



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL
THE PRESIDENT**



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**Remarks by Herman Van Rompuy,
President of the European Council,
following his meeting with President of Armenia
Serzh Sargsyan**

Mr President, it is a pleasure to be here in Armenia for the first time, a country which has brought much to European history and culture, and with which we share many things, both in our past and future. I am very grateful for the warm and gracious hospitality extended to me and my delegation today.

This is the third time that we meet. (we met previously in Warsaw for the EaP-summit and in Brussels). And as usual, President Sargsyan and I had good talks covering our bilateral and regional agenda.

I would like to highlight the following three points:

First, We are experiencing overall progress in the EU-Armenia relationship. There has been progress in the negotiations on the Association Agreement. And, we have started negotiations on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement. Moreover, in February of this year, negotiations were launched on Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements, as a first step towards visa liberalisation.

I encouraged President Sargsyan to make maximum use of the opportunities provided by the Eastern Partnership for Armenia. We have registered good progress since the summit in Warsaw.

And, as I mentioned, we are on track in reaching the goals set out in the Roadmap in time for the next Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius 2013.

Second, I welcome Armenia's commitment to reforms based on the core values for the European Union, and geared towards approximating to the standards and norms of the EU. This is clearly a strategic choice by Armenia.

P R E S S

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I encourage Armenia to continue on this path towards strengthening its democratic institutions, to promote transparency, to root out corruption and to respect Human Rights and the rule of law, including the right to free speech and press. You are, President Sargsyan, on the right track, even if there is still a lot of work ahead.

I also pointed out, (and will point out to parliamentarians and civil society later today) that we are prepared to support you. The stronger the commitment to pursue genuine reform and to uphold universal values, the more you will be able to count on the EU in accordance with the "more for more" principle.

In this regard, I am happy to announce that the EU has decided to top up its annual support to Armenia by 15 million euros for 2012 under the Eastern Partnership Integration and Cooperation (EaPIC). This is an increase of 25 % of the EU's financial assistance to Armenia.

The funds will be used to scale up our support to a number of core reforms in support of Armenia's progress towards association.

The European Union welcomes the efforts which the Armenian authorities made to deliver more competitive and transparent parliamentary elections. This was an important step forward. However, as identified in the Final Report by the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission, some issues remain to be addressed. We trust that this will be done before the upcoming Presidential elections.

On this basis, I am pleased to say that the European Commission will now be in a position to start preparations of a donor conference with Armenia and international financial institutions.

Third, progress on the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict should remain a top priority. Everyday that goes by without a solution is an opportunity missed for all of us. In order to find a solution we need to build confidence, trust and respect.

It is with great concern that we take note of recent reports of serious armed incidents on the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the Line of Contact. I deeply regret the loss of life. My sympathy lies with the families of those who have suffered the loss of relatives and loved ones.

Military force will not resolve the conflict. Only a peaceful, negotiated settlement can allow the entire region to move beyond the status quo toward a secure and prosperous future. If a secure and stable regional environment can be prepared, stability, peace will bring benefits to all Armenians.

I repeat what has been said earlier by the EU, and was stated by the Co-chairs of the Minsk-group at the G20, to both Armenia and Azerbaijan: Both need to take decisions in order to reach a lasting and peaceful settlement based on the Madrid principles: both Armenia and Azerbaijan need to fully implement the commitments made by their Presidents in the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group. Both sides should also strictly respect the ceasefire and exercise restraint on the ground and refrain from hostile rhetoric in public statements.

The EU stands ready to support any confidence building and reconciliation efforts. We have both the means and the experience to do so. The appointment of Ambassador Lefort as the new EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia shows the increasing commitment of the EU.

Mr President, thank you again for receiving us here in Yerevan. Armenia is a partner - a close partner. I am happy that we today confirmed our joint work together to ensure Armenia's positive future.
