
Armenia And Caucasus At The Threshold Of The European Union

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The European Armenian Federation warmly welcomes the decision of the European Council to establish an "Eastern Partnership" (EaP) with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldavia and Ukraine.

Last Friday, the Council adopted the European Commission's proposal which aims at setting up such a partnership to extend the dispositions of the current European Neighbourhood Policy to the countries located to the East of the European Union. This new Eastern Partnership, based on a "differentiated approach" will respect each partner country's "own way forward and speed" and will provide practically almost all of the economic and social advantages of the European Union to the five States with the exception of opening the doors to the Union's political institutions. Nevertheless, the Commission's proposal does not "prejudice to individual countries' aspirations for their future relationship with the EU"

"At the current stage of EU integration, the Eastern Partnership constitutes certainly the most advanced level of relations which could be hoped for these countries. We warmly commend this courageous step forward which shows voluntarism and offers to Armenia and to the Caucasus a real opportunity of peaceful and balanced development" declared Laurent Leylekian, the executive director of the European Armenian Federation.

In fact, the Eastern Partnership proposes a deepening of bilateral engagements with the Non-member States and the establishment of a multilateral co-operation framework. The bilateral engagements will progressively include a "deep and comprehensive free trade area", a visas facilitation policy - then later on abandonment of visa requirements for the nationals of these countries - police and judicial co-operations, the integration of Ukraine and Moldavia in European Energy Community and the signing memoranda of understandings with Armenia, Georgia and Moldavia on Energy transit and security and also on regional policies, regional programmes of development and participation to transnational programmes in South-Eastern, Central and Northern Europe.

The multilateral co-operation framework in its turn considers four "thematic platforms" ("democracy, good governance and stability", "economic integration and convergence with the EU policies", "energy security" and "contact between people"), emblematic "flagship" initiatives and increased participation of the civil society through ad hoc forums, parliamentary initiative EuroNest - associating the European Parliament with the related national Parliaments - the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee.

"This is an extremely ambitious program which, in particular, recognizes and gives an appropriate place to the civil society. In this context, Armenia and Europe have a particular card in their favour, that of the European Armenian Diaspora" continued Laurent Leylekian. "This Diaspora constitutes the natural bond, the facilitator of the Eastern Partnership with Armenia. In this perspective, the European Armenian Federation which is ready to remain the privileged interlocutor with the European institutions as well as the Armenian government will play its role" concluded Leylekian.

The financial instrument of the Neighbourhood Policy had planned a billion Euros of support for the period 2007 - 2010 and the Eastern Partnership will

increase this amount by 600 million Euros for 2010 - 2013. This new Eastern Policy will be inaugurated during a summit, envisaged in spring 2009, in the presence of all the leaders of the 27 States and those of the countries concerned.
