

**EUROPEAN UNION****OSCE Permanent Council Nr 955
Vienna, 6 June 2013**

**EU statement in response to the Minister for Foreign
Affairs of Armenia, H.E. Edward Nalbandian**

The EU warmly welcomes H.E. Edward Nalbandian, to the Permanent Council today.

We congratulate Armenia on its recent assumption of the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and thank Minister Nalbandian for his statement in this capacity. We reiterate our support for the broad cooperation and regular dialogue between the OSCE and the Council of Europe.

The OSCE, the Council of Europe and the European Union, share many of the same values and principles. We wholeheartedly support the Council of Europe's core mission of promoting and protecting human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law.

We welcome Armenia's decision to focus on priorities that are also issues of relevance, concern and focus here in the OSCE. We note their intention to promote European values through intercultural dialogue and to address the challenge of combating racism and xenophobia in Europe including by organising a High Level Conference on this issue. The OSCE has of course recently held its own High Level conference in Tirana on this theme and we would encourage Armenia to consider whether the findings of that conference can usefully inform the organisation of their own event. We call on Armenia to adopt a comprehensive approach to this topic that seeks to combat all forms of intolerance and discrimination, including against LGBT persons. To this end we hope that Armenia's stated intention to focus on combating hate speech will take a similarly comprehensive approach.

We also note Armenia's priority of strengthening European standards on human rights and on the rule of law through its proposed emphasis on capacity-building

for legal professionals and a conference of experts to give specific attention to the role of public administration in States governed by the rule of law, notably the scope and the limits of State powers' discretion in designing, implementing and interpreting laws. We consider this to be a valuable opportunity to work in conjunction with, and give greater prominence to, the work of the Venice Commission, and to maintain the focus on the practical application in Member States of issues relating to the rule of law. We also welcome the importance that the Armenian Chairmanship has attached to the accession of the European Union to the European Convention on Human Rights, thereby reinforcing the role of the Council of Europe in the European architecture.

Beyond the priorities of the Armenian Chairmanship, cooperation between the OSCE and the Council of Europe continues to be based on a well established and solid framework including in the areas of terrorism, trafficking in human beings, tolerance and non-discrimination, the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, election observation cooperation, Roma and Sinti issues, media freedom and democratisation. These are just a few of the areas where the two organisations can maximise synergies whilst at all times seeking to complement rather than duplicate the other's activities. In this regard, we note the proposals for enhanced cooperation between the two organisations that were transmitted by the Committee of Ministers to the Permanent Council at the end of last year. Your presentation here today and the forthcoming visit of Secretary General Zannier to Strasbourg on 3 July offers us opportunities to exchange views on how we might take forward this issue.

Whilst the distinguished Foreign Minister's address today has focussed on his country's role as Chair of the Council of Europe, we would also like to encourage Armenia to continue to cooperate with the OSCE.

The EU takes this opportunity to reaffirm its support for the Minsk Group and to restate its complete confidence in the commitment of the Co-Chairs to the search for a fair and lasting settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. We urge the parties to focus on constructive dialogue and encourage them to take greater advantage of the efforts being made by the Co-Chairs. We also welcome the monitoring activities conducted by the Personal Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office.

We welcome the measures taken by the Armenian authorities to bring the recent presidential elections into line with international standards, notably through improved administration of the electoral process, including ensuring freer campaigning by candidates and the better quality of voter lists. We would encourage the Government of Armenia to continue to work with the OSCE and ODIHR to address the issues raised in their election observation reports, such as abuse of administrative resources and instances of intimidation and pressure on voters. We would further encourage an inclusive and transparent process of amendments to election related legislation, in line with their recommendations and that a number of outstanding concerns be followed up.

In conclusion, we would like to thank H.E. Edward Nalbandian for his address to the Permanent Council today.

The Acceding Country Croatia*, the Candidate Countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Montenegro*, Iceland+ and Serbia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA country Norway, member of the European Economic Area, as well as the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this statement.

* Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

+ Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.