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PRESS RELEASE

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EU Council wants free access to Karabakh and for Armenia Visa Facilitation, free trade and more democratisation

On 27 February, the Foreign Affairs Council of the EU defined the framework for the EU's relations with the South Caucasus for the near future.

"The Council statement describes a new quality of relations between the EU and Armenia, including Visa Facilitation and the DCFTA, but also the conditions for further assistance and integration. But most strikingly, the EU acknowledges that EU officials should travel freely to and engage with Nagorno-Karabakh, disregarding infamous pressures from Azerbaijan. With this new clear mandate of the Council, we now expect that Special Representative Philippe Lefort, Ambassador Traian Hristea and other EU officials will visit Nagorno-Karabakh and retain first-hand information about the situation on the ground, but also help build up strong confidence building measures. The EU has the capacity and the neutrality required for this", commented Dr Michael Kambeck, Secretary General of European Friends of Armenia (www.EuFoA.org).

Background: In the past, the EU was subject to substantial pressure and intimidation by Azerbaijan regarding visits to NK. Two striking examples: In June 2007, the visit of the then EUSR Peter Semneby was stopped at the very last minute, effectively caving in to this pressure. In February 2011, the Azerbaijani Ambassador Eyyubov became famous for a threat letter sent to the members of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament. In an aggressive tone, MEPs were threatened with isolation and being declared "persona non grata" in Azerbaijan, if they follow the example of some colleagues who visited NK "without permission".

Concerning Nagorno-Karabakh, the Council makes these points:

- It calls for more direct **involvement of the EU in confidence building**, while continuing to **support the OSCE Minsk Group** format and the so-called Madrid Principles (to which last year's Kazan summit could not agree amid a long list of last-minute amendments presented by President Aliyev upon his arrival).
- It invites the Commission and the EEAS to develop, with the OSCE, post conflict scenarios for NK as a basis for future EU engagement. These could be **infrastructure plans and other positive incentives** for the conflict's resolution, but also the **EU's involvement in a possible peace keeping mission**, given the setup of the peace-securing forces is a major obstacle to reaching an agreement on the Madrid Principles.
- Most notably, the EU underlines the need for **unconditional access for representatives of the EU to Nagorno-Karabakh** and surrounding regions.

Regarding Armenia, the Council insists especially on the following points:

- It welcomes the **progress made in the negotiations for a new Association Agreement (AA)**.
- It welcomes the start of negotiations for **Visa Facilitation** and for a **Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA)**.



- It underlines the need for **further democratisation** in Armenia, especially the good conduct of the **parliamentary elections in May**. Achieving the goals to which Armenia committed itself, like the **fight against corruption** and enhancing the **independence of the judiciary**, will determine how much Armenia will profit from EU assistance and integration.

The Council of the European Union is the EU's highest foreign policy body, convening on Foreign Minister level. Its mandates are binding for the European Commission and the European External Action Service lead by the High Representative Catherine Ashton.

EuFoA is happy to provide commentary 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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