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## PRESS RELEASE

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# NGOs commend Armenian Ombudsman

On 16 November, European Friends of Armenia (EuFoA, [www.EuFoA.org](http://www.EuFoA.org)) and the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU, [www.agbu.org](http://www.agbu.org)) held a joint policy briefing at EuFoA's Brussels office with Mr Armen Harutyunyan, Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia and Ms Jacqueline Hale (Open Society Institute) as discussant. The NGOs present commended the Ombudsman's contribution to the democratisation process in Armenia and his frank and credible analysis.

"Like many other post-Soviet countries, Armenia has not escaped distortions of its political-economic system", commented Mr Harutyunyan. "If we still dream of building a country based entirely on the rule of law, with respect for human rights standing at its core, then we must eliminate these distortions."

"It was great to hear about the strong progress made over the past five years, as well as the challenges which the Ombudsman is facing so passionately", added Michael Kambeck, EuFoA Secretary General. "Armenia is on the right track but must go further to have this progress enshrined in its political system and culture."

Key representatives of European institutions, think-tanks and NGOs, as well as diplomats took part in this roundtable discussion. The focus of Mr Harutyunyan's speech and the subsequent debate was on the role of the Ombudsman of Armenia in promoting Human Rights. The effective establishment and functioning of the Ombudsman institution in Armenia was praised by the European Union on numerous occasions. The European Commission's report on the European Neighbourhood Policy implementation progress for Armenia for 2007 has stated that "good progress was achieved in particular in the areas of judiciary reform, the administration of elections and the Ombudsperson Institution". According to the same document for 2009, "the independence of the institution of the Human Rights Defender (HRDO) in the political system and its role for the protection of human rights was further strengthened. Overall, the trend in the number of complaints received by the HRDO is increasing, confirming growing credibility of this institution". Meanwhile, challenges still remain and the rule of law and democracy features high on the EU-Armenia cooperation agenda, which is reflected by the creation of a new mechanism – the EU-Armenia Human Rights Dialogue in December 2009.

EuFoA is happy to provide commenting or background analysis in English, German, French, Italian, Polish, Russian and Armenian. Members of the Europe-Armenia Advisory Council may also be available for comments; for enquiries please contact our secretariat.

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