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Closer ties between the EU and Armenia and the need for a peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia

European Parliament resolution of 13 March 2024 on closer ties between the EU and Armenia and the need for a peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia (2024/2580(RSP))

(C/2024/6555)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to its previous resolutions on Armenia, Azerbaijan and the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh,

— having regard to the UN Charter, the Helsinki Final Act and the Alma-Ata Declaration of 21 December 1991,

— having regard to the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Armenia, of the other part [1] (CEPA), which fully entered into force on 1 March 2021,

— having regard to the address of the Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan to the plenary of the European Parliament on 17 October 2023,

— having regard to the conclusions of the second high-level EU-Armenia Political and Security Dialogue of 15 November 2023,

— having regard to Armenia's becoming a party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) on 1 February 2024,

— having regard to the Partnership Implementation Report on Armenia of 9 February 2024,

— having regard to the outcomes of the fifth meeting of the EU-Armenia Partnership Council on 13 February 2024,

— having regard to Rule 132(2) and (4) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas EU-Armenia relations are based on common values such as democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, regional cooperation and an active engagement in the Eastern Partnership framework so as to contribute to regional cooperation and stability;

B. whereas the European Council tasked the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Commission with exploring ways to strengthen all aspects of EU-Armenia relations;

C. whereas on 17 October 2023, in his address to the European Parliament, the Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan called for a joint commitment to further strengthen EU-Armenia relations and underlined that the 'Republic of Armenia is ready to be closer to the European Union, as much as the European Union considers it possible';

D. whereas on 9 March 2024, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Armenia, Ararat Mirzoyan, publicly contemplated submitting an application for Armenia to become a candidate for accession to the European Union;

E. whereas Armenia has undergone significant political changes in recent years, with a government committed to both ensuring functioning democratic institutions and to using the EU-Armenia CEPA as a blueprint for reforms to modernise the country, despite considerable challenges; whereas according to *The Economist's* 2023 Democracy Index, Armenia is the leading democracy in the region;

[1] OJ L 23, 26.1.2018, p. 4.

F. whereas, by freezing its membership of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Armenia is attempting to decrease its security dependence on the Russian Federation and include new players in its security mix, such as through increased military cooperation with France, Greece and other EU Member States; whereas thousands of Russian soldiers are still stationed on Armenian soil; whereas Russia's alleged readiness to guarantee the security of Armenia has proven to be non-existent; whereas Armenia still remains in the Eurasian Economic Union; whereas Armenia has become a party to the ICC's Rome Statute;

G. whereas the Russian Federation is seeking to undermine Armenian democratic credentials, and is spreading chaos and destabilisation through continuous attempts at interference, including disinformation campaigns;

H. whereas the Armenian economy is still largely dependent on Russia, which accounts for around 35 % of Armenia's foreign trade, and its dependence is particularly pronounced in the strategic energy sector; whereas Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has called for increased assistance under the EU Economic and Investment Plan; whereas the Economic and Investment Plan has so far mobilised approximately EUR 500 million in cross-sector investments; whereas the EU remains the key reform partner and largest aid donor in Armenia; whereas on 5 October 2023, the Commission announced a further EUR 5,25 million in emergency assistance, increased funding for the EU4Peace programme, additional annual programmes intended for budget support and technical assistance to address issues such as air safety and nuclear safety;

I. whereas a new EU-Armenia Partnership Agenda, agreed at the fifth EU-Armenia Partnership Council, will prioritise – based on common values – strengthening Armenia's resilience and diversifying its economy, enhancing security cooperation and stepping up investment as the key to economic cooperation;

J. whereas the recently published partnership implementation report outlines the progress achieved by Armenia in implementing the CEPA, including on justice reform, the fight against corruption, the creation of a Ministry of Interior and the reform of the police service in Armenia, with EU support;

K. whereas Russia continues to access restricted EU goods through supply chains running through third countries, including Armenia; whereas, following the introduction of EU sanctions on Russia, exports from Armenia to Russia tripled in 2022 and doubled between January and August 2023; whereas the EU Special Envoy on Sanctions, Mr David O'Sullivan, has not voiced any concern over Armenian authorities' cooperation with the EU on the prevention of circumvention of sanctions and has assessed positively the overall record of cooperation with Armenia;

L. whereas on 19 September 2023, after a nine month illegal blockade of the Lachin Corridor, disregarding its commitments included in the November 2020 ceasefire agreement and International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling, Azerbaijan launched an offensive on the remaining parts of the Nagorno-Karabakh not already under its control; whereas more than 100 000 Armenians had to flee the territory, resulting in Nagorno-Karabakh being almost entirely deprived of its Armenian population, who had been living there for centuries; whereas this may amount to ethnic cleansing; whereas the unrecognised de facto authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh ceased to exist on 1 January 2024, after they agreed under duress to their dissolution; whereas a number of Armenians are still being held in Azerbaijan, including the former leaders of Nagorno-Karabakh; some being interviewed and submitted to public curiosity contrary to the 1929 Geneva Conventions; whereas Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh lost their properties and belongings while fleeing the military push by Azerbaijan and have not been able to recover them since then;

M. whereas on 13 February 2024, the Commission announced the allocation of an additional EUR 5,5 million in humanitarian aid to support the Armenians displaced from the Nagorno-Karabakh region, in addition to the EUR 12.,2 million announced in September 2023;

N. whereas the EU fully supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Armenia and Azerbaijan and actively supports efforts towards a sustainable peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan, achieved by peaceful means and in respect of the rights of the population concerned;

O. whereas Armenia and Azerbaijan have engaged in direct negotiations toward a possible peace agreement, which could open a new chapter in bilateral relations; whereas disagreement persists on matters related to delimitation and demarcation of the border as well as the practical arrangements for transport links between Azerbaijan proper and its exclave of Nakhchivan; whereas Azerbaijan demands a corridor through Armenia connecting mainland Azerbaijan with its Nakhchivan exclave, to be controlled by Russian border troops and without Armenian customs or border checks, therefore disregarding Armenia's sovereignty; whereas Armenia's proposed 'Crossroads of Peace' includes linkages between mainland Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan with Armenian border and customs checks;

P. whereas, as a gesture of good will, Armenia did not oppose the organisation of COP29 in Baku; whereas on 28 January 2024, Armenia's Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan, proposed the signing of a non-aggression pact with Azerbaijan; whereas, in the meantime, the security situation remains tense, as exemplified by the 13 February 2024 incident in which four Armenian soldiers were killed and one wounded by Azerbaijani gunfire in Armenia's southern Syunik province;

Q. whereas Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan commented on 15 and 16 February 2024 that Azerbaijan had rejected Armenia's latest proposals on border delimitation/demarcation and shared his analysis that Azerbaijan could be preparing to launch 'military operations in some areas of the border with the aim of turning it into a large-scale war against the Republic of Armenia'; whereas Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev met in Munich on 17 February 2024, with the mediation of German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, for the first time since Azerbaijan's attack on Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023;

R. whereas numerous churches, mosques, cross-stones and cemeteries are located in Nagorno-Karabakh; whereas after considerable deliberate damage was caused by Azerbaijan to Armenian cultural heritage during the 2020 war, the ICJ indicated, in its Order of 7 December 2021 ([2]), that Azerbaijan must 'take all necessary measures to prevent and punish acts of vandalism and desecration affecting Armenian cultural heritage, including but not limited to churches and other places of worship, monuments, landmarks, cemeteries and artefacts'; whereas during recent weeks, Azerbaijani authorities have removed monuments and demolished iconic buildings related to the Armenian cultural heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh, including the local parliament building;

S. whereas the Azerbaijani leadership continues to make irredentist statements with reference to the sovereign territory of Armenia; whereas the Azerbaijani army continues to occupy approximately 170 km² of the sovereign territory of Armenia;

T. whereas the civilian EU Mission in Armenia (EUMA), under the common security and defence policy, was deployed in February 2023, with a mandate to monitor and report on the developments on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border; whereas EUMA is allowed to operate only on the Armenian side of the border as Azerbaijan refuses to have the mission on its side of the border; whereas the Russian military personnel present in Armenia have deliberately placed obstacles in the way of the implementation of EUMA's mandate; whereas EUMA has been the target of disinformation by Azerbaijani authorities and government-controlled media; whereas in December 2023, the EU Foreign Affairs Council agreed to increase the presence on the ground from 138 staff to 209;

U. whereas Armenia has repeatedly asked the EU to include the country among the beneficiaries of the European Peace Facility; whereas several Member States decided to increase their support to Armenia by providing military assistance in order to help Armenia reform its army and deter new military aggressions against its internationally recognised territory;

1. Recognises and welcomes the fact that Armenian has strongly emphasised its desire to enhance and prioritise relations with the European Union; believes that the European Union should respond positively and take full advantage of this potential geopolitical shift and help Armenia anchor itself more strongly in the community of democracies;

2. Calls for the sustained implementation of the newly agreed EU-Armenia Partnership Agenda, emphasising the need to actively pursue and achieve the ambitious joint priorities for cooperation; believes that a substantial partnership between the EU and Armenia is a logical step in aligning with Armenia's choice in favour of democracy, the rule of law, the fight against corruption and respect for the international rules-based order;

3. Welcomes Armenia's commitment to implementing CEPA and the progress it has made in implementing the CEPA roadmap; welcomes the fact that the Armenian Government recognises CEPA as a strategic blueprint for key reforms in Armenia; encourages the Commission and the Member States to start working on a roadmap to achieve an ambitious upgrade to the EU's relations with Armenia; believes that the experience stemming from the Association Agreements / Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas with Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova should serve as a good basis, in particular in relation to a gradual sectoral integration with the single market, which should bear tangible benefits on a macro and micro scale for Armenia;

([2]) Order of the ICJ of 7 December 2021 on the request for the indication of provisional measures for the application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (*Armenia* v *Azerbaijan*).

4. Reiterates that, pursuant to Article 49 of the Treaty of European Union, any European state may apply to become a member of the European Union provided that it adheres to the Copenhagen criteria and the principles of democracy, respects fundamental freedoms and human and minority rights and upholds the rule of law; considers that, should Armenia be interested in applying for candidate status and continuing on its path of sustained reforms consolidating its democracy, this could set the stage for a transformative phase in EU-Armenia relations; calls on the Commission and the Council to actively support Armenia's desire for increased cooperation with the EU, not only in the area of economic partnership but also in political dialogue, people-to-people contacts, sectoral integration and security cooperation;

5. Supports Armenia in its continuous efforts to implement reforms and strengthen democracy, the rule of law and good governance; underscores the important role of civil society in the implementation of the reforms; calls on Armenia to continue cooperating with the EU in this regard and calls for the EU to increase support in these areas, in particular technical support and the exchange of expertise; encourages Armenia's active engagement in the Eastern Partnership policy as a means of fostering good neighbourly relations in the South Caucasus;

6. Recognises that the Russian Federation's influence on the Armenian economy remains high, encourages Armenia to exert vigilance on possible EU sanctions circumvention taking place in the country; is fully aware of the level and diversity of threats that the Russian Federation might try to use against Armenia to punish it for its independent political and strategic choices; believes that the EU needs to be ready to provide rapid assistance to Armenia to mitigate the negative consequences of any such unfriendly steps;

7. Notes that over the last 10 years, the volume of Armenia-EU bilateral trade has been increasing; encourages Armenia, the EU and its Member States, as well as European companies and investors, to take the necessary steps to further enhance their economic and trade relations; commends the success of the Economic and Investment Plan and encourages the EU and Armenia to continue leveraging both public and private investments to promote sustainable development in Armenia;

8. Recognises the urgent need to strengthen the cooperation between the EU and Armenia in the field of security and defence while Armenia reconsiders its membership of the CSTO; calls for the EU to respond favourably to Armenia's request for support via the European Peace Facility and to provide support to the Armenian military; notes the added value of regular EU-Armenian Political and Security Dialogues, as an umbrella platform for all security related matters; calls for the launch of a hybrid threat assessment survey, which will help Armenia to identify key vulnerabilities and devise targeted solutions; welcomes the actions undertaken by several Member States to provide defensive military support to Armenia and urges the Member States to consider similar initiatives;

9. Welcomes Armenia's decision to suspend its participation in the CSTO, following its failure to assist Armenia against military aggression, and to seek a more reliable security architecture; supports Armenia's official request for the Russian Federation to withdraw its Federal Security Service border guards from its international airport;

10. Recognises the untapped potential of people-to-people contacts between the EU and Armenia; calls for the progress achieved by Armenia in implementing the agreements on visa facilitation and readmission to be acknowledged; believes that it is time to launch a visa liberalisation dialogue with Armenia;

11. Welcomes the conclusion of the agreement between the EU and the Republic of Armenia, which will enable the transfer of operational personal data between Eurojust and Armenia's competent authorities as part of judicial cooperation in criminal matters; underlines the importance of continuing to deepen the cooperation between the EU and Armenia in fighting crime and terrorism and protecting the security of the Union for mutual benefit;

12. Expresses its support for the activities of EUMA and underscores the important role it plays; calls for its mandate to be extended beyond 2025 and its staffing to be further increased; reiterates its disappointment at Azerbaijan's refusal to allow the mission to operate on its side of the border and the repeated smear campaigns originating from Azerbaijan against EUMA; deplores the fact that Russian border guards stationed in Armenia blocked EUMA from reaching the village of Nerkin Hand where four Armenian soldiers were recently killed at the hands of Azerbaijan on 13 February 2024, following the alleged injury of an Azerbaijani soldier; condemns the inflammatory rhetoric deployed by Azerbaijani officials against the EU, its Member States, EUMA and the Armenian authorities;

13. Underscores that the EU should be ready to impose sanctions on any individuals and entities that threaten the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Armenia;

14. Calls on Azerbaijan to genuinely engage in a comprehensive and transparent dialogue with the Karabakh Armenians to ensure respect for their rights and guarantee their security, including their right to return to and live in their homes in dignity and safety under international presence, to access their land and property rights, to maintain their distinct identity and fully enjoy their civic, cultural, social and religious rights; calls on Azerbaijan to release and commit to broad amnesty for all the inhabitants of Nagorno Karabakh and Armenia who continue to be in Azerbaijani custody; calls for the full, immediate and effective implementation of all the ICJ orders in the case on the Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (*Armenia* v *Azerbaijan*);

15. Reiterates its condemnation of the Azerbaijani military incursions into the internationally recognised territory of Armenia and ongoing occupation of parts of it; reiterates its demand for the withdrawal of Azerbaijan's troops from the entirety of the sovereign territory of Armenia; rejects and expresses its grave concern regarding the irredentist and inflammatory statements made by the Azerbaijani President and other Azerbaijani officials threatening the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Armenia, including those in connection with demanding the exterritorial corridor linking Azerbaijan to its exclave of Nakhchivan; warns Azerbaijan against any potential military adventurism against Armenia proper; highlights that Azerbaijan's connectivity issues with its exclave of Nakhchivan should be resolved with full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Armenia;

16. Reiterates the European Union's unequivocal support for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of the borders of Armenia; strongly supports the normalisation of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan based on the principles of mutual recognition of territorial integrity and inviolability of borders based on the 1991 Almaty Declaration, border delimitation based on relevant USSR General Staff maps that have been provided to both sides, and the unblocking of regional communication based on respect for the sovereignty and jurisdiction of both countries, on the basis of reciprocity and equality;

17. Expresses its support for the resumption of talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan on all pending issues, with the aim of concluding a peace treaty, and calls on both parties to remain fully committed to a lasting and peaceful settlement of the long-standing dispute, through dialogue and negotiations; believes that this agreement needs to be negotiated in good faith and be based on the recognition of sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-use of force; calls for a stronger EU commitment to continue facilitating a comprehensive, sustainable peace for the benefit of all the people of the region; calls on Türkiye and other allies of Azerbaijan to refrain from fuelling bellicose behaviour from Baku and to exert their influence in favour of a swift conclusion to the peace negotiations; urges Azerbaijan to close the so-called Trophy Park in Baku, which was inaugurated on 12 April 2021, as it undermines efforts to build mutual trust between Armenia and Azerbaijan;

18. Strongly disagrees with the tone of some recent statements by leaders of the Commission and the European Council congratulating President Aliyev for his re-election without mentioning the absence of democracy in Azerbaijan and misleadingly qualifying Azerbaijan as a reliable partner; affirms that these statements do not reflect the position of the European Union and should never have been made in the light of the ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh by Azerbaijan; urges the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European External Action Service to continue the negotiations for a renewed partnership agreement conditionally, if Azerbaijan has demonstrated its genuine readiness to respect the rights and security concerns of the Karabakh Armenians and has contributed to substantial progress towards a comprehensive and sustainable peace agreement with Armenia;

19. Expresses serious concern about the failure to safeguard the cultural, religious and historical heritage of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh, in violation of the ICJ Order of 7 December 2021; condemns all cases of the destruction, vandalism and desecration of all sites recalling the centuries-long Armenian presence in Nagorno-Karabakh; calls on the Azerbaijani authorities to preserve, protect and promote the rich and diverse heritage of the region; urges UNESCO to take immediate action to preserve and protect Armenian cultural heritage at risk in Nagorno-Karabakh; calls for the cooperation between Armenia and the EU to be reinforced, concerning the monitoring of the systematic destruction of Armenian cultural heritage (churches, monasteries, cemeteries, monuments, palaces, etc.) by Azerbaijan, most notably through the involvement of the EU Satellite Centre;

20. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the President, Government and Parliament of the Republic of Armenia and the President, Government and Parliament of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the United Nations and the Council of Europe.