P9_TA(2023)0081

EU-Armenia relations

European Parliament resolution of 15 March 2023 on EU-Armenia relations (2021/2230(INI))

(C/2023/404)

The European Parliament,

— 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 joint staff working document of the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 17 May 2022 on the Partnership Implementation Report on Armenia (SWD(2022)0154),

— having regard to the statement of 6 October 2022 following the quadrilateral meeting between President Aliyev, Prime Minister Pashinyan, President Macron and President Michel,

— having regard to the Declaration by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on behalf of the European Union of 19 November 2020 on Nagorno-Karabakh,

— having regard to the Orders of the International Court of Justice of 7 December 2021 in the cases between Armenia and Azerbaijan,

— having regard to the Orders of the International Court of Justice of 22 February 2023 on the application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Armenia v. Azerbaijan and Azerbaijan v. Armenia),

— having regard to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR),

— having regard to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgment of 26 May 2020, in the case of *Makuchyan and Minasyan* v *Azerbaijan and Hungary* (17247/13), which became final on 12 October 2020,

— having regard to the activities of the Co-Chairs of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group,

— having regard to the joint staff working document of 2 July 2021, entitled 'Recovery, resilience and reform: post 2020 Eastern Partnership priorities' (SWD(2021)0186),

— having regard to the Eastern Partnership Index 2021,

— having regard to the reports of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) of the Council of Europe, notably its fourth country report on Armenia, published on 4 October 2016, and its conclusions on the implementation of the recommendations in respect of Armenia, published on 10 September 2019,

— having regard to Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 2418 of 25 January 2022 on alleged violations of the rights of LGBTI people in the Southern Caucasus,

— having regard to the report of the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe following her visit to Armenia from 16 to 20 September 2018, published on 29 January 2019,

— having regard to the joint communication from the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 18 March 2020 entitled 'Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020: Reinforcing Resilience — an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all' (JOIN(2020)0007),

— having regard to the Economic and Investment Plan published on 2 July 2021,

— having regard to the Commission's multi-annual indicative programme (2021-2027) for Armenia,

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

— having regard to the outcome of the fourth EU-Armenia Partnership Council meeting of 18 May 2022,

— having regard to the final report of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) Election Observation Mission of 27 October 2021 on Armenia's early parliamentary elections held on 20 June 2021,

— having regard to the EU Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society in Armenia 2021-2027,

— having regard to its resolution of 4 July 2018 on the draft Council decision on the conclusion, on behalf of the Union, of 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 ([2]),

— having regard to its recommendation of 19 June 2020 to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the Eastern Partnership, in the run-up to the June 2020 Summit ([3]),

— having regard to its previous resolutions, including those of 13 September 2012 on Azerbaijan: the case of Ramil Safarov ([4]), of 15 April 2015 on the centenary of the Armenian Genocide ([5]), of 20 May 2021 on prisoners of war in the aftermath of the most recent conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan ([6]), of 10 March 2022 on the destruction of cultural heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh ([7]), of 8 June 2022 on security in the Eastern Partnership area and the role of the common security and defence policy ([8]), of 18 January 2023 on the implementation of the common foreign and security policy — annual report 2022 ([9]), and of 19 January 2023 on the humanitarian consequences of the blockade in Nagorno-Karabakh ([10]),

— having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,

— having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A9-0036/2023),

A. whereas over more than three decades, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as well as the recent incursion by Azerbaijan into Armenian sovereign territory have resulted in tens of thousands of casualties, immense destruction and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people; whereas the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has not yet been resolved;

B. whereas it is estimated that there are still around 4 500 Azerbaijani and Armenian missing persons and hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people from the first Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the 1990s;

C. whereas, according to the 9 November 2020 ceasefire statement, the parties have committed to remain in the positions they were in that day, to exchange prisoners of war (POWs) and other detainees, and to unblock all economic and transport connections in the region;

D. whereas the trilateral statement of 9 November 2020, introduced after the 44-day war triggered by Azerbaijan in 2020, has not been fully implemented and the ceasefire continues to be repeatedly violated resulting in more casualties; whereas the 44-day war resulted in 3 825 casualties on the Armenian side and 203 people are still missing, including civilians;

E. whereas in September 2022, Azerbaijan attacked three Armenian provinces: Gegharkunik, Syunik, and Vayots Dzor; whereas Armenian authorities reported that the attack had resulted in the occupation of 220 km² of Armenian sovereign territory, that it had left 201 people, both military and civilian, dead and that 27 people remain missing;

F. whereas Armenian authorities estimate that the shelling on civilian objects and infrastructure impacted 36 communities and settlements, 192 houses, two schools, one medical centre and three guesthouses, as well as power supply lines and pipelines; whereas this constitutes a clear violation of the territorial integrity of Armenia and norms of international law prohibiting the targeting of civilian infrastructure;

([2]) OJ C 118, 8.4.2020, p. 43.
([3]) OJ C 362, 8.9.2021, p. 114.
([4]) OJ C 353 E, 3.12.2013, p. 148.
([5]) OJ C 328, 6.9.2016, p. 2.
([6]) OJ C 15, 12.1.2022, p. 156.
([7]) OJ C 347, 9.9.2022, p. 198.
([8]) OJ C 493, 27.12.2022, p. 70.
([9]) Texts adopted, P9_TA(2023)0009.
([10]) Texts adopted, P9_TA(2023)0012.

G. whereas Azerbaijani military actions follow worrying statements by Azerbaijani authorities referring to the territory of the Republic of Armenia as Azerbaijani ancestral land and threatening to use force; whereas, since December 2022, civilian traffic between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh on the Lachin corridor has been blocked, which has had a negative impact on the deliveries of food and other essential supplies and services to the region;

H. whereas, on 22 February 2023, the International Court of Justice issued a binding order indicating that Azerbaijan must take all measures at its disposal to ensure unimpeded movement of persons, vehicles and cargo along the Lachin corridor in both directions;

I. whereas the ECtHR decided on 16 September 2022 that its 29 September 2020 interim measure calling on parties to comply with their engagements under the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of the Council of Europe, including with regard to prisoners of war, is still in force and that it applies to the events at issue;

J. whereas there are credible reports, including video footage, that Armenian POWs and other detainees have been subjected to extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and the desecration of the dead; whereas the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on 7 December 2021 ordered that Azerbaijan had an obligation, and on 12 October 2022 reaffirmed that obligation 'to protect from violence and bodily harm all persons captured in relation to the 2020 conflict who remain in detention, and ensure their security and equality before the law'; whereas videos depicting alleged war crimes against Azerbaijanis during the 2020 war have also appeared;

K. whereas, despite Azerbaijani authorities releasing some Armenian POWs, an undisclosed number of them, both military and civilians, are still detained in Azerbaijan in unknown conditions;

L. whereas the EU is committed to promoting a South Caucasus region that is secure, stable, peaceful and prosperous for the benefit of all people living in the region and whereas the EU is ready to play an active role as an honest broker in mediating a sustainable peace settlement and as a reliable partner;

M. whereas the EU supports the peaceful resolution of any unresolved regional conflicts via diplomatic means;

N. whereas, following the quadrilateral meeting between President Aliyev, Prime Minister Pashinyan, President Macron and President Michel on 6 October 2022 in Prague, on 20 October 2022 the EU deployed a temporary EU Monitoring Capacity along the Armenian side of the international border with Azerbaijan with the objective of monitoring, analysing and reporting on the situation in the region, which lasted until 19 December 2022; whereas on 23 January 2023, the EU decided to establish a civilian mission in Armenia; whereas the European Mission in Armenia was launched on 20 February 2023;

O. whereas Armenia and Azerbaijan made proposals on the conditions for a peace treaty governing their inter-state relations; whereas the countries' political leaders recently agreed to step up substantive work to advance the draft text;

P. whereas the outcome of the 2020 conflict in and around Nagorno-Karabakh traumatised Armenian society and plunged the country into a deep political crisis; whereas the country subsequently held snap parliamentary elections in 2021; whereas the electoral campaign exposed deep polarisation, which was reflected in harsh rhetoric; whereas the election result did not reduce political tensions, which were further fuelled by the security challenges faced by Armenia;

Q. whereas a sustainable normalisation of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan requires that all violence cease, that all the root causes of conflict be addressed, in particular that the rights and security of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh be guaranteed, and that all agreements reached between Armenia and Azerbaijan be fully implemented in order to ensure the long-term stability of bilateral relations and of the wider region as a whole; whereas such a goal can only be achieved when the authorities of Armenia and Azerbaijan can guarantee peaceful coexistence and the respect of minority rights;

R. whereas the armed conflicts between Armenia and Azerbaijan have had a catastrophic impact on the cultural, religious and historical heritage of the whole region;

S. whereas, in the ICJ order of 7 December 2021, which ordered Azerbaijan to prevent and punish acts of vandalism and desecration affecting Armenian cultural heritage, serious allegations were made regarding the involvement of the Azerbaijani authorities in the destruction of cemeteries, churches and historical monuments in Nagorno-Karabakh;

T. whereas Armenia showed solidarity with the people of Türkiye following the devastating earthquake on 6 February 2023 by sending rescue workers and humanitarian aid; whereas this historic step can further contribute to the process of normalising relations between the two countries;

U. whereas EU-Armenia relations are based on common values such as democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, and a shared interest in Armenia's engagement in economic and political reforms as well as regional cooperation, including in the framework of the Eastern Partnership; whereas the final aim of the Union should be to support Armenia in its process of reform;

V. whereas the defence of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including through the respect of the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights, is a crucial tenet of the CEPA;

W. whereas human rights defenders, activists and independent civil society organisations often face online hate speech, smear campaigns and targeting by various right-wing groups linked to previous regimes in Armenia; whereas they lack protection and recognition for the work they do for the country's society and democratic reforms, in particular for the promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law;

X. whereas, on the evening of 20 October 2022, a young gay couple aged 16 and 21 committed double suicide as a result of the pervasive discrimination in Armenian society, which has been enabled by years of government inaction on anti-discrimination and equality initiatives; whereas hate speech spread on social media and messaging apps thereafter with impunity, fuelling existing discrimination towards LGBTIQ persons; whereas attacks recently took place on social media against 'Right Side', a non-governmental organisation (NGO) defending transgender human rights; whereas the attackers spread false information, incited hatred and issued death threats to its founder, trans human rights defender Lilit Martirosyan; whereas violent attacks against trans women have repeatedly taken place since summer 2022, including an incident in July 2022 in Yerevan where the perpetrator livestreamed the attack on social media and received praise;

Y. whereas the human rights of LGBTIQ people in Armenia are at best discarded and at worst actively fought against by the government and state institutions; whereas the 2022 Rainbow Map and Index of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association Europe shows that Armenia has one of the largest deficits in legislation and policy protecting LGBTIQ people, and that it was the third worst country in this regard among all Council of Europe countries, tied with the Russian Federation;

Z. whereas in 2022, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a resolution on violations of the rights of LGBTI persons in the Southern Caucasus and made several calls to authorities to reform legislation in order to address these violations; whereas the recommendations reflect the 2016 ECRI findings; whereas in 2019, the ECRI had already concluded that its recommendations had not been addressed sufficiently and that none of the relevant provisions of the new Criminal Code had been adopted; whereas the Government's lack of response to international bodies' recommendations is alarming;

AA. whereas the ECtHR recognised in its judgment on Cases 71367/12 and 72961/12 (*Oganezova* v *Armenia*) that criminal law measures are required with respect to hate speech, notably on the grounds of sexual orientation and sexual life; whereas domestic law currently prohibits hate speech, yet sexual orientation and gender identity continue not to be included in the characteristics of victims of the offence despite the recommendations of the relevant international bodies in that respect;

AB. whereas Armenia made a 16-point improvement on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index over the five years from 2016 to 2021;

AC. whereas Armenia has made significant democratic improvements and positive strides against corruption, but the promised anti-corruption and judicial reforms slowed down in 2021 in the wake of the political and economic crisis triggered by the pandemic and renewed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh;

AD. whereas Armenia has the leading position in its neighbourhood in the Economist Intelligence Unit 2021 Democracy Index and the Reporters Without Borders 2022 World Press Freedom Index;

AE. whereas Armenia has improved its positions in the World Bank's Women, Business and Law 2022 report, the Global Startup Ecosystem Index Report 2022, and the World Economic Forum Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2021;

AF. whereas Armenia's ranking in the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum 2020-2021 Index improved and it attained the top position in terms of democracy and good governance; whereas Armenia received a positive assessment in Freedom House's Nations in Transit 2022 report;

AG. whereas Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has had negative implications for the South Caucasus region and has further complicated the security situation in the region;

AH. whereas Russia's alleged readiness to guarantee the security of Armenia has proven to be non-existent, as demonstrated by its lack of response to Azerbaijan's continuous attacks even in the light of Armenia's attempt to resort to the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO); whereas democratic parties and civil society organisations in Armenia have started to question the country's membership of the CSTO; whereas Russian peacekeepers deployed in the region were unwilling and unable to prevent further attacks from Azerbaijan and their presence has been decreasing steadily, especially after the start of Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine;

AI. whereas Armenia is a target for disinformation from neighbouring countries, in particular from Russian media outlets, as Armenian news outlets mostly rely on Russia for news sources and agencies;

AJ. whereas Armenia is the target of Azerbaijani information operations, in particular with the aim of harassing social media users and disseminating false information;

Conflict resolution and normalisation of Armenia-Azerbaijan relations

1. Considers that the armed Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which over the years has caused immense suffering and destruction, has significantly hampered the socio-economic development and stability of the whole South Caucasus region; is convinced that durable and sustainable peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan cannot be achieved through military means and the threat of force, but requires a comprehensive political settlement in accordance with international law, including the principles enshrined in the UN Charter, the 1975 OSCE Helsinki Final Act, namely the non-use of force, territorial integrity and the equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and the OSCE Minsk Group's 2009 Basic Principles and all the agreements reached between the two parties, including the Alma Ata 1991 Declaration;

2. Reaffirms that, in order to be effective, a comprehensive peace treaty must include provisions that guarantee the integrity of Armenia's sovereign territory, the rights and security of the Armenian population residing in Nagorno-Karabakh and other conflict-afflicted areas, and the prompt and safe return of refugees and internally displaced people to their homes; recalls that the root cause of the conflict, which is the situation and security of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh and the status of the formerly autonomous region, remains unresolved; calls on the international community to keep its attention on this conflict, which is a matter of stability and security for the whole region;

3. Strongly condemns the large-scale military aggression by Azerbaijan in September 2022 against multiple places in the sovereign territory of Armenia, which constituted a serious breach of the ceasefire and contradicted earlier commitments, including those made as part of EU-mediated talks; condemns military incursions into the internationally recognised territory of Armenia since May 2021; recalls that this follows violations of the territorial integrity of the Republic of Armenia as reported in May and November 2021; urges the return of all forces to their positions held on 9 November 2020 and stresses that the latest September aggression has no direct link to the long-lasting conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh; reiterates that the territorial integrity of Armenia must be fully respected in line with international law and the UN Charter and calls on the Azerbaijani authorities, therefore, to immediately withdraw from all parts of the territory of Armenia and to release the POWs under their control; urges the EU to be more actively involved in settling the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan; emphasises that both sides have to respect the principle of territorial integrity, which is key for peace in the region;

4. Condemns the ongoing blockade of the Lachin corridor, which is worsening the humanitarian crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh; condemns the deadly incident between Azerbaijan and the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh on 5 March 2023, which resulted in multiple deaths and once again jeopardised the process towards establishing peace between the two countries; urges Azerbaijan to remove any obstacles that would hinder freedom and security of movement along that corridor as stipulated by the trilateral statement of 9 November 2020; calls on Armenia and Azerbaijan to address all concerns relating to the functioning of the Lachin corridor through dialogue and consultations with all the parties involved;

5. Deplores the significant loss of life, damage and destruction; notes in particular, that the attack of September 2022 resulted in nearly 300 deaths, of which 210 were Armenian servicemen and civilians, and that at least 7 600 civilians were displaced from the Armenian provinces of Vayots Dzor, Syunik and Gegharkunik according to the Armenian Ombudsperson's office;

6. Urges Armenia and Azerbaijan to fully implement the tripartite ceasefire statement of 9 November 2020 in all its aspects and condemns Azerbaijan for regular violations of the ceasefire; stresses the need to advance discussions on the future peace treaty, to address the root causes of the conflict and to refrain from any steps that could lead to further escalation; recalls that the implementation of Article 9 of the ceasefire statement of 9 November 2020 cannot go against the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Armenia;

7. Calls on both parties to urgently implement measures to prepare their respective populations for peaceful coexistence, including those enhancing people-to-people contact; insists on the urgent need for both parties, and especially for Azerbaijani authorities, to refrain from any hostile rhetoric or actions that may be perceived as inciting hatred or outright violence or as supporting impunity, or that risk undermining the efforts to establish and promote an atmosphere conducive to trust and reconciliation, cooperation and sustainable peace; emphasises the urgent need for increased and credible confidence-building measures in order to counter the long-term problems of polarisation, lack of trust, and hate speech and other inflammatory rhetoric;

8. Calls on Armenia and Azerbaijan to set up a transitional justice mechanism as a confidence-building step to achieve lasting peace and reconciliation, to acknowledge the suffering on both sides, with a mandate to establish the fate of missing persons, to repatriate POWs and to invest in establishing historical truths based on a factual assessment of events during the armed conflict which started in 1988; proposes the inclusion of members of the academic community, independent journalists and civil society activists from both sides in this mechanism; recommends that the EU support and help facilitate this work in conjunction with other bodies such as the UN, the Council of Europe and other relevant international organisations;

9. Recalls that the EU's perceived passive stance during and immediately after the 2020 war gave other regional actors, such as Russia, Iran and Türkiye, the opportunity to gain influence in the region; highlights that more active European preventive diplomacy could have helped prevent such an outcome; strongly supports, therefore, the initiative taken by the President of the European Council Charles Michel to convene and mediate bilateral meetings of the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan in Brussels and encourages the work on the ground of the EU's special representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia; highlights the importance of the EU's continued close engagement and the EU-led mediation format in order to prevent further attacks and bring about a peaceful resolution to the conflict;

10. Calls on the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European External Action Service (EEAS) to step up efforts to revitalise and effectively contribute to the peaceful resolution of this conflict, including through support for stabilisation, post-conflict rehabilitation, reconstruction, and confidence-building measures;

11. Urges the governments of both countries to fully engage in the drafting of a comprehensive and mutually acceptable peace treaty that should address the security of the Armenian population in Nagorno-Karabakh, the return of internally displaced persons and refugees and the protection of cultural, religious and historical heritage; welcomes in this regard the meetings of the foreign affairs ministers of both countries on 30 September 2022 in Geneva and on 8 November 2022 in Washington D.C.;

12. Welcomes the establishment of the Azerbaijan and Armenia border delimitation commissions and takes note of the initial discussions on the process of border delimitation; welcomes the third meeting of the border delimitation commissions on 3 November 2022 in Brussels and urges the EU to closely follow up on this process; calls on both sides to finalise the border delimitation process and sign a peace treaty as soon as possible, as well as to work together to complete the process of demining;

13. Welcomes the agreement reached at the quadrilateral meeting between President Aliyev, Prime Minister Pashinyan, President Macron and President Michel on 6 October 2022 within the framework of the European Political Community meeting in Prague to deploy an EU civilian mission of 40 monitoring experts for a period of two months, which ended on 19 December 2022, along the Armenian side of the border with Azerbaijan to support confidence-building by monitoring adherence to the ceasefire and to support the work of the border commissions;

14. Welcomes the launch of the civilian European Union Mission in Armenia under the common security and defence policy, which aims to help increase security in the region by decreasing the number of incidents in conflict-affected and border areas in Armenia, to reduce the level of risks for the population living in such areas and thereby to contribute to the normalisation of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan on the ground, while at the same time increases visibility of the EU in the region; welcomes Armenia's willingness to facilitate the mission on its territory and calls on Azerbaijan to allow the presence of the EU mission on its side of the border as well; calls for the demarcation process to be internationally facilitated by the EU and/or OSCE in order to ensure credibility, fairness and sustainability;

15. Reiterates the need to agree on, and implement through peaceful means, transport and communication between the western regions of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, which does not infringe on the territorial integrity of Armenia; insists that the modalities of goods transport on this route need to be agreed bilaterally between Armenia and Azerbaijan; notes that the unblocking of regional transport and communication links will present a significant opportunity for socio-economic development in the entire South Caucasus region;

16. Welcomes the humanitarian assistance provided by the EU for the conflict-affected population in and around Nagorno-Karabakh and its leading role in assisting humanitarian demining in the areas affected by the conflict; calls on the Commission to ensure additional funding and assistance for demining efforts, including equipment, training and risk education; calls for additional demining cooperation with experts from EU Member States and NGOs;

17. Calls on the Commission to increase EU assistance to people in need, to facilitate the implementation of more ambitious confidence-building measures, and to promote interreligious and interethnic dialogue, protect minority rights and enhance people-to-people contacts between citizens in order to provide the foundations for a sustainable and peaceful coexistence; calls for finding mutually acceptable solutions for the safe return of displaced populations;

18. Notes that Russia's aggression against Ukraine has created multiple challenges for Armenia in terms of security and economic development and also has major societal implications as a result of both the mass arrival of Russian nationals in the country and the indirect impact that international sanctions against Russia have on the Armenian economy; calls on the EU to assist Armenia in mitigating the economic and social consequences of these developments;

19. Suggests the establishment of a temporary international guarantee mechanism for the safety and security of the Armenian population and all returnees in Nagorno-Karabakh;

20. Highlights the importance of international mediation, given the significant power imbalance between the sides, and the EU's particularly important role in this context to ensure a fair agreement and the protection of the rights of the Nagorno-Karabakh population;

21. Calls for the granting of access to international humanitarian organisations to Nagorno-Karabakh, especially the United Nations, and recalls that currently only the International Committee of the Red Cross is allowed access to the region, which is insufficient to accurately assess the conditions and needs of the population residing there;

22. Expresses concern about the presence of so-called Russian 'peacekeepers' and their potential impact on political developments in the South Caucasus and the future of the region's reform agenda;

23. Notes that with the expiry of the peacebuilding mandate of the Russian forces in three years' time, a new peacekeeping presence should be assured on the ground, and stresses the need that this be an international peacekeeping mission;

24. Continues to be seriously concerned about the fate of Armenian POWs and civilians detained during and after the conflict and still illegally held by Azerbaijan; welcomes the release of some of them; condemns the sentencing and continued detention of the 33 confirmed POWs and civilian captives; underlines that their imprisonment is contrary to all the calls from the international community, including Parliament, to release all remaining POWs and civilian captives; stresses that both Armenia and Azerbaijan are parties to the Geneva Convention (III) relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, which stipulates that POWs must at all times be humanely treated and must be released and repatriated without delay after the cessation of active hostilities; regrets, however, that the fate and whereabouts of over 200 Armenians, including 20 civilians, in relation to the 2020 war remain unknown; notes that the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances has started procedures and requested information from Azerbaijan in relation to at least 18 missing persons; calls on all sides to clarify the fate and whereabouts of the disappeared, and to treat dead bodies with dignity; demands once again the immediate and unconditional release of all the remaining detainees, including those captured during the recent military confrontations, and for them to be treated in accordance with international humanitarian law;

25. Condemns in the strongest possible terms the torture, mutilation and killing of Armenian military personnel, including women, and eight unarmed Armenian POWs by Azerbaijani armed forces in September 2022; deplores the fact the perpetrators filmed these heinous acts and posted them on social media themselves; takes note of reports by human rights groups, in particular by Human Rights Watch, classifying this act as a war crime; calls for a full independent and impartial investigation to identify those responsible and hold them accountable for their actions;

26. Condemns all instances of torture and enforced disappearances as well as the ill-treatment and desecration of bodies; demands that Azerbaijani authorities ensure that the investigation opened on 2 October 2022 by the military prosecutor's office is transparent and effective and leads to the soldiers and commanders responsible being held accountable; notes in this context that so far, no information has been made available to this end; at the same time, calls on Armenian investigative authorities to continue the investigation into the 2020 footage of Azerbaijani soldiers allegedly being subjected to war crimes and to identify the perpetrators and hold them accountable;

27. Insists that both states are under international obligations to conduct independent, prompt, public and effective investigations and prosecute all credible allegations of grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions and other violations of international law and war crimes in order to ensure the accountability of those responsible and redress for the victims;

28. Denounces the destruction of Armenian and Azerbaijani cultural, religious and historical heritage since the beginning of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict; urges Azerbaijan and Armenia to refrain from further destroying, neglecting or altering the origins of cultural, religious or historical heritage in the region and instead strive to preserve, protect and promote this rich diversity; calls for accountability regarding such actions; stresses that the destruction of cultural heritage increases tension and hatred between countries and contributes to the destabilisation of the region and thereby undermines the efforts of the bilateral talks held recently; calls for the restoration of damaged sites in accordance with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) standards and indications as well as for the international community's greater involvement in protecting cultural and religious heritage in the region; deplores the fact that two years since the signing of the ceasefire statement of 9 November 2020, the UNESCO mission has not been able to visit the affected areas; calls on Armenia and Azerbaijan to fully cooperate with UNESCO and urgently allow and facilitate its mission's visit to both countries without preconditions; takes note of Armenia's expressed readiness to receive such a mission;

29. Encourages increased bilateral contacts between the political authorities of Armenia and Azerbaijan; underlines the role played by the civil societies of both countries in improving relationships between the two countries; stresses the need to consult and cooperate with civil society and human rights defenders, in particular on the issues of reconciliation and humanitarian assistance, as well as the importance of sustainable funding and the freedom of such organisations to conduct their work without restrictions; calls on the Commission, therefore, to support civil society organisations in Armenia and Azerbaijan that genuinely contribute to reconciliation;

Foreign and security policy

30. Supports the normalisation of relations between Armenia and Türkiye in the interest of reconciliation, regional stability and security as well as socio-economic development and welcomes the progress achieved so far, including the resumption of flights between the two countries; calls for the speedy implementation of agreements reached by the special representatives; recalls that the previous attempt to normalise relations between Armenia and Türkiye through the signing of 2009 protocols failed because of Türkiye's unilateral support for Azerbaijan and its decision to make the opening of the border and establishment of diplomatic relations with Armenia conditional on the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict; calls on both sides to engage in the process in good faith and without preconditions and calls for the EU to actively support this process; expresses the hope that this may give impetus to the normalisation of relations in the South Caucasus region; encourages Türkiye once again to recognise the Armenian Genocide to pave the way for genuine reconciliation between the Turkish and Armenian peoples, and to fully respect its obligations to protect Armenian cultural heritage;

31. Recalls that the clauses of the CSTO were not activated either during the 2020 war or in September 2022, despite Armenian requests; encourages Armenia, in order to ensure better protection of its sovereignty and territorial integrity, to consider the possibility of diversifying its partnerships and potential security alliances with its regional and Euro-Atlantic partners, as its long-standing reliance on Russia and its allies in the CSTO has proved insufficient;

32. Notes Iran's interest in preventing the construction of new transport links between the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic with the western regions of Azerbaijan, as agreed in the ceasefire statement of 9 November 2020, which, if succeeded, would have a significant impact on the prospects of a peace agreement; draws the attention of the Armenian authorities to the risks of cooperating with the Iranian authoritarian regime, which, among other crimes and violations, is a supplier of military equipment that is being used by Russia in its war of aggression against Ukraine;

33. Supports Armenia's efforts to use the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly as an important forum for political dialogue with neighbouring countries and therefore encourages Armenia to continue making full use of it;

Democratic reforms, rule of law and good governance

34. Welcomes the full entry into force of the CEPA on 1 March 2021 and Armenia's commitment to its implementation; underlines that the agreement is a framework for the EU and Armenia to work together in a wide range of areas, such as strengthening democracy, the rule of law and human rights, contributing to economic growth and fostering sectoral cooperation; welcomes the fact that the Armenian Government recognises the CEPA as a strategic blueprint for key reforms in Armenia; commends Armenia for the significant reforms and thorough democratisation process implemented over the past few years and for thus becoming a leader in democracy in the region; acknowledges the fact that the Commission and the High Representative recognised Armenia as a fully-fledged democracy in their 2022 Partnership Implementation Report on Armenia;

35. Welcomes the progress Armenia has made on implementing the CEPA road map; calls on the EU-Armenia Partnership Council to work closely together to implement ongoing and future reforms; notes that, as of September 2022, Armenia has finished or is in the process of implementing the measures within the 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 deadlines of the CEPA road map;

36. Acknowledges Armenia's successful fight against crime and corruption, making it one of the safest countries in the region;

37. Welcomes the early parliamentary elections of 2021, which confirmed the strength of democracy in Armenia and its people's support for the reform agenda; encourages the government to continue implementing reforms, despite the difficult international context and the challenges Armenia is facing, in order to strengthen democratic institutions, the rule of law and judicial independence; reiterates that the EU is the largest donor supporting Armenia's reform process and that it follows an incentive-based approach of 'more for more' and 'less for less' in its assistance;

38. Encourages Armenia to continue its efforts to implement reforms and strengthen democracy, the rule of law and good governance and appreciates the progress already made; appreciates the progress made by Armenia in the implementation of its national strategy for judicial and legal reforms and its national anti-corruption strategy as well as comprehensive constitutional reforms and calls on Armenia to take the steps necessary to better protect human rights, especially women's rights and the rights of minorities, including LGBTIQ people; takes note of the reports of certain NGOs and representatives of the opposition revealing the potential risk of regression, at least in some areas; urges the government to make visible progress in these areas; calls on Armenia to continue cooperating with the EU on the implementation of reforms and calls on the EU to increase support in those areas, in particular technical support and the exchange of expertise;

39. Calls on all political actors in the country to continue carrying out the necessary reforms aimed at strengthening the rule of law, media freedom and the independence of the judiciary, while ensuring the full respect of democratic principles and human rights;

40. Expresses regret at the polarising language often used by political opponents and the destructive attempts by some Russia-affiliated political groups to derail the peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan;

41. Notes the ambitious police reforms undertaken by the Government of Armenia with the EU's extensive support, which aim to create a safer environment and increase trust between the public and police, and in particular the establishment of Armenia's new patrol service and the planned establishment of a ministry of interior;

42. Calls for the completion of the comprehensive investigation into the alleged cases of abuse of force by police against protesters, journalists, opposition figures and activists;

43. Underlines the important role of civil society in the shaping and implementation of key reforms; underlines the important role that NGOs and human rights activists play in the protection of democracy and human rights; calls on the Armenian Government to further strengthen its cooperation with civil society organisations, and to introduce legislation to better protect human rights defenders; calls on the EU Delegation and Member States' representations in Armenia to increase their support for civil society and human rights defenders' work; calls on the Armenian Government to launch joint efforts to address disinformation directed at civil society actors and human rights activists, aimed at undermining their role in supporting and promoting democracy;

Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms

44. Highlights that Article 1 of the CEPA includes as an objective the enhancement of cooperation in the area of freedom, security and justice with the aim of reinforcing the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; underlines the importance of media freedom, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly for preserving a vibrant democracy; is concerned by the presence of disinformation and harsh rhetoric, including towards marginalised groups; urges authorities to categorically uphold all human rights enshrined in the ECHR, notably when they concern vulnerable groups such as women, children, persons with disabilities and LGBTIQ persons;

45. Recalls that the fight against discrimination is a cornerstone of democratic systems; considers that the democratic transition in Armenia is an opportunity to strengthen the human rights system; recalls that the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe encouraged the government to take a prompt stance and adopt several legal reforms; considers that the authorities have all the recommendations at their disposal to make progress on human rights and calls for their implementation;

46. Welcomes the improvements in media freedom in Armenia as reflected in the 2022 World Press Freedom Index; encourages the national authorities to continue to implement reforms to improve media freedom in the country; stresses that while the media environment in the country is diverse, it is also characterised by polarisation and media owners' influence on editorial policies; is concerned by cases of hate speech and physical violence targeting journalists;

47. Is concerned about the relentless Russian disinformation campaigns in Armenia, that spread into the Armenian media and on social media platforms, targeting the EU and the West in general; calls on the Commission and the EEAS to work together with Armenian authorities to fight disinformation, particularly by increasing support for independent media in the country and for efforts to train and improve the diversity of the media sector and contribute to an increased level of media literacy in Armenia;

48. Calls on the Armenian Government to refrain from using measures that limit freedom of speech and media freedom while fighting against foreign interference, including disinformation; insists on greater cooperation with diverse stakeholders on laws that have an impact on human rights, democratisation and media;

49. Stresses the need to improve the situation regarding gender equality, women's representation and equal treatment at all levels of political, economic and societal life, and the fight against gender-based and domestic violence; calls on Armenia to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence; regrets the fact that women's political participation remains low despite the introduction of a gender quota for candidate lists;

50. Highlights the particular effect of the conflict on women and marginalised groups, including the vulnerable situation of the women displaced from the conflict-affected areas and the rise in domestic violence in the aftermath of the recent war, as well as the exclusion of women from the official peace process; calls on the Armenian Government, as well as international mediators, to remove barriers to women's participation and to systematically include women experts and women human rights defenders in all consultations;

51. Welcomes the advancing and prioritisation of the women, peace and security agenda by Armenia in the framework of its national policies and programmes, with the objective of ensuring the political and public participation of women at all levels of the decision-making procedure, their empowerment and the promotion of gender equality; notes that the

adoption of Armenia's second national action plan for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security is instrumental in consolidating Armenia's efforts to address all forms of violence against women and girls in conflicts and to further gender mainstreaming in the governance of the security sector;

52. Stresses the importance of non-discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and that improvements in this regard would be of great benefit to the democratic development of Armenia and help advance human rights protection; regrets, however, that Armenia is lagging behind in the defence of LGBTIQ rights and is concerned about the situation in the country; urges the Armenian authorities to uphold and promote the rights of LGBTIQ persons and to prevent and combat LGBTIQ-phobia, social exclusion, stigmatisation and all forms of discrimination against LGBTIQ people in its legislation and calls for the EU to support Armenia in this process;

Economic and trade relations

53. 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;

54. Notes that as of 1 January 2022, Armenia stopped benefiting from the Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) and its special incentive arrangement for sustainable development and good governance (GSP+); calls on Armenia to build on the successes of trading under the GSP and GSP+ preferential tariffs and to fully use the opportunities available within the CEPA;

55. Notes the potential of the Economic and Investment Plan to help Armenia build a sustainable, dynamic and resilient economy; welcomes Armenia's progress in the implementation of flagship initiatives;

Sectoral cooperation

56. Welcomes the signing of the Common Aviation Area Agreement on 15 November 2021 and calls on Member States to ensure its swift ratification;

57. Welcomes the signing of the agreement on strategic cooperation with Europol in September 2021 and the substantial progress made in the negotiations to sign an agreement with Eurojust;

58. Welcomes the fact that Armenia joined the European Migration Network as an observer in October 2022;

59. Welcomes Armenia's association to Horizon Europe, the EU's research and innovation programme for 2021-2027, enabling Armenian researchers, innovators and research entities to strengthen partnerships with their counterparts in the EU, and welcomes Armenia's successful cooperation with the Erasmus+ programme;

60. Welcomes the fact that Armenia has joined the Creative Europe programme 2021-2027, which will strengthen Armenia's cultural and creative sectors and will boost its efforts to become more inclusive, digital, and sustainable;

61. Calls for the EU and its Member States to acknowledge the progress made by Armenia over recent years in implementing the agreements on visa facilitation and readmission, and in opening a visa liberalisation dialogue with Armenia to support people-to-people contacts, closer bilateral ties and reform progress;

62. Reiterates its concerns regarding the ongoing operation of the outdated Metsamor nuclear power plant; calls for the swift adoption of a road map or action plan for the closure and safe decommissioning of the plant, taking into consideration the need to replace its energy capacity, including with renewable energy sources, to ensure Armenia's energy security and sustainable development in line with CEPA provisions; welcomes the visit of the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to Armenia in October 2022 and encourages the Armenian Nuclear Regulatory Authority to foster mutual cooperation and to make full use of the IAEA's support; urges Armenia to take any steps necessary to bring the Metsamor nuclear power plant up to international standards to ensure its safe and secure operation, at least for the necessary transition period until an adequate alternative replacing it is fully operational and energy security is guaranteed;

63. Welcomes the steps Armenia has already taken concerning the green transition and its commitment to reduce emissions by 40 % by 2030; calls on Armenia to engage further in the fight against climate change in line with the Paris Agreement and the need to protect the environment; encourages Armenia to increase its emissions reduction targets under its nationally determined contribution in order to mirror its commitment and good track record in cutting emissions;

64. Calls on the Armenian authorities to take crucial steps to accelerate the development of renewable energy, increase energy efficiency and diversify energy sources, taking into account that natural gas imports from Russia still represent over 80 % of Armenia's gas imports, as well as the bilateral cooperation between Armenia and Iran on energy exchange;

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65. 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 governments and parliaments of the Member States and the Government and Parliament of Armenia.