



EU-Armenia Parliamentary Partnership Committee

MINUTES

2nd meeting of the EU-Armenia Parliamentary Partnership Committee

Thursday 24 February 2022,

National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, Yerevan

The meeting opened at 09:30 with the opening speech of the acting president of the National Assembly **H.E Mr Hakob ARSHAKYAN**.

Acting president welcomed the guests in Yerevan on the occasion of holding the Second Meeting of Armenia-EU Parliamentary Partnership Committee. Mentioned the importance of having an opportunity to discuss the current situation of cooperation between the Republic of Armenia and the European Union, the collaboration between the National Assembly and the European Parliament, as well as other agenda items of bilateral interest. Mr Hakob ARSHAKYAN mentioned that the development of the partnership with the European Union has been and remains one of the important doctrines of the foreign policy of the Republic of Armenia (RA). The role of parliamentary diplomacy in modern international relations was emphasized. The acting President made a special reference to the Armenia-EU Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement, noting that it opened perspectives for implementing new cooperation programs with EU member states. Mr Hakob ARSHAKYAN said that the grave consequences of the 44-day war of September 2020 unleashed by Azerbaijan and Turkey against Nagorno-Karabakh have become irreversible for Armenia. The peace in the region is endangered and the stability is fragile. The penetration of the Azerbaijani armed forces into the sovereign territory of Armenia is a more dangerous development. The situation on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border has been tense since May 12, 2021. The encroachments against the Republic of Armenia resulted in human losses and seriously endangered the regional security. The acting president stressed that we expect from our international colleagues urgent and addressed response to the illegal actions of Azerbaijan, including the penetration to the sovereign territory of Armenia and the provoking of further escalations on the borders by Azerbaijan. Mr Hakob ARSHAKYAN expressed the gratitude to the members of the European Parliament for showing position of principle after the 44-day war. The acting president touched upon the resolution adopted by the overwhelming majority of the votes in the European Parliament on the return of Armenian prisoners of war, in which the European Parliament demanded the urgent and unconditional release of all arrested Armenians captives, both military

and civilian, captured during the conflict and after it. Mr Hakob ARSHAKYAN added that Armenia is convinced that only the resuming of the peaceful settlement process of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict under the auspices of the OSCE Minks Group Co-Chairmanship, the full implementation of the trilateral statements of November 9, 2020 and January 11, 2021, the elimination of the consequences of their violations, including the preservation of the unreserved ceasefire regime, the withdrawal of the Azerbaijani armed forces from the RA sovereign territory, and the urgent return of prisoners of war and the civilian hostages, can create conditions for strengthening peace and security. Mr Hakob ARSHAKYAN expressed readiness to build bridges of cooperation with neighboring countries and international organizations operating in different formats for the benefit of the development of Armenia and strengthening of peace in the region.

2. Opening remarks by the Co-Chairs of the EU-Armenia PPC, Mr Arman YEGHOYAN and Ms Marina KALJURAND

Mr Arman YEGHOYAN, Co-Chair, welcomed the guests in the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, mentioned that they visited a country that is a part of European civilization with its centuries-old historical and cultural ties. These values, ideological and cultural similarities greatly contribute to the rapid dynamics of the development of the relations between the European Union and Armenia. Such a development of relations also demonstrates the mutual interest in further deepening of the relations. Parliamentary diplomacy has a significant role in that context. Mr Arman YEGHOYAN emphasised the importance of the PPC work, and of the Standing Committee on European integration in the National Assembly, which shows the importance of the process of integration to the European family for Armenia. After the Velvet Revolution of 2018, major focus has been placed on the key issues of establishment, and development of democratic institutions and protection of human rights in Armenia, which are cornerstone values of Western civilization. Mr Arman YEGHOYAN emphasised the role of CEPA, that entered into force in March 2021 in the sphere of EU-Armenia cooperation. The agreement is of prominent importance for the modernization of Armenia, in particular, by approximation of the legislative framework to EU norms. Speaking about the challenges threatening humanity in the last two years, the Co-chair emphasized the importance of the European Union's support to Armenia especially in overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic. Mr Arman YEGHOYAN drew attention to the fact that during the pandemic, the principle of non-use of force established by the UN Charter and the OSCE Helsinki Final Act was violated, which made it impossible to solve interstate problems. Nagorno-Karabakh was attacked by Azerbaijan. The Co-chair pointed to the resolution adopted by the EU on May 19, 2021, which once again showed that war is not a solution for the EU. These steps of Azerbaijan call into question the policy aimed at regional stability. In his view, the European Parliament saw these actions of Azerbaijan as steps aimed at undermining the efforts towards security and stability in the region. This resolution of the European Parliament once again proves that it is impossible to solve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by force. Armenia believes in a peaceful European future.

Ms Marina KALJURAND, Co-Chair, first thanked the Armenian delegation for hosting the European Parliament's delegation in Armenia, and expressed hope that the meeting would contribute to closer cooperation. Before addressing issues of EU-Armenia relations, Ms KALJURAND strongly denounced the Russian invasion of Ukraine, stressing that there is no excuse for such violation of the international law, the UN Charter and the principles of the Helsinki Final Act. She emphasised that the EU and the Western countries stood strong by Ukraine, not unlike when the EU supported Armenia, after Armenia fell under the attack by

Azerbaijan. She underlined that war is never a solution: the solution must come by the way of diplomacy, peaceful talks. She further urged all the EU's eastern partners, including Armenia, to support Ukraine, in the same way that the EU supports Armenia after the war in Nagorno-Karabakh. Ms KALJURAND stated that the relations between the EU and Armenia are excellent. One year earlier, the CEPA came into force and in November 2021 the Common Aviation Area Agreement was signed, which the Estonian parliament was the first one to ratify. The Co-Chair noted the EU's support to reforms and the boost to investment expected from the Economic and Investment Plan. She praised the well-managed elections of June 2021 and stressed that a shared commitment to democracy, human rights and the rule of law must remain a central element of EU-Armenian relations, with a democratic, safe and prosperous Armenia being the common objective. Ms KALJURAND also raised some issues in the field of the independence of the judiciary, freedom of speech, and the EU's concern about the criminalization of insults. She recognised that the EU had been largely absent during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh war. Even though the EU has limited tools, it could have done more. The EU nevertheless has significant political and economic weight and a wide array of instruments that will help build stability and peace. The process started by the Brussels meeting of Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders with European Council President Michel shows the EU's increased engagement. The Co-Chair emphasised that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has not yet been resolved, despite such unilateral claims by Azerbaijan. There is a need for a comprehensive agreement between the parties, and for negotiations to continue within the framework of the process led by the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs. Armenian prisoners of war and other persons held in Azerbaijan should be released. Certain actions of Azerbaijan since the 2020 war were particularly harmful, but efforts are needed from both sides and both sides need to show restraint. Reconciliation must be the long term goal. Ms Marina KALJURAND strongly encouraged the work on opening communications in the region and the talks on normalization of relations with Turkey.

3. Adoption of the draft agenda

The draft agenda was adopted.

4. Approval of the draft minutes of the 1st meeting of the EU-Armenia PPC held on 24 October 2018 in Strasburg.

Mr Hayk MAMIJANYAN requested several corrections regarding statements of Mr. Armen ASHOTYAN.

The draft minutes were approved, subject to modifications in line with Mr MAMIJANYAN's comments.

5. State of play of EU-Armenia relations

Mr Paruyr HOVHANNISYAN, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, also welcomed the attendees. In his speech, the deputy minister emphasized the implementation of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement, at the same time he mentioned the Common Aviation Agreement, the EU "Horizon" research program, EU investment programs, whose ambitious agenda will contribute to sustainable development. Referring to the 44-day war, Mr Paruyr HOVHANNISYAN spoke about the need for the return of prisoners of war and other detained persons, the preservation of cultural heritage, in which UNESCO's help is greatly expected. He presented the RA government's readiness to mitigate the humanitarian consequences caused by the epidemic and the war. In response to Ms KALJURANDS' question about the trilateral working group, which is working on unblocking the regional

communications, and how the EU can directly support this process, the deputy minister noted that a more vocal stance of the EU with regard to the need to preserve sovereignty when opening communication channels might be helpful.

The head of the EU delegation to Armenia, **Ambassador Ms Andrea VIKTORIN**, joined Ms KALJURAND in denouncing the Russian invasion of Ukraine and stressed the united EU position in this regard. She noted the importance of interparliamentary deliberations on EU-Armenia relations on the eve of the one-year anniversary of the entry into force of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement, which continues to be a common roadmap for reforms and for the strengthening of relations. She stressed that the EU supports Armenia and stands by Armenia in tackling the consequences of the epidemic and the war. The EU redirected its assistance to help fight the pandemic and support recovery and was the first donor to provide humanitarian aid to vulnerable groups in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh after the war. The Ambassador emphasized that the conflict is not over and that a peaceful settlement of the conflict is needed, underlining the role of the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group. She highlighted in particular the EU investment programs in Syunik, as well as support to reform programs, giving examples of twinning projects on anti-corruption and cooperation in the field of education. Ms WIKTORIN noted that the EU is involved in a wide range of areas, supporting the civil society, cooperating in the field of education, supporting young people, boosting jobs, cooperating on democratic reform, gender equality, rights of children, rights of women, with the ultimate objective of benefitting the people of Armenia.

6. Recent political developments in Armenia and state of play of domestic reforms

Mr Sargis KHANDANYAN, member from ruling "Civil Contract" faction, noted that the process of democratic reforms is irreversible in Armenia. In the field of democracy Armenia is the leader in the region. The recent elections showed Armenia's unwavering commitment to democracy, and it is important that the opposition also accepted the results. According to the publication of "Transparency International" index, in the last 5 years, Armenia has managed to make positive progress in the fight against corruption, citing that there were serious democratic reforms in Armenia after the 2018 revolution. According to the National Security strategy adopted in 2020 corruption is a serious threat to national security, and in order to emphasize the fight against corruption, one should look at the concept of national security of Armenia. The Armenian government adopted the anti-corruption strategy which has 3 general directions: prevention of corruption, counteraction of corruption, raising public awareness. The Corruption Prevention Commission has been operating in Armenia since 2019. It is an independent body. Its members are elected by the parliament. One of the commission's functions is to check the integrity of the candidates for judges and justices. Mr Sargis KHANDANYAN also stated that in 2020 the Armenian parliament adopted the law on confiscation of property of illegal origin and the Anti-Corruption Committee was created, and referred to the commitment of the government to further fight against corruption. Mr Sargis KHANDANYAN mentioned that a long chain has been created in Armenia to fight against corruption and they are committed to show better results in the future.

Ms Hripsime STAMBULYAN, the opposition member of the "Armenia" faction, countered and talked about political persecution, high inflation, emigration, citing that they are a consequence of the lack of security and democracy. In particular, she mentioned that the current authorities have crossed all the borders of democracy in the field of freedom of speech, there are arrests of judges, stated that in Armenia there are political prosecutors and political arrests. During the elections almost all of the opposition candidates are directly or indirectly politically prosecuted. Ms Hripsime STAMBULYAN touched upon the socio-economic situation in Armenia pointing to high inflation. Ms Hripsime STAMBULYAN specifically mentioned that

the opposition would like the European partners to respond to this situation. European structures encourage silence, but it is necessary to understand that there is a problem and there is no explanation. Every government is temporary, but the consequences of their actions are long-term.

Mr Hayk MAMIJANYAN, an opposition MP from the "With honor" faction, expressed his concern that the deputies of the European Parliament came to Armenia with a small delegation and that there were no representatives from the EPP. Mr Hayk MAMIJANYAN referred also to the format of the chairmanship of the session, proposing to introduce the institute of deputy co-chairs of the Armenian delegation and to assign a quota to the opposition representatives to make the work of parliamentary partnership even more effective and practical. Mr Hayk MAMIJANYAN also addressed the problems of democracy in RA. Addressing Mr Sargis KHANDANYAN'S speech, Mr Hayk MAMIJANYAN reminded that the opposition contested the election results in the Constitutional Court and that the opposition participates in the work of the parliament, only to use this tool for the change of power. He referred to political arrests, arrests of judges, and hate speech against the opposition, bringing the example of the hammer symbol used during the campaign for power, stressing that the European structures definitely do not understand the tools used by the opposition: demonstrations, uprisings, etc., but assured that they will fight with all legal means, because there are serious problems in terms of democracy in Armenia. The part of the society that complains about the RA authorities expects appropriate evaluations from the European structures.

Opposition MP **Mr Aram VARDEVANYAN** of the "Armenia" faction talked about the problems of human rights protection in Armenia, first he talked about the arrests of fellow MPs, which took place without the consent of the National Assembly noted that this is a violation of the Constitution of Armenia. he mentioned that they raised this issue to the EU ambassador, but did not receive a response. He mentioned that some of the MPs of the opposition do not have the opportunity to participate in meetings on international platforms, because they are being prosecuted. Mr. Aram VARDEVANYAN gave the examples. He brought forward the issue of criminalization of insults, pointing out the criminal records opened within the framework of the topic, bringing the examples, to which Mr Arman YEGHOYAN countered, stating that 80 percent of them are about complaints submitted to the police by private individuals, the other 20 percent refer to public and political figures, in the scope of which they are being investigated as government, as well as cases concerning opposition politicians. While talking about political arrests, Mr. Aram VARDEVANYAN referred to the institution of bail, noted that the institution of bail did not specifically work in the case of arrests of opposition representatives, giving the examples and names. The opposition deputy raised the issue of concern about the non-electronic way of signing the cases to the judges, which Mr Arman YEGHOYAN addressed, noting that the judges' opportunities to work impartially are not limited to that. Mr Arman YEGHOYAN stated it is no secret that the judicial system or justice system in Armenia needs reform, and the authorities are now trying to reform the system, make it more and more impartial, it takes time to have courts independent of any party, technically it is not possible to do it at once.

Ms Marina KALJURAND welcomed the positive results of the democratic reforms, as shown by independent indicators such as the Democracy Index. She noted that Armenia is the leader in this regard in the region. Ms KALJURAND recalled that the European Parliament could not observe the elections in 2021 due to the pandemic, but welcomed the OSCE/ODIHR report which found that the elections were competitive and well-managed. However, as in any country, it is clear that there is room for improvement. Armenia should strive towards more transparency. Independence and accountability of justice should be a top priority and the EU pays attention to it and supports it in the bilateral cooperation. The main objective needs to be to have judiciary

without political interference and the reforms need to be carried out in such a way so as to dispell any suspicions of political interventions and selective justice. Constitutional reforms need to be transparent and inclusive. Regarding the law on insult, the Co-Chair welcomed the readiness of the Armenian Prime Minister to take into account the best practices of the EU in this field. Ms. KALJURAND further stressed that the EU is following closely the protection of rights of national minorities, as well as issues such as the rights of LGBTI people and gender-based violence.

Ms Marketa GREGOROVA emphasised the importance of free speech for a democratic society and noted that the European Parliament will continue to follow closely developments regarding the law on insults and media law. She pointed out the importance of the presumption of innocence, including when it comes to politicians.

7. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and regional security developments

Ms Marina KALJURAND firstly expressed her regret for the loss of lives on both sides. She strongly condemned the use of force and stressed that Azerbaijan's narrative that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been solved, is not accepted by the European Parliament. The only way to solve the conflict is through political negotiations on a comprehensive peace treaty, with the facilitation of the international community, represented by the co-chairs of the Minsk Group. The European Parliament continues to raise the issue of Armenian prisoners of war and other detainees kept in Azerbaijan. Ms KALJURAND rejected the use of human beings as bargaining chips, and appreciated the fact that Armenia handed over all landmine maps to Azerbaijan. She noted that the EU is ready to provide technical assistance on demining. She underlined that the unblocking communications is a positive element of the 2020 ceasefire statement, which would bring great benefits to the whole region, and expressed hope that an agreement on the road connection between western Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan can also be reached soon, with full respect of Armenian sovereignty over the entire Syunik region. Reconciliation should be the ultimate goal and requires effort from both sides. Pragmatic approach with small steps can lead to results. Ms KALJURAND recalled also the important number of victims of landmines in Azerbaijan, while stressing that this must not serve as an excuse for certain actions. Azerbaijan should put an end to hate speech, while Armenia should also make sure it is not tolerated. There is need for a lot more restraint from both sides. She stressed the issue of cultural heritage and strongly condemned the announced intention of Azerbaijan to remove Armenian inscriptions from monuments. There is no justification for Baku not to allow UNESCO access – Azerbaijan rightly points to the extensive destruction in the areas it regained in 2020, but this is one more reason to allow UNESCO to assess the situation on the ground. Ms Kaljurand concluded by welcoming the recent negotiations on the normalisation of relations between Armenia and Turkey.

Mr Arman YEGHOYAN emphasized the fact that not a single Azerbaijani cultural heritage was destroyed by Armenia after the First Nagorno-Karabakh war, what happened was due to the military operations. On the contrary, several mosques were even reconstructed with state funds, Armenia does not aim to eliminate the presence of any culture, Armenia is at the crossroads of civilizations, and there are cultural evidences of many other nations in Armenia. As for prisoners, detainees, captives it is unacceptable to use human life for political goals, it is perfect to state that the opinion of the European Parliament is the same in this regard.

MPs **Mr Hayk MAMIJANYAN** firstly stated that the opposition has objections to everything Mr. Yeghoyan said, but will not address them in this topic, expressed his gratitude to the

deputies of the European Parliament for their impartial speeches and for standing by Armenia. The deputy noted that the world, particularly Europe, left Armenia alone during the war. The world did not give an appropriate response during the border incidents, for the use of phosphorous weapons during the war, for the participation of mercenary soldiers, for the issue of prisoners, for the protection of cultural values. All this led to the fact that the enemy no longer takes into account any observations. Mr. Hayk MAMIJANYAN suggested that the European Parliament should create a commission for the investigation of war crimes and violations of human rights and speak the language of sanctions.

Mr Aram VARDEVANYAN firstly thanked the MEPs for their speeches regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, stating that the conflict has not been resolved. International law was violated by Azerbaijan, and these actions would not be possible if the international community broke its silence and were active. Stating that nations have the right of self-determination, Mr. Aram VARDEVANYAN referred to the origins of the conflict, spoke about ethnic cleansing, the inhuman crime committed by Ramil Safarov against Guren Margaryan. Cultural heritage of Armenia has been destroyed by Azerbaijan from the beginning of the conflict till now, Azerbaijan violated the territorial integrity of Armenia, refused to return the POWs and other detainees, but Europe at that time made statements instead of sanctions. Azerbaijani actions needed to be punished, said Mr. Aram VARDEVANYAN

Ms Tatevik GASPARYAN thanked for the speeches and spoke about the democratic achievements in Armenia. Turning to the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, she stated that the policy of Azerbaijan is based on lies and manipulation and gave the examples concerning the POWs and other detainees, whom Azerbaijan refused to return. Mentioning the issue of cultural heritage and the violation of Armenia's territorial integrity by Azerbaijan, Ms. Tatevik GASPARYAN expressed her hope that the Armenian efforts of maintaining peace in the region will succeed.

8. Any other business

None.

Mr Arman YEGHOYAN and Ms Marina KALJURAND closed the meeting, reminding that a joint statement would be published soon, about which the participants of the meeting were informed in advance.

The meeting closed at 11:30