MINUTES

Sixteenth Meeting

Wednesday 20 January 2016, 15:00-18:30 SDM S.5
Thursday 21 January 2016, 09:00-12:30 SDM S.1 / LOW S.4

Strasbourg

The meeting opened at 15:07

1. Opening remarks by the Co-Chairs of the EU-Armenia PCC

Co-Chair Sajjad KARIM opened the meeting by welcoming all participants, and especially guest speakers Mr Karen NAZARYAN, Deputy Foreign Minister of Armenia, Mr Adriano MARTINS, Deputy Head of Division, EEAS and Mr Mathieu BOUSQUET, Head of Unit, DG Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, European Commission. In turn, Co-Chair Samvel FARMANYAN introduced the six members composing the multi-party Armenian Delegation, stressing that all forces present in the Armenian National Assembly were thus represented by Mr Alexander ARZOUNANIAN (Heritage), Mr Levon DOKHOLYAN, (Rule of Law), Mr Vahe ENFIAJYAN, (Prosperous Armenia), Mr Edmon MARUKYAN, (independent), Mr Nikol PASHINYAN, (Armenian National Congress), Mr Aghvan VARDANYAN (ARF) and himself, representing the ruling Republican Party of Armenia.

2. Adoption of the draft agenda

The draft agenda was adopted without changes.
3. **Adoption of the minutes of the fifteenth meeting of the EU-Armenia PCC held in Yerevan on 19 and 20 March 2015**

Members were informed that the minutes of this meeting, prepared as customarily by the host Parliament, had been distributed and were available in their files. No correction suggestions having been received by the following day, they were deemed adopted.

4. **Overview of EU-Armenia relations**

Co-Chair KARIM reminded that the coming year would be an important one in terms of EU-Armenia relations, with formal negotiations in view of a new agreement having just started. The floor was thus given to the Armenian MFA and the EEAS for an overview of related developments.

Mr Karen NAZARYAN, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia underlined that important developments had taken place since the last PCC meeting, with an impressive number of bilateral meetings and high level visits. Negotiations had now been launched in view of reaching a new overarching EU-Armenia agreement: this was a significant step, which would allow relations to build upon new and solid foundations, shared values, and the respect for each other choices. He was hopeful the new agreement would thus reflect the essence and the depth of EU-Armenia relationship; Yerevan, furthermore, welcomed the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the willingness to engage with partner countries: the principle of differentiation was fully embraced, since the spirit of shared ownership was enshrined in the core of the ENP. Mr NAZARYAN further underlined the value of P2P contacts and of enhanced mobility in order to bring societies closer, and stressed it was high time to give a further impetus to the dialogue on gradual visa liberalisation – which, he reminded, was a reform oriented process. Armenia had also shown interest in the Horizon 2020 research programme, and in reaching a common aviation agreement with the EU.

As to Human Rights, a structured dialogue was taking place with the EU since 2009, showing all issues could be frankly discussed in a framework of genuine dialogue. Mr NAZARYAN further welcomed the resolution the EP had adopted in April 2015, on the occasion of the centenary commemorations of the Armenian Genocide, which sent a clear message to all nations, including Turkey: Armenia was grateful for a principled resolution, which was not calibrated by political expediency; at the same time, the country was showing its dedication to the protection of ethnic minorities and refugees. With the crisis in Syria unfolding, Armenia had not stood as a bystander, and had actually received more than 20000 refugees, despite the economic challenges it faced; EU support would be welcome to mitigate hardship.

Mr Adriano MARTINS, Deputy Head of Division Eastern Partnership - Bilateral, European External Action Service reminded that a joint reflexion on the future of EU-Armenia relations was well underway, in the spirit of the 2013 Vilnius summit declaration, which had given a clear sign on the willingness for future political engagement. The future EU-Armenia agreement which was under negotiation would, thus, replace the standing Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, and would reset EU-Armenia relations within the wider framework of the ENP. The basis of the new agreement would be the common values shared by Armenia
and the EU (rule of law, democracy, human rights); dimensions to be covered would include energy, transport, environment and new opportunities for trade investment. The economic cooperation chapter would have to take into account Armenia’s new commitments under the Eurasian Economic Unions, which meant, by definition, a Non preferential character in trade terms. Mr MARTINS nonetheless hoped that that the sectors of services / intellectual property rights, as part of the acquis of the (negotiated, but not signed) DCFTA would be preserved. He reminded that economic reforms would be crucial to integrate Armenia in the world economy, especially so since the EU remained Armenia’s main partner for new investments; the EEAS also welcomed the fact that Armenia had not joined any of the Russia Federation’s restrictive policy trade measures targeting the EU and Ukraine.

Moving to other aspects of EU-Armenia cooperation, Mr MARTINS explained that while the overall GSP+ report was expected imminently, the EEAS trusted that, based on these findings on Armenia’s effective implementation of international commitments, priority actions would be jointly identified in order to address any possible shortcomings. The EU, he underlined, had adopted in October 2015 an action plan allowing to mobilize 30 million Euros in favour of Armenia, half of it being dedicated to fighting unemployment; enhanced mobility was a core objective of the Eastern Partnership, and Armenia was progressing well on visa liberalisation. As to the 6 December Constitutional referendum results, the EU had taken note of them, but had also voiced concerns at alleged irregularities, urging Armenia to ensure a proper investigation. Armenia was thus encouraged to implement relevant, and existing, OSCE/ODIHR recommendations. The Human Rights dialogue was indeed taking place in an open and constructive spirit, but there were many areas where progress was still expected, such as equal opportunities for women, ill treatment in pre-trial detention, prison conditions, protection of rights of vulnerable groups, fight against corruption, reform of the judiciary & law enforcement bodies, respect of principle of non-discrimination, and gender-based violence. While Armenia has made clear efforts to fulfil its international commitments and obligations, further reforms were needed.

5. The future of EU-Armenia relations

The constitutional reform and the 6 December 2015 referendum

Giving the floor to Ms Simona GRANATA-MENGHINI, Deputy Secretary of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, Co-Chair KARIM explained that the Venice Commission (VC) had examined the Constitutional Amendments which were the subject of the 6 December referendum, and had adopted two opinions in 23-24 October 2015, which largely welcomed the revised text proposed.

Ms Simona GRANATA-MENGHINI reminded of the extensive involvement of the VC with Armenia and of its rich history in providing legal advice when so requested. With the current reform, the VC felt that Armenia was moving to a rationalised parliamentary regime; for the VC, any form of government could be acceptable provided that the judiciary was independent and checks and balances existed. The National Assembly, now, was being given new powers, while the prerogatives of the opposition were preserved. The President would now be elected by the NA, with a largely ceremonial role. While the PM would enjoy a position a pre-eminence, a constructive vote of non-confidence was now foreseen - and this addressed convincingly one of the main concerns which the opposition had expressed. The electoral
system to be followed would be a proportional one, while also providing for a stable parliamentary majority - if needed, by the organisation of a second ground of elections. It was true that many details remained to be fine-tuned with the adoption of the new Electoral Code, before June 2016, and the Venice Commission stood ready to provide assistance. The main conclusion of Ms GRANATA-MENGHINI, especially as the new Constitution addressed issues related to the independence of the judiciary, following previous recommendations, was, thus, that, in legal terms, this was «an excellent piece of work».

Commenting on the constitutional referendum, Mr VARDANYAN stressed it marked a successful transition from Presidential to Parliamentary régime, which the ARF did advocate - after 2 years of preparatory work at parliamentary level. The reforms initiated with the 6 December referendum were necessary to entrench real democracy, rule of law, and the separation of powers with the creation of an appropriate system of checks and balances. The Constitutional Amendments adopted, furthermore, promoted a bipartisan spirit in a whole range of high-level appointments within the civil service; in a nutshell, the new Constitution safeguarded the development of the country alongside European values.

As to the conduct of the referendum, Co-Chair KARIM reminded that independent observers had raised many questions, with the local EU Statement of 10 December 2015 referring to credible fraud allegations. One of the worries had been that official statistical data often showed a too close, almost linear correlation between voters’ participation and the 'Yes' vote, which was a statistical oddity - and already identified, to some extent, in previous OSCE/ODIHR reports. Mr MARTINS, from the EEAS, stressed that fraud allegations remained an open question that ought to be answered primarily by the Armenian authorities; the EEAS had indeed strongly called for a credible investigation on the matter - but had no further information on any action really taken.

Mr VARDANYAN did accept the possibility of such violations having taken place; no system was perfect. On the other hand, the competent law investigative bodies had been seized of such cases, but no conclusion had yet been drawn. Mr VARDANYAN felt that, in some cases, electoral violations or fraud may indeed have happened, but without reaching a scale that would allow to put the overall results in doubt. This said, Mr VARDANYAYN strongly acknowledged the need to improve the Electoral Code - and called for Armenia’s partners (EU, the Venice Commission) to support efforts to address the deficiencies observed in the standing one (such as the right of appeal).

Answering a query from Ms HAUTALA, and agreeing with Mr VARDANYAN, Co-Chair FARMANYAN added that Armenia’s electoral culture, while perhaps not beyond reproach, was however heading in the right direction - with constant progresses when compared to past elections, also taking into account the history of the country, which had seen 70 years under the Soviet Union. At this stage, priority ought to be given to the overhaul of the Electoral Code - with support from Armenia’s partners in the international community. While dozens of cases of allegations of fraud were being considered seriously by the Public Prosecutor’s services, technical support would also allow to strengthen confidence in the process; Mr ARZOUMANYAN, on the other hand, agreed that the new Constitution was an excellent document, but felt that the referendum had not been without faults. While electoral fraud could perhaps not be eliminated completely, working with the Venice Commission on the reform of the Electoral Code would help to prevent such temptations in the future.
Moving to the issue of EU-Armenia cooperation, Mr Mathieu BOUSQUET, Head of Unit, DG Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, European Commission, underlined the progresses made in this respect; reforms had been supported, leading to concrete results for the lives of the people on the ground. EC assistance was embedded in the EU’s neighbourhood policy since 2004, and was delivered through the European Neighbourhood Instrument, which had amounted to circa 285 million euros for 2007-2013. The new country strategy paper and the Single Support Framework 2014-2018 identified three sectors as focal areas of assistance: justice sector reform, civil administration reform and private sector.

Additional support measures targeted local authorities, civil society programmes, or the NIF (Neighbourhood Investment Facility), which had been successfully leveraged in Armenia, providing 285 million euros for infrastructure projects (roads, waste management). Armenia was also actively participating in Horizon 2020 or the COSME programmes. Results of EU support could, thus, be seen, for instance, with the renovation of 12 vocational colleges covering all Armenia territory; 9000 additional graduates thus saw more prospects for job opportunities, while other efforts on e-government aimed at minimising the risks of corruption. Challenges remained (human rights; rule of law, public financial management...), but could be tackled jointly by the EU and Armenia, in the framework of the ENP review.

Commenting on the differentiation policy as enshrined by the ENP, Co-Chair FARMANYAN warmly welcomed this development, seen a real shift; he reminded that Armenia’s decision to join the EEU ought to be evaluated in a comprehensive context, taking into account the “angle of the world” Armenia was located in, and of the constraints it faced (war situation with Azerbaijan, Turkey’s blockade, Iran as a neighbour presenting specific challenges). There was now a real “change of language” from the EU, which hinted at more understanding towards Armenian decision - which had taken place within a very specific geopolitical context, and with very specific geopolitical considerations in mind. Despite this, Armenia remained committed to its common agenda with the EU, was willing to engage with the EU to the extent it would be possible, and, it was hoped, wanted to keep options open for the future for the new generations.

As to the ongoing negotiations on the new overarching EU-Armenia agreement, Co-Chair KARIM reminded that the EEAS/ European Commission had previously taken concrete steps in closely involving the European Parliament, notably by informing our INTA committee, throughout the negotiation process of the AA/DCFTA, round per round. This time, the EP was not even sure of the name of the new agreement -or of the options- being considered. The EEAS (Mr MARTINS) was however unable to comment, nor to confirm whether any similar arrangement would be foreseen this time in the context of the current negotiations. Likewise, Co-Chair KARIM and Ms HAUTALA stressed with the Armenian National Assembly the value of seeing Armenian lawmakers becoming institutionally involved with this negotiation process - especially given the ongoing move from Presidential to Parliamentary republic, which could hint to closer parliamentary scrutiny terms vis-a-vis Foreign Policy. Mr ARZUMANYAN explained that such developments were not really taking place yet - even
though the National Assembly had been “briefed”; with the new Constitution, there would however be more possibilities for an institutional involvement of the Parliament. Mr FARMANYAN agreed with this approach, hoping the new Parliament would develop the oversight mechanisms needed in order for a spirit of shared ownership to emerge.

**Democratisation, Rule of Law, human rights and freedoms**

Co-Chair KARIM expressed his satisfaction given that both Armenia and the EU had jointly declared their commitment to human rights and fundamental values in the framework of the joint declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit in Riga - which ought to be the cornerstone of the new EU/Armenia Framework Agreement. Furthermore, Mr KARIM welcomed the considerable efforts made in June by the Armenian National Assembly to address several human rights issues, such as the changes made to the legal definition of torture, aligning national legislation with the Convention against Torture; Mr KARIM further stressed the need to take further measures to prevent torture, and avoid impunity, and to see the effective implementation of the National strategy for the Protection of Human Rights - with the possible adoption of a comprehensive anti-discrimination law. Likewise, it was hoped that the 2014 adoption in 2014 of the Law on Social Assistance would pave the way to for a specific Law on Domestic Violence. Other issues where priority ought to be given included fighting overcrowding in prisons, and further steps to strengthen the independence of the judiciary - which was a key issue in the constitutional reform process.

Mr MARUKYAN stressed that the last year had been full of developments in terms of human rights and democracy promotion; Armenia was a relatively young democracy, and there was a legitimate concern it could always slip back. Mr MARUKYAN felt that the referendum had indeed known many instances of fraud; on the other hand, the Armenian authorities had invited the EP to observe the process, and the EP had not done so. The result now was a deep restructuring of Armenia’s political system - and this was the reality everyone had to face, irrespective of whether one liked it or not. While Mr PASHINYAN strongly argued that the referendum had indeed been rigged, Mr MARUKYAN underlined that, at this stage, it was in the interest of every Armenian voter to have a new Electoral Code - and EU aid would be crucial in this respect. Civic activism was alive in Armenia, as was excessive use of force by the Police: this raised concern on freedom of assembly terms. Continuous dialogue and assistance with European structures were therefore a must, in order to safeguard the democratic reforms launched during the times of the negotiations of the AA/DCFTA, even if this agreement had, eventually, not been signed.

**Assessment of EU trade policies**

On behalf of the International Trade Committee, South Caucasus Monitoring Group Chair HAKKULA stressed the value of the scorecard mechanism within GSP+, as this allowed both to see the state of play of ongoing progress, but also to identify the areas where more efforts were needed. It allowed for continuous dialogue between the European Commission and beneficiary countries - such as Armenia; Armenia had faced several difficulties in the past decades on its way to democratic consolidation. As part of GSP+, Armenia had demonstrated its willingness to work in order to strengthen human rights and good governance; further commitment would be needed to fully implement the relevant international conventions. One of the biggest problems Armenia was facing was related to drugs and trafficking, which was
seen as fuelling corruption; approximately ¼ of Armenia’s trade to the EU fell under the GSP scheme - even though most of Armenia’s exports to the EU were not added value product. Efforts could be undertaken, in order for this to change.

Having heard Mr FARMANYAN on the economic challenges faced by Armenia, Co-Chair KARIM expressed his satisfactions at seeing that the Scorecard was functioning - and some issues where progress was needed had been addressed by the Armenian Assembly, such as the legal definition of torture. On the other hand, deficiencies had been reported, especially with military justice. Mr MARUKYAN reminded that the Criminal Code featured a new article on torture, which was now in line with international standards. The new code would thus allow progress on other elements as well, as this was problem which many acknowledged, as was ill-treatment and overpopulation in prisons - a point also made by Mr PASHINIAN.

**On the Migration crisis**

Co-Chair KARIM expressed solidarity at Armenian efforts towards Syrian refugees - stressing that, especially per capita, Armenia had been called to make a very important effort and had made efforts to ensure that refugees would be welcomed in a dignified way, also easing their social integration. This was also an issue faced in the EU; Deputy Foreign Minister NAZARYAN stressed that any kind of EU assistance would be welcome, as the social integration of refugees was not without problems: there were different segment of refugees (those who sought permanent status, those merely transiting, etc) - all of them with different needs.

6. **Regional issues:**

On the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, Mr NAZARYAN stressed the need to implement the agreement on the creation of an investigative mechanism on the incidents at the Line of Contact, alongside other CBMs, and deplored that Azerbaijan was rejecting such proposals and, instead, threatening to resort to military means. Armenia was ready to continue negotiations in the OSCE setting which was foreseen, in view of a peaceful resolution; Mr NAZARYAN stressed this was a delicate process, which was dealt with within an agreed framework, which requested a specific expertise and mandate. Any deviation would have the potential to lead to counter-productive results, which explained Armenian sensitivities on the matter. Mr NAZARYAN thus called all Members to be aware of this element, particularly in view of parallel debates taking place in other European parliamentary fora.

On behalf of the EEAS, Mr Adriano MARTINS stressed that the EU supported the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, as clearly expressed in the Riga summit declaration in 2015 (Deputy MFA NAZARYAN, however, questioned whether such a conclusion was indeed part of the Summit’s declaration and not only a partial reading of the agreed text). At the same time, Mr MARTINS stressed that the EU remained highly concerned at the security situation in the region, underlining that while this protracted conflict did not have a military solution, the status quo was unsustainable. The EU was calling on the parties to strictly respect the ceasefire and show restraint on the ground and in public statements, and to continue efforts towards an early peaceful and comprehensive settlement; The EU, thus, stood ready to engage in renewed efforts towards political settlement, in full complementarity with the OSCE Minsk group. Mr MARTINS further recalled that the Presidents of both Armenia and Azerbaijan had accepted that the conflict would be resolved by exclusively peaceful means.
Answering a query from Ms HAUTALA, Mr FARMANYAN stressed that the European Court of Human Rights recent judgments on Nagorno Karabakh touched two separate cases. These judgments were however misinterpreted by political / media circles as if they gave, per se, a solution to the conflict, whereas they limited themselves to ruling on compensation on property rights. Armenia, Mr FARMANYAN reminded, had one of the best records amongst Council of Europe member-states in implementing ECHR rulings. Such developments could actually only help in finding a constructive solution, as Armenia was ready for political compromises, with an expressed willingness to engage with the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs in a variety of issues - such as on the creation of the investigation mechanism.

Concluding the debate, Co-Chair KARIM reminded that European Parliamentarians were concerned at the lack of progress on the settlement of the conflict; the EU had, manifold, condemned the escalation of violence along the Line of Contact and the international border, including by the use of heavy artillery and extended condolences to the families of the victims - on all sides; the need for an investigation mechanism of ceasefire violations, as called for by the OSCE Minsk Group Co chairs, was clear: it was a positive first step to see that Armenia had accepted to discuss this in detail. As to Armenia-Turkey relations, the EP position had not changed: the border ought to be opened without any preconditions. There were however fears that this process could become hostage to the accrual of regional tensions - with the worsening of Turkey-Russia relations. A positive sign was, however, that, against all odds, dialogue between civil societies in your two countries was still ongoing - with strong EU, and EP, support.

7. Adoption of the Final Statement and Recommendations

A working draft version of the Statement and Recommendations of our PCC had already been distributed by email prior to the meeting, reflecting prior consultations having taken place at Co-Chair level. The amendments submitted prior to the deadline jointly set (January 20, 18:00 pm) were thus put to the vote and the joint text, as annexed, adopted unanimously – thus meeting the double majority requirement.

8. Any other business

No points were raised.

9. Date and place of next meeting

Co-Chair KARIM informed participants that the next 17th EU-Armenia PCC meeting would take place on Armenian soil in 2017. Members would be informed electronically of the date agreed by the Co-Chairs in due time.
The Parliamentary Cooperation Committee

1. welcomes the high-level opening of EU - Armenia negotiations on 7 December 2015, in view of a new comprehensive framework agreement that would cover political, economic and sectoral cooperation; recalls that the PCC had already recommended, on 20 March 2015, to use the experience acquired in the scoping exercise to establish a legally binding contractual basis in order to replace the outdated 1999 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement;

2. recalling the work carried out in negotiating the AA/DCFTA trusts that the technical result of these talks, which was safeguarded for future reference at the time, will facilitate the swift completion of the EU / Armenia negotiations which are now re-launched;

3. expects to see firmly enshrined in the new agreement a strong commitment to rule of law, democracy and human rights, which should be cornerstones of the text; further underlines that the respect for these shared values can only enhance and further facilitate cooperation in all other issues expected to be covered by the agreement, from energy, transport, or the environment to investment and trade; reminds that Armenia remains covered by the preferential GSP+ trade scheme, with an enhanced role played by the EP in its reformed monitoring procedure;

4. believes that a new, ambitious EU/Armenia framework agreement is compatible with the progressive differentiation approach promoted within the Eastern Partnership, particularly taking into account the revised European Neighbourhood Policy; reminds that enhancing citizens mobility in a secure and well managed environment remains a core objective of the Eastern Partnership, and welcomes the overall good implementation by Armenia of the Visa facilitation and Readmission Agreements, stressing that continued and sustained progress is crucial in order to further proceed with a Visa Liberalisation Dialogue;

5. underlines the need for a strong parliamentary dimension to be included in any future agreement, encouraging legislators to develop procedures allowing them to be duly informed throughout the negotiation process, and fully involved in its subsequent implementation and monitoring;
6. *recalls* the outmost importance and value of the annual EU-Armenia Human Rights Dialogue, as a unique format allowing to constructively focus on issues such as fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of assembly and association, the development of civil society, the rule of law, mobility, judicial reform, the continued fight against corruption, the independence of the media and the fight against torture and inhuman and degrading treatment;

7. *welcomes* the considerable effort recently undertaken by the Armenian National Assembly to align national legislation with the UN Convention Against Torture and *looks forward* to further progress on the ancillary measures currently under examination to avoid torture and fight impunity; *further welcomes* the review of the Judicial Code and the strengthening of the independence of the judiciary provided by the Constitutional Amendments as supported by the Venice Commission, particularly the Council of Justice; *stresses* the importance the EU attaches to ICC ratification worldwide;

8. *takes note* of the 6 December Constitutional Referendum results, recalling the first and the second opinions delivered by the Venice Commission on the draft Amendments to the Constitution, and the local EU Statement issued on 10 December 2015 which urged the authorities to fully investigate in a transparent manner the election fraud allegations;

9. *underlines* that the full implementation of existing recommendations already issued by previous OSCE/ODIHR election observation missions remains a key to increase the confidence in the integrity of the electoral process, and expects that the necessary amendments, particularly pertaining to the electoral code, will be adopted well before the 2017 general elections;

10. *recognizes* that the EU’s support over the years has been instrumental for the effective implementation and sustainability of Armenia’s reform process and institutional capacity building; *thus welcomes* the EU adopting, on 16 December 2015, a new support programme of €30 million to enhance further efforts in the areas of quality employment, fiscal governance and civil society participation in the democratic decision making process; *notes* the decisive role civil society can play in enhancing transparency and accountability in all fields of public life, but also in monitoring GSP+ implementation, through dedicated EDIHR-funded projects; *supports and encourages* Armenian full participation in the COSME and Horizon 2020 programmes;

11. *deeply regrets* the continued -and rising- human cost of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and the increasingly serious violations of the cease-fire agreement, including by the use of heavy artillery / mortars, which repeatedly led to the loss of life even amongst the civilian population; *stresses* there can be no justification for the death and injury of innocent civilians on all sides, *supporting* the creation of a mechanism to investigate ceasefire violations, as repeatedly called for by the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs; *reminds* that the Minsk Group Co-Chairs noted on 26 September that Armenia has agreed to discuss the details of this mechanism, urging
Azerbaijan to do the same; expects from the EU to play a more active role in supporting further confidence building measures to spread the ideas of peace, reconciliation and trust;

12. believes that the recent escalation proves beyond possible doubt that the status quo has become unsustainable and that there can be no alternative to a peaceful solution in accordance with the UN Charter, Helsinki Final Act and relevant principles of international law;

13. firmly supports the negotiation process under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs, as the only internationally agreed format for the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and calls for a greater political commitment from all parties involved; in this regard, strongly encourages pan-European and other international institutions and bodies to align with the OSCE-Minsk Group co-chairs statements in their motions and resolutions on Nagorno-Karabakh in order to contribute to the peaceful resolution of the conflict;

14. calls on the European Union to include in its exchange and mobility programmes students and teachers hailing from conflict areas, such as Nagorno-Karabakh, as outlined in the Bologna Process communiqué of May 2015 adopted also by all EU member states and the European Commission;

15. welcomes the steps taken by the Government of Armenia in accepting around 20,000 Syrian refugees and calls on the European Commission and the EU member states to consider in a positive light any support request from the Armenian authorities in carrying out relevant programmes aimed at the further social integration of the Syrian refugees in Armenia;

16. recalls the commemorations of the Centennial of the Armenian Genocide which took place in Yerevan in April 2015, and commends the participating EU institutions and their Office-Holders; encourages all Member States and EU Institutions to contribute further to the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, noting that the issue has, in recent years, become the focus of open and public debate in Turkey itself;

17. echoes the call of the EP Plenary, which, on 10 June 2015, urged the normalisation of Armenia -Turkey relations by the ratification, without preconditions, of the protocols on the establishment of diplomatic relations, and by the opening of the unilaterally closed border; supports initiatives aimed at promotion of regional cooperation, in the belief they can contribute to the ending of isolation of any country in the region; strongly hopes such developments will help to overcome the legacy of the past and face it courageously.

Unanimously adopted, 21 January 2016