European External Action Service (EEAS)

Remarks by HRVP Federica Mogherini at the joint press conference with Mr Edward Nalbandian, Foreign Minister of Armenia

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Check against delivery!

It is a pleasure for me to be here and to address the press again together with you, Edward [Minister Nalbandian]. We were together in Brussels in December last year to launch the negotiations on the new EU-Armenia Agreement and at that occasion we had the pleasure to address the press.

Today, I had the first visit to your country, a very intensive and comprehensive one. Apart from my encounter with the Foreign Minister, I had good discussions with the President [Serzh Sargsyan], with members of political parties represented in the Parliament and representatives of the extremely vibrant and active Armenian civil society.

We have addressed a wide range of issues, starting with the EU-Armenia bilateral agenda as well as some regional and multilateral issues.

2015 was an important year for our bilateral relations, marked by a joint reflection on the scope for future relations and marked by the launch, as I said in December, of negotiations on the new EU-Armenia Agreement.

Today, we have discussed the state of play and the perspectives of these negotiations. It is important for broader society to be part of this process, to fully understand and share the sense of direction of our relationship and this is true both in the European Union and in Armenia. I believe we both want to be good partners to each other and this should under no circumstances be seen as exclusive or divisive, competitive or contradictory to other traditionally close relations. Peace, cooperation, rule of law have proven to be the best drivers of economic growth, employment and security.

And even in these very difficult years and these very difficult times, the European Union is already the first trade partner for Armenia, the first investor in Armenia and the first donor in Armenia.

But it is not only about money – even if it doesn't play a minor role. Emphasis needs to be placed notably on democracy and the rule of law, anti-corruption, human rights and

fundamental freedoms, constitutional and judicial reform, justice and accountability. And I know this is a particular day to mention this. Particular attention is also needed as regards the reform of the electoral system. We discussed this at length. This should be carried out in due time and in an inclusive manner, so that all stakeholders would be able to build broad consensus on it.

The European Union supports the recommendations of the OSCE/ODIHR Referendum Expert Team's Final Report and the previous OSCE/ODIHR recommendations, which still need to be addressed. Without a transparent investigation of all alleged frauds as well as appropriate measures taken, if these are confirmed, the recent constitutional referendum would be a missed opportunity to increase the confidence in, and the integrity of, electoral processes in Armenia.

The European Union will continue to support the country’s efforts to advance political and social reforms, to advance the mobility agenda and to improve the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. It is important to make best use of the very significant EU assistance, which focuses in particular on private sector development, public administration reform and justice sector reform.

We also discussed at length regional issues, including potential for constructive cooperation with Iran and possibilities for cooperation on Syria. I fully share the words you spent in the UN Security Council Resolution and the cessation of hostilities in that territory. We also discussed the integration of Syrian refugees. The European Union is considering whether it can support Armenia in this respect, also through the EU Trust Fund that was established to address the crisis.

The peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remains a priority for the European Union. The status quo is unsustainable to us. The conflict does not have a military solution and needs a political settlement in accordance with international law.

The European Union supports the efforts of the Minsk Group Co-Chairs to facilitate progress, drawing on the three Madrid principles and elements, and calls for the intensification of high-level talks to advance the settlement. It is also important to reverse recent negative trends of escalating tensions and create an enabling environment, in particular by refraining from actions on the ground and confrontational rhetoric that heighten tensions and undermine the peace process. The European Union supports the calls of the Co-Chairs for an incident investigation mechanism.

We will continue to extend support to the Minsk Group Co-Chairs, including through the work of the EU Special Representative Herbert Salber, who was with me throughout the day, and to complement their efforts in this respect. The European Union also stands ready to further support peacebuilding activities and people-to-people contacts to help overcome the conflict divide.

And let me finish by thanking you, Edward, and all the institutions, the political actors, the civil society organisations for an extremely interesting and I believe fruitful first visit to Armenia.

Link to the video:http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/player.cfm?ref=I117268

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