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President of the European Commission

**Statement by President Barroso
following his meeting with Mr Serzh
Sargsyan, President of Armenia**

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Press point

Brussels, 6 March 2012

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen,

It is indeed a pleasure to welcome President Serzh Sargsyan of Armenia to Brussels. We just had a very constructive meeting.

My message to the President today was very clear: we fully support the President's reform and modernization agenda, and we remain committed to deepen our engagement with Armenia in the framework of the Eastern Partnership.

And I am happy to say that because of this reformist drive our relations are moving forward and making good progress.

Indeed, we are now ready to launch talks on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, which is part and parcel of the Association Agreement that we are already negotiating with Armenia. This is to a large extent, the result of Armenia's efforts to comply with our 'key recommendations'. I congratulate you on your leadership in this process, Mr President.

The opening of the DCFTA negotiations marks a turning point in our trading and economic relationship, providing new opportunities for our citizens and businesses. This is also a sign that our ties are getting stronger.

Armenia should now continue to advance in its trade and trade-related reforms and work towards reaching a stable, transparent and predictable economic environment. This is essential, we believe, to attract foreign investment and also to stimulate growth and job creation.

The relationship between the European Union and Armenia is not only about the economy or trade or mobility, we have discussed these issues. But it is also about the universal values that we share. Democracy, fundamental rights and the rule of law are at the core of the Association Agreement that we are negotiating with Armenia and they are the solid foundations of our present and also our future relations.

I trust that you, Mr President, will continue to pursue reforms to strengthen democratic institutions, to enhance the independence of the judiciary, to encourage political pluralism and media freedom, and the protection of fundamental freedoms.

The next parliamentary and presidential elections will be an important benchmark in Armenia reform's path. I am reassured by the President's commitment that these elections will be conducted in accordance with democratic international standards – and just now the President has reiterated that very clearly to me. You can count with our support in this regard.

Peace and regional stability are also necessary to advance our common goals. I reaffirmed the urgent need to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The EU continues to support the efforts of the OSCE Minsk Group and we stand ready, in full complementarity with the Minsk Group, to provide enhanced support for confidence building measures if the parties so wish.

I am convinced that with strong political will on both sides there is a solution to end this conflict. In parallel with an agenda for reforms we also need an agenda for peace.

There is still a long road ahead to continue and complete the important negotiations in which we are engaged and to strengthen our partnership with Armenia. We have discussed this, it is a process, but a process in which I believe we can also achieve success.

From the part of the European Commission, you, Mr President, and Armenia can count on a steadfast friend and partner.

I thank you for your attention.