradication of all forms of corruption, the promotion of a transparent and meritocratic public service, the effective oversight on law enforcement agencies, the independence and impartiality of the judiciary, and the development of sustainable agriculture, tourism and renewable energy;

12. Welcomes the Armenian authorities’ first steps aimed at achieving these goals, and in particular the recent crackdowns on corrupt officials, as a proof of their stern resolve to thwart corruption; insists, nevertheless, that such campaigns against high-level graft cases must be solely motivated by the eagerness to uphold the rule of laws and recover stolen assets, and not by political retaliation;
13. Acknowledges that the thorough and lasting implementation of the CEPA, paired with an adequate level of EU financial and technical assistance, is key to meet all the socio-economic challenges which Armenia is facing;

14. Recalls that the EU has already planned to provide, under the Single Support Framework 2017-2020, a bilateral financial support totalling around €160 million, focusing on areas such as economic development and innovation, improving the rule of law and the business environment, electoral assistance, connectivity, energy efficiency, environment and climate change;

15. Reckons that the level of EU assistance should match the ambitions of the CEPA, provided that Armenia meets the required conditions as far as the reforms jointly agreed with the EU are concerned, in line with the principles of differentiation and “more for more”; encourages the European Commission to further enhance its assistance and to align its budgetary instruments so as to match the ambitions of the new EU-Armenia partnership;

16. Recalls that the EU financial support is strictly conditional on concrete reforms steps and their effective implementation, notably in terms of upholding the rule of law, ensuring good governance, and defending human rights as well as the plurality and freedom of media; recalls and that the EU’s incentive-based approach aims at benefiting those Eastern Partners most engaged in genuine, ambitious reforms;

17. Calls on closer cooperation to improve energy security and efficiency through investments in interconnectivity and infrastructure and the diversification of energy sources, in particular by increasing renewable energy and reducing dependence on fossil fuels; underlines the importance of ensuring full respect for international nuclear safety and environmental protection agreements and obligations;

18. Encourages Armenia’s active participation in the COSME and Horizon 2020 programmes, in regional programmes funded under the European Neighbourhood Instrument in the fields of environment, energy, transport, culture and youth, in cross-border cooperation actions, and in the initiatives open to all the Eastern Partners such as Erasmus+, Erasmus Mundus, eTwinning Plus, TAIEX, SIGMA, and the Neighbourhood Investment Facility;

19. Calls on the European Commission to allow for a more intensive participation of Armenia in EU-supported programmes that are open to non-EU countries and to open the way for the participation of Armenia, when the conditions are met and under a legally appropriate framework, in EU agencies;

20. Welcomes the achievements in strengthening people-to-people contacts, including through education, youth, cultural and scientific exchanges between Armenia and the EU; calls for a reinforced engagement in modernising education, research and innovation systems, increased investment in young people’s skills, entrepreneurship and employability, and welcomes in this regard the strengthened “Youth Package” presented by the EU under the EU4Youth initiative;

21. Calls on the European Commission to focus on tangible deliverables for the citizens; underlines, in this respect, that the EU-Armenia Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreement that entered into force in January 2014 is already up-and-running; looks forward to strengthening cooperation in the area of mobility and to considering, in due
course, the opening of a visa liberalisation dialogue with Armenia, provided that the conditions for a well-managed and secure mobility are in place;

22. Notes positively the initiation of reforms in the area of territorial management and local self-government, seeking to enhance the role of municipal authorities and shape stronger links with the local communities in the decision-making processes;

23. Calls on the Armenian authorities to address all the recommendations made by the Council of Europe’s Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR, notably when it comes to the reform of the Electoral Code, seeking in so far as necessary the technical assistance of the international community, e.g. of the European Union and in particular of the European Parliament;

24. Recalls that, although the April 2017 elections were generally well administered, the observation mission led by the OSCE/ODIHR, to which the European Parliament contributed, still identified some shortcomings, such as the persistence of pressure and vote-buying practices, and the illegitimate interference of party representatives or police officers at the voting stations; calls on the Armenian authorities to take all the necessary steps - legislative measures and others - so as to eradicate such malpractices;

25. Recalls the importance of the gender dimension in the EU-Armenia relations and, as a whole, within the Eastern Partnership framework; recalls that gender equality, non-discrimination and women’s empowerment are among the 20 Deliverables for 2020, as it was stressed during the Eastern Partnership Summit of 24 November 2017; calls on the Armenian authorities to continue paying attention to this issue, i.a. by fighting negative gender stereotypes, bridging the pay gap between women and men, and declaring zero tolerance for any form of gender-based harassment, intimidation or violence, as per the recommendations made by the competent, international human rights bodies, such as the UN CEDAW Committee; insists that traditions shall not hamper the realisation of women’s rights and potentials;

26. Welcomes the adoption of the law for the prevention of violence in the family, the protection of the victims of violence in the family and the restoration of the harmony in the family; recalls that the EU stands ready to offer all support and expertise to help Armenian authorities to best deal with all matters pertaining to domestic violence; welcomes the subsequent signing of the Council of Europe’s Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (also known as the Istanbul Convention) as another major, positive step forward;

27. Stresses the need to tackle all forms of discrimination, as defined by the United Nations’ Conventions and Resolutions, and put in place the appropriate mechanisms to address all forms of discrimination;

28. Commends the Armenian authorities on their endeavours to accept and integrate Syrian refugees of Armenian descent; calls on the European Commission and the EU Member States to respond positively to any request for assistance from the Armenian authorities aimed at facilitating this integration; stresses that the resettlement of the Syrian refugees must take place in full compliance with international law and UN conventions;

29. Deplores the continued human losses caused by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict; deeply regrets the regular violations of the cease-fire agreement, which repeatedly claim the lives of both military personnel and civilians, whilst hampering the socioeconomic
development of the entire region; acknowledges that the current status quo is neither acceptable nor sustainable, and that there can be no military solution to the conflict;

30. Reiterates its unwavering support to the efforts of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs and to their 2009 Basic Principles as noted in the CEPA – refrain from the threat or use of force, territorial integrity of States, and equal rights and self-determination of peoples-, as well as its appreciation of their endeavours to advance towards a peaceful settlement of the conflict; stresses that efforts shall follow commonly shared principles of maintaining international peace and security as enshrined in the UN Charter, the OSCE Helsinki Final Act and other relevant multilateral documents, underlining the importance of existing agreed formats for the peaceful settlement of the conflict; stresses the importance of arms control and confidence- and security-building measures for security, predictability and stability;

31. Calls on the Armenian and Azerbaijani authorities to pursue high-level talks in good faith and commit to genuine confidence-building measures and renewed dialogue, in order to ease tensions on the line of contact, stabilise the security situation and promote a more constructive atmosphere for future negotiations aimed to the peaceful resolution of the conflict including measures of demilitarisation and disarmament; reiterates its full adherence to the exclusively peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, as proposed by the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs and supported by the European Union and the European Parliament;

32. Welcomes the EU’s strengthened role in conflict resolution and confidence-building in the framework of existing agreed negotiating formats and processes; welcomes in this regard its initiatives aimed at supporting and completing the aforementioned efforts of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs, by promoting confidence- and peace-building activities across the conflict divide and bringing the civil societies closer;

33. Regrets deeply that the Armenian initiative of normalisation of relations with Turkey without any preconditions, fully supported by the international community and reflected in the Zurich Protocols of 2009, were not ratified by the Turkish side as the latter put forward preconditions for this ratification, thus continuing to keep the border with Armenia unilaterally sealed;

34. Recalls that the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide will mark its 70th anniversary on 9 December 2018; calls on all the EU Member States to acknowledge the Armenian Genocide; notes that the issue has become in recent years a topic of open and public debate in Turkey itself.