

**EUROPEAN UNION****OSCE Special Permanent Council Nr 1043
Vienna, 11 March 2015**

**EU Statement in Response to H.E. Mr Edward Nalbandian,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia**

The European Union warmly welcomes H.E. Edward Nalbandian to the Permanent Council today and thanks him for his presentation.

Your Excellency, your visit comes at a time when we are confronted with the most serious challenge to European security in decades. Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol and destabilising actions in eastern Ukraine have seriously violated the basic OSCE principles and commitments.

The EU remains committed to strengthening the security of the whole OSCE region. We believe that it is essential that we achieve tangible progress towards the resolution of the protracted conflicts. In this context, the situation in the South Caucasus remains of great concern and has direct implications for the security and stability of the whole region.

We therefore strongly support a peaceful resolution to the long standing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. We call on Armenia and Azerbaijan to step-up their efforts to conduct comprehensive negotiations to find a lasting settlement. We support the work of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs in trying to find a peaceful resolution of the conflict. We join the call of the Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group, reiterated by President Hollande at the Paris summit, in encouraging both sides to make progress towards a comprehensive peace agreement and to prepare the populations for peace. We note with interest the recent statement by the Minsk Co-Chairs which referred to potential next steps towards a settlement, as well as preparations for a future presidential meeting later this year.

We would further encourage the parties involved to take steps which will contribute to a peaceful resolution of the conflict, including through confidence-building measures in support of and fully complementary with the work of the Minsk Group Co-Chairs. On this basis, the EU has been supporting and promoting such confidence-building measures across the conflict divide and we invite the parties to also cooperate with the EUSR. We would encourage all sides to continue to discuss with the International Committee of the Red Cross issues related to persons who were missing as a result of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. We call upon both Armenia and Azerbaijan to fulfil their commitments undertaken in the framework of the Minsk Group, to show readiness to compromise and engage in dialogue, and to refrain from any rhetoric or action that could heighten tension.

In this context we remain concerned about the serious incidents along the Line of Contact and along the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan. We urge the sides to redouble their efforts to avoid such incidents in the future. We also reiterate the call of the Minsk Group Co-Chair countries on both sides to settle pending humanitarian issues. We reiterate our support for the regular monitoring activities of the Personal Representative of the CiO, Ambassador Kasprzyk and his team, the HLPG, and for efforts to put in place a mechanism to investigate incidents along the front lines.

We would also like to encourage Armenia to continue to cooperate with the OSCE, including through the Office in Yerevan, which is providing valuable assistance to Armenia to implement its OSCE commitments.

The EU notes the progress achieved in implementing reforms, while at the same time encouraging Armenia to accelerate reforms in specific areas, notably democracy and the rule of law, anti-corruption, human rights and fundamental freedoms, constitutional and judicial reforms. We would also like to draw attention to the important role of civil society and the need for reform of the electoral system. The EU is concerned about recent pressure on prominent members of the opposition in Armenia, and hopes that the government and opposition parties can work together productively to strengthen Armenia's democratic institutions. In this regard we encourage the Government of Armenia to continue to work with ODIHR to address

the issues raised in their election observation reports. We also reiterate our concern over the lack of results in the investigation of the March 2008 events.

The EU also wishes to stress the need to assure freedom of expression and of the media and reiterates its concern regarding cases of harassment and attacks against journalists, issues which have also been raised by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

We look forward to further developing our relationship with Armenia, including through launching negotiations on a new EU-Armenia agreement. The EU will continue to help Armenia implement the political and economic reforms the people of Armenia desire.

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

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.