



EU-ARMENIA CIVIL SOCIETY PLATFORM

5th meeting, Brussels, 15 October 2024

JOINT DECLARATION

The EU-Armenia Civil Society Platform (EU-ARM CSP) is one of the bodies set up within the framework of the European Union-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA). It enables civil society organisations (CSOs) from both sides to monitor the implementation process and prepare recommendations for the relevant authorities.

The 5th meeting of the EU-ARM CSP was held on 15 October 2024 in Brussels, Belgium.

With regard to the implementation of the CEPA and the progress of EU-Armenia relations in general, the EU-Armenia Civil Society Platform:

1. welcomes the start of the visa liberalisation dialogue between the European Union and Armenia announced on 9 September 2024; at the same time, calls on the Armenian authorities to make consistent efforts to meet the EU benchmarks crucial for future visa-free travel for Armenian citizens to the EU with regard to documentary security, border and migration management, the fight against corruption and organised crime, and the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms;
2. welcomes the Armenian Parliament's speedy ratification of the cooperation agreement with EUROJUST, and the signing of the working arrangements between EUROJUST, the Ministry of Justice and the Office of the Prosecutor General, which marks the start of closer cooperation with the EU in criminal matters; calls on the Armenian authorities to hold a competitive process of appointment for the office of liaison prosecutor for this important structure;
3. appreciates the crucial role that the EU Monitoring Mission has played for the security of Armenia in reducing the number of Azerbaijani attacks on Armenian territory, and calls on the EU to extend its mandate beyond 2025; welcomes the European Council's adoption of the assistance measure in support of Armenia under the European Peace Facility, as well as other bilateral initiatives directed at strengthening Armenia's defence capabilities;
4. welcomes the negotiations between Armenia and the EU on the new cooperation agenda; at the same time, stresses the importance of a transparent and inclusive consultation process with civil society, including the EU-ARM CSP, to make sure that civil society's recommendations are considered before the final document is signed;

5. reiterates that for civil society actors engaged in the process, CEPA is not only a framework agreement between two partners, but is first and foremost a catalyst for turning Armenia into a true democracy and leading it towards EU membership;
6. points out that the primary functions of the EU-Armenia Civil Society Platform in implementing CEPA are to contribute to the process by providing advice and sectoral expertise, and to provide concerted and coordinated monitoring efforts to ensure that Armenia's commitments under CEPA are implemented in a transparent and accountable way;
7. indicates that in order to continue advising on CEPA and monitoring the Armenian government's implementation of CEPA and the proposed upgrade of the cooperation agenda between Armenia and the EU, the EU-ARM CSP will need continued support, including through direct funding from the European Commission and the Armenian government;
8. reiterates its position on the need to update the CEPA implementation plan, and calls on the Armenian government to do this in close cooperation with civil society, including the EU-ARM CSP, with a view to incorporating civil society's recommendations into the updated plan;
9. appreciates the steps taken by the Armenian authorities in carrying out the country's obligations under the Rome Statute; at the same time, urges the Armenian government to step up efforts towards cooperation with the International Criminal Court;
10. underlines the importance of allowing democratically elected members of the Yerevan City Council to fulfil their mandate;
11. reiterates the need for comprehensive judicial and legal reform, including in the prosecutorial and law enforcement bodies; calls on the authorities to take measures to prevent judges and persons related to them from continuing to take the seats of non-judicial members in the existing judicial commissions, to prevent continued instances of selective appointments and selective justice by the Supreme Judicial Council, and to rectify the failure to take adequate note of the negative integrity checks in judicial appointments;
12. calls on the international partners to strongly condemn instances of the media and other actors controlled by external forces targeting the judges of the Constitutional Court of Armenia for discharging their professional responsibilities;
13. notes the Armenian government's efforts towards fighting corruption, however, expresses concern about a number of unresolved institutional issues; in particular, stresses the need to ensure the independence of anti-corruption bodies, to promote their institutional development, and to bring their capacities up to standard;
14. Notes with concerns the practice of use of excessive force by police and lack of effective investigation of human rights violations committed by the police;

15. condemns the unprecedented draft amendment to the Police Act aiming to establish a mass state CCTV surveillance across the entire country, and deeply regrets that this draft has already passed the first parliamentary reading without proper public discussions and public awareness-raising campaigns; notes that introducing such legislation requires broad public discussion and a solid framework for personal data protection;
16. notes with regret that despite certain improvements in the Labour Code, little progress has been made on overall social and labour reforms over the past two years, despite advisory opinions and joint declarations by the EU-ARM CSP pointing out insufficient reflection among the policymakers concerned; once again calls on the Armenian government to promote social dialogue and to take practical steps to reinstitutionalise collective bargaining and social partner consultations at all levels, and to launch the awaited reforms on occupational safety and health, with clearly defined deadlines for these reforms;
17. reiterates the urgent need for Armenia to ratify and implement the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Conventions No 155 and No 187, in line with International Labour Organization (ILO) standards, and to fully implement Labour Inspection Convention No 81, given the lack of progress in adopting new international labour standards over the last 18 years;
18. calls on the Armenian government to reform the current legal framework to empower labour inspectorates to adequately ensure the effective enforcement of labour laws, particularly regarding informal employment, freedom of association and collective bargaining, wage setting and protection, and occupational health and safety;
19. notes that the organised transportation of foreign workforces and the often forced involvement of undocumented migrants in undocumented and dangerous labour is still taking place, and could even constitute trafficking; notes also that the authorities' mitigation measures have not yet brought visible outcomes; confirms the critical importance of taking decisive steps towards formalising the informal economy, ending undeclared labour practices by unscrupulous businesses and bringing traffickers involved in forced labour to justice;
20. appreciates the significant improvements in legislation on preventing domestic violence, however, points out the importance of also preventing harassment and violence in the world of work; calls for the ratification and implementation of the ILO's Violence and Harassment Convention No 190;
21. points out that in an era marred by the cost-of-living crisis, the prevalence of social justice in Armenian politics remains low; reaffirms the importance of expanding social protection systems, unemployment benefits and pensions; of introducing adequate minimum wages; and of indexing policies to protect society's resilience amid growing inequality and social tensions; at the same time, urges the EU to offer technical assistance for these reforms;
22. welcomes the Armenian government's plans to introduce universal healthcare coverage in the coming years, but stresses of the urgent need to keep the process transparent and to properly consult workers, who are expected to be the main financial funders of this coverage;

23. calls on the EU to exert any possible leverage on Azerbaijan to fully ensure respect for the rights and guarantee the security of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh (including their right to return to and live in their homes under international presence and to access their land and property rights), and to release all the inhabitants of Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia who continue to be in Azerbaijani custody, in line with Resolution RC-B9-0163/2024 of the European Parliament;
 24. greatly appreciates the financial support provided by the EU and its Member States to Armenia and its civil society for the displaced Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh, and stresses the need to increase this support with a view to preventing external forces from using discontent to run political interferences, including by unconstitutional means;
 25. reiterates that effectively and sustainably developing and introducing democracy in a country is only possible in conditions of peace, security and stability; in this respect, notes that it is essential to increase pressure and diplomatic leverage on Azerbaijan to refrain from any future military aggression against Armenia, and any military narrative in the country.
-