



EU-ARMENIA CIVIL SOCIETY PLATFORM

4th meeting, Yerevan, 14 March 2024

JOINT DECLARATION

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

The fourth meeting of the EU-ARM CSP was held on 14 March 2024 in Yerevan, Armenia.

With regard to the **implementation of the EU-Armenia CEPA**, the EU-Armenia Civil Society Platform:

1. welcomes the Resolution 2024/2580(RSP) on closer ties between the EU and Armenia and the need for a peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia adopted by the European Parliament on 13 March 2024;
2. welcomes the positive outcomes of the EU-Armenia Partnership Council of 13 February 2024, with the introduction of the new EU-Armenia Partnership Agenda, as well as the latest efforts and declared commitments of the Armenian leadership to advance the relationship with its European partners in line with the European aspirations of the Armenian people. At the same time, the EU-ARM CSP points out that this cannot substitute for or de-prioritise the routine legislative and institutional reforms committed to under CEPA and calls for civil society to be actively involved in the implementation of the Agenda.
3. points out that the primary functions of the EU-Armenia Civil Society Platform in the area of CEPA implementation are to contribute to the process through advisory sectoral expertise and concerted and coordinated monitoring efforts, with a view to ensuring that Armenia's commitments under the CEPA are implemented in a transparent and accountable manner;
4. states that the EU-ARM CSP has made considerable efforts to raise public awareness of the importance of the CEPA for Armenia, and of EU-Armenia cooperation, and remains committed to increasing its efforts in achieving greater public awareness of these matters;
5. points out that the EU-ARM CSP has undertaken efforts to monitor CEPA implementation and to consolidate former and current civil society efforts in the area of CEPA monitoring, intending

to strengthen its coordinating role even further in the period to come, including for civil society in the regions of Armenia;

6. emphasises that in order to keep its current level of involvement in advising on and monitoring of CEPA implementation by the Armenian Government and the proposed upgrade of the cooperation agenda between Armenia and EU, the EU-ARM CSP will need continued direct financial support from the European Commission and the Government of Armenia;
7. assesses that the level of cooperation between the CSP, the Armenian government, the EU and its Members States is increasing and reiterates that effective implementation of the EU-ARM CSP's functions requires continued constructive and effective communication between all the parties concerned. To that effect, expresses hope that the communication established between the EU-ARM CSP and the Government will increasingly be placed on a more institutional footing and that the EU-ARM CSP's recommendations, as set out in its advisory opinions and reports¹, will be taken into account in an open and constructive manner;
8. reiterates that for the civil society players engaged in the process, the CEPA is not only seen as framework agreement between two partners, but first and foremost as a strong stimulus for Armenia's democratisation and future EU membership;
9. appreciates the steps taken by the Armenian authorities to join the international community in its efforts to prevent and punish the gravest international crimes through the ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, assessing this as a fulfilment of an important obligation assumed under the CEPA;
10. Regretfully assesses certain processes led and initiated by the My Step faction in the Armenian National Assembly and Yerevan Council as clear signs of democratic backsliding. These processes include the election of the former Chairperson of the Corruption Prevention Commission, the dismissal of the former Chairperson of the parliamentary Standing Committee on Human Rights Protection and the removal of the leader of the National Progress party from his mandate of Yerevan Council member;
11. appreciates the positive steps taken in the area of justice sector reform, including the reform of the legislation on the ethics and disciplinary commission of the judges. At the same time, expresses regret about setbacks in the current progress of the justice sector reform, as reflected in certain instances of selective justice administered by the Supreme Judicial Council and failure to take adequate note of the negative integrity checks in making judicial appointments;
12. assesses positively the establishment of the Ministry of the Interior with oversight of the police and the Police Patrol Service, yet expresses serious concerns over the increased incidents of police brutality, including against the members of the LGBTIQ community and practicing lawyers;

¹ www.eu-armenia.am

13. calls on the Armenian authorities, the EU and its Member States to take concerted measures to fight disinformation against CSO representatives calling on Armenia to heed to the European aspirations of the Armenian people and accelerate the implementation of the reforms that will bring the State closer to the EU;
14. Notes that the integrity of the education system cannot be restored by merely restraining from the vicious practices by the authorities, nor by adding new, less compromised institutions and mechanisms on top of the compromised ones with similar/duplicating functions and calls for targeted and urgent measures of high quality audit of integrity violations in the system of education and instituting accountability and inspection measures tying the detected violations with administrative consequences;
15. notes the efforts of the Armenian government to diversify its economic, energy - related, infrastructural, defence, and political dependence on Russia and other authoritarian powers, yet considers them to be insufficient in the face of the current challenges faced by the State. Considering the inevitable relationship between trade and political stability, the EU-ARM CSP members urge the government to invest more efforts to improve trade between Armenia and the European Union, which should not be limited to the attraction of investments in infrastructure under regional peace-building initiatives and public procurement;
16. draws attention to economic decline in agriculture and rural development (Chapter 10 of the CEPA, articles 70 and 71) caused by an inefficient agricultural and food security policy; notes that more than half of the agricultural lands is not irrigated in Armenia, and that cooperation to promote agricultural and rural development, in particular through progressive convergence of policies and legislation, is almost absent; poverty is growing in rural areas and the level of food security is continuously declining;
17. express the need to undertake a joint study to reveal the threats to food security in the South Caucasus region with concrete recommendations to policy-makers and international organisations in the light of the results of a comprehensive study² demonstrating that none of the South Caucasus countries can report self-sufficiency in terms of food security, instead being classified by the UN as low-income, middle-income and food-deficit nations;
18. calls for increased EU assistance for agriculture and rural development in the form of support in designing programmes for the establishment of agricultural cooperatives, investments in the construction of new dams and effective irrigation systems, the provision of technical assistance in the area of supply chain development from farm to agro-processing enterprises and the development of long-term trust-based relations between farmers and processors, ensuring compliance with ISO and HASP standards;
19. calls on the Armenian authorities to continue the land reform by amending the land code with a view to regulating the use of land in a way that encourages consolidation of land plots owned by different owners and initiation of legal action in cases of misuse or non-use of arable lands;

² <https://www.globalhungerindex.org/pdf/en/2023.pdf>

20. highlights the need to accelerate reforms aimed at improving the state oversight and inspection of standards and regulations in the fields of labour, food safety, the environment and consumer protection, including through the adoption, ratification, and effective implementation of international standards, committed to by Armenia, including the International Labour Organization' (ILO) Conventions as well as European standards under CEPA;
21. welcomes the historical visit by ILO Director General to Armenia in December 2023 and Armenia's adherence to the Global Coalition for Social Justice, support ILO in advancing decent work, employment creation and social protection, including assisting refugees; notes that the Decent Work Country Programme has expired and expresses hope that the new one will be developed in the nearest future;
22. expresses concerns over dysfunctional social dialogue and the need to improve compliance with the international norms, particularly under ILO Conventions on freedom of association, non-discrimination, occupational health and safety (OSH), forced labour, wages and labour inspection; notes that ongoing labour law reforms must ensure proper engagement of social partners and be in full compliance with international obligations;
23. calls on Armenia to pursue ratification of the ILO Conventions, particularly, OSH Conventions 155 and 187, which were recognized as core labour standards by the International Labour Conference in 2023; notes in this regard that the EU support to the ILO technical assistance programmes to the country, social dialogue and engagement of social partners shall be strengthened;
24. calls on the authorities to take effective measures to protect immigrants in Armenia from organised illicit schemes related to illegal or informal labour, irregular migration and dangerous housing, including by increased scrutiny and inspections in risky industries and collective accommodation; identifying and combatting trafficking for forced labour practices and bring responsible criminal groups to justice;
25. reminds the authorities of Armenia of the utmost importance of the principles of social justice and cohesion when enacting the upcoming Universal Healthcare Insurance reform, and calls to refrain from putting the funding burden solely on workers; argue that employers and businesses must contribute their fair share;
26. emphasizes the importance of a robust and consistent implementation of the Visa Facilitation Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Armenia, noting the significant procedural flaws in recent years. The EU-ARM CSP points to the urgent need for enhanced budgetary and human resource capacities within the diplomatic missions of EU Member States in Armenia to improve efficiency and expediency in the managing of visit appointments, as well as the processing and issuance of visas. We call on the EU and Armenia to increase cooperation in the area of achieving visa liberalisation for Armenian citizens travelling to the EU Member States;
27. notes with regret that the level of environmental pollution in Armenia is among the worst globally in the face of low-level industrialisation; expresses the belief that this situation is a clear result of political neglect. We urge the authorities to acknowledge the environmental and

public hazard emergency and take urgent, bold and visible steps to contain and decrease the pollution from the transport, construction and mining industries;

28. strongly condemns the forced displacement of the Armenian population of Nagorno Karabakh as a result of the attack of the Azerbaijani military forces on 19 September 2023 and calls on the EU institutions to take into account the recommendations of the European Parliament relating to proportionate sanctions against Azerbaijan;
 29. calls on EU to exert any possible leverage on Azerbaijan to fully ensure the exercise of the rights and security of the Armenians from Nagorno-Karabagh, including their right to return and live in their homes under international presence, to access their land and property rights, to release all the inhabitants of Nagorno Karabagh and Armenia who continue to be in Azerbaijani custody in line with the Resolution RC-B9-0163/2024 of the European Parliament;
 30. 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 such support with a view to preventing Russia's proxy political parties and civil society from using the discontent of the Armenians from Nagorno Karabakh for yet another attempt at overthrowing the government through unconstitutional means;
 31. reiterates that the effective and sustainable democratisation and development of any country is possible only in conditions of peace, security and stability. In this respect, it is essential to increase pressure and diplomatic leverage on Azerbaijan to refrain from any future military aggression against Armenia;
 32. values greatly the work of the EU Monitoring Mission in Armenia (EUMA) in the light of tangible evidence of a reduced number of Azerbaijani attacks on those Armenian territories where there is a presence of the EUMA and calls on the EU and its Member States to increase security sector cooperation with Armenia through the European Peace Facility and other bilateral initiatives aimed at strengthening Armenia's defence capabilities.
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