



EASTERN PARTNERSHIP Civil Society Forum

STATEMENT

of EaP Civil Society Forum's Armenian National Platform

17 September, 2013

With this statement, the Armenian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) Civil Society Forum (CSF), reconfirms its support for the enlargement of multilateral ties between the Republic of Armenia, foreign states and international organizations. At the same time, we express our disagreement and deep frustration regarding the statement of the President of the Republic of Armenia on joining the Customs Union and participating in the formation of the Eurasian Union.

For about three and a half years, the Armenian authorities were negotiating the Association Agreement with the EU in the framework of the Eastern Partnership, including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) Agreement. It seems that the Armenian authorities had shown absolute commitment to the drafting and implementation of this crucially important document. However, the announcement by the Armenian President came to prove exactly the opposite.

The intentions of the Armenian authorities to join the Customs Union to the detriment of the Association Agreement with the EU contradict their numerous statements where they have declared European integration as a foreign policy priority.

It makes meaningless the huge efforts and expense by the Republic of Armenia and the EU in recent years directed to holding negotiations and drafting documents. Numerous projects aimed at implementing reforms in different spheres of life and strengthening relations with the EU, which demand significant resources, have now become useless. Completed projects will not lead to any results and the current projects are now jeopardized.

It is an unprecedented phenomenon, when a country having a far lower level of political and economic development than the European Union, practically refuses to be integrated in the largest economy of the world and deepen multilateral cooperation with the most sustainable region on the planet, and specifically, when this refusal took place in the context of joining the Customs Union, which at this point

does not justify itself even for those countries that have already joined it and which prospects are quite vague.

Serzh Sargsyan's surprising announcement, which had such consequences, caused unrecoverable damage to Armenia's international reputation as a trustworthy partner.

The claims of officials, politicians and some "too loyal" experts in our country, who tried to put the blame of the failure of the Association Agreement initialing on the Brussels' shoulder, cannot stand any criticism. We find the decision by the European Union not to consider about 80 percent shortened (without deep and comprehensive free trade agreement) document completely substantial and normal, because no prior consultation and negotiation were held around this new approach.

Moreover, the assessments about the economic calculations and security risks sound quite inconclusive. If such kind of concerns could be an obstacle on the way of association with the European Union, then they should have been revealed and studied much earlier and not at the end of negotiations. In that case, the preference that Yerevan gave to the Customs Union would be considered as more worthy and acceptable by all international partners and Armenian society. However, now all grounds are there to talk about national humiliation.

Even if we assume, that by joining to the Customs Union the RA authorities received some immediate benefits for security and other spheres, there are, however, many reasons to suspect that for a long-term perspective country will become more vulnerable in terms of external threats. And the biggest of these threats is the tendency to neglect the interests of Armenia by international community and the uncontrolled process of concession of sovereignty.

Today, with the difficult social-economic situation there are new factors arising, which only strengthen emigration, one of the most pressing and painful problems in the Republic of Armenia.

The rumors that are being spread presumably not without the direct involvement of the Armenian authorities, implying that the decision was made under pressure, cannot justify the denial of previous constant assurances about the irrevocable path towards the Association Agreement. When such a crucial decision for the country is being made, external factors, of course, exist, and all Eastern Partnership countries have faced it. However, the decisions that are most stable and protected from risks are those based on the consensus in the society about the realization of national interests. The Armenian government has done nothing to inform the society about the content and benefits of the Association Agreement as well as the European Integration in general, leaving the stage for cheap speculations about imaginary "European values".

All the above mentioned circumstances allow us to confirm that the decision about the Customs Union was made based on the narrow interests of a small circle of people, who were not intending to

implement the broader package of reforms designed within the framework of the Eastern Partnership, more specifically, the Association Agreement.

For the current situation, the international organizations, particularly the EU institutions have their share of responsibility. They have been going beyond the limits of tolerance in their relations with the Armenian authorities, many times going along with the imitation of fulfilling obligations and choosing a “more for less” formula. Apparently this served as basis for the Republic of Armenia’s political elite to treat the EaP process without proper seriousness and responsibility.

Another negative factor was the absence of real partnership, understanding of mutual priorities and benefits as well as the willingness for mutual assistance between the Eastern Partnership countries. As a result, each of the countries was acting alone considering the failures and drawbacks of a neighbour as their own advantage. We hope that Armenia’s undesirable precedent will reveal the need for change of relationships inside the “Six”.

The intention to join the Custom’s Union and the failure of initialing the Association Agreement is a serious turnover in the areas of internal and foreign policy, socio-economic development and many other fields. Decisions of such importance should not be made without discussions in the National Assembly, government, Security Council and public debates. The lack of formal consultations sets background for us to perceive the Armenian President's statement on September 3rd as a part of one-man policy which we cannot consider unchangable.

In the current situation we demand from the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia to convene parliamentary hearings and invite special session, which will evaluate the latest announcement of the President of Armenia. We call on the MPs to be above political affiliations and demonstrate a trans-partial position on the issue of joining the Customs Union and refusing the Association Agreement, as this choice goes beyond the interests of certain political parties and predicts the future of Armenia for a long-term period.

We invite the representatives of the Armenian authorities to take part in the conference of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum’s National Platform, which will take place in hotel “Hrazdan”, on 19 September 2013, 14:00-17:00; and present the justifications for Sargsyan’s announcement and the failure of the initialing of Association Agreement.

We are sure that for every single citizen of the Republic of Armenia who knows the consequences of this choice, who values the independence which was gained through big losses and appreciates the democratic development of the country, the decision announced on September 3 cannot be accepted.

The situation can be improved only by consolidation of non-indifferent layers of the society and by civic activism. Irrespective of the developments of the coming months the Armenian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forums will be faithful to the European integration process and invites all the interested people for close cooperation.