



European External Action Service
Press Officer for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
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Brussels, 5th August 2020

RE: Student unions call for Democracy, Prosperity and Stability

To whom this concerns,

In light of the re-manifestation of open hostility between Azerbaijan and Armenia, that began on July 12th, the European Students' Union (ESU), in solidarity with the Armenian National Students' Association (ANSA), first and foremost implore for closely monitored and publicly communicated mediation by the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) through its Minsk Group co-chaired by the United States, Russia and France, in order to de-escalate and restrain further violence towards the civilian populations of both nations.

We are concerned with the unprecedented spread of hate speech, violence and war rhetoric across these nations and we call for supportive actions to civil society organisations on the ground working to counter indoctrination of xenophobia amongst civilians. We call for both governments to promote peace talk and negotiations and, by no excuse fuel xenophobia amongst their nationals, instigate war rhetoric and issue war threats such as the threat to launch missile attacks on the Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant in Armenia¹. This is a reprehensible and heinous threat of humanitarian and environmental disaster that will jeopardize the lives of both current and future generations of the entire Caucasus region.

Humanity must reject antiquated practices of intimidation and oppression if we hope to avoid repeating past atrocities. Only by reinforcing obligations to uphold international human rights systems can our nations gradually be emancipated from years of injustices and tragedies. We state this as representatives and leaders of the European student movement, founded on the values of democracy, diversity and open-mindedness.

ESU and ANSA respect the equal and inalienable rights of all humans. We therefore assert that both Azerbaijanis and Armenians deserve peace and prosperity unequivocally. Neither country will benefit from escalating military conflict, especially at the height of the coronavirus pandemic.



Hate, xenophobic and war rhetoric amongst civilians are hardest to combat, especially if undemocratic forces within a state's government systematically curtail the liberties by abolishing the freedom of speech of its own citizens and increasing arbitrary authority on what should be the independent institutions of the free press, academic community and civil society. It is therefore that the Eastern Partnership initiative of the EU, which is currently looking into the next decade of cooperation, should set the development of democratic processes and culture within the Southern Caucasus region as the first and foremost priority for both Azerbaijan where the democracy index is 2.75, as well as for Armenia where the index has increased throughout the past years to 5.54².

In order to bolster democratic processes and culture, ESU and ANSA appeal to the European Commission and the EEAS for enhanced and strategically effective investment into embedding education (formal and non-formal) on human rights and democratic citizenship within the Eastern Partnership initiative of the EU. Higher education in particular, with the right incentives and following the key commitments of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the recommendations of the Council of Europe (CoE), can equip both learners and the wider population with which higher education coexists, with knowledge, understanding and skills, as well as empowering them with the readiness to take action in society in the defence and promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Furthermore, education-centered mobility schemes for Armenian and Azerbaijani students and youth in countries with higher democratic indexes should be supported as this gives them the opportunity to learn to live together in a democratic and multicultural society and presents a reliable hope for present and future generations to acquire the knowledge and skills to promote social cohesion, value diversity and equality, appreciate differences – particularly between different faith and ethnic groups – and settle disagreements and conflicts in a non-violent manner with respect for each others' rights, as well as to combat all forms of discrimination and violence³.

Under an authoritarian regime, commitments to uphold the fundamental values of the EHEA and the CoE take a longer and more difficult path to realization. As both Armenia and Azerbaijan are members of the aforementioned international frameworks, the opportunity to invest time, money and resources in free, quality and inclusive education on human rights, democratic citizenship, academic freedom, institutional autonomy, intercultural diversity and globalisation cannot be wasted nor underrated, particularly when the world is collectively facing alarming declines in human freedom index and shortages of trustworthy leaders effective in tackling the pressing issues of our times.

The plight for democracy and human rights and dignity are the core values that have shaped ESU since its inception back in 1982. Together, ESU and ANSA appeal to European institutions including the European External Action Service, the European Commission, the



Council of Europe and mediating countries to work together with the youth and student networks and organisations of Armenia and Azerbaijan. In efforts for mediation and a hopeful reestablishment of peaceful partnership, the role and promotion of education must not be undermined. Students and youth of Armenia and Azerbaijan must be provided with the necessary resources and opportunities for them to inform and thus empower themselves, to speak up without fear, to associate and to negotiate and exchange non-violent convictions. We at ESU and ANSA stand behind this call united in solidarity, we are thankful for all work put into peaceful mediation and de-escalation efforts and hope for peace and justice to prosper within the region.

This letter is co-signed by:

European Students' Union (ESU)

www.esu-online.org

secretariat@esu-online.org

Mundo-Madou, Avenue des Arts 7/8

1210 Brussels, Belgium

Armenian National Students' Association (ANSA)

secretariat.ansa@gmail.com

00374 10 545254,

8, Vardanants Blind Alley,

0004 Yerevan, Armenia

References:

1 <https://www.rferl.org/a/idle-threat-azerbaijani-hint-at-missile-strike-on-armenian-nuclear-plant-increases-tensions/30733672.html>

2 <https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index>

3 <https://rm.coe.int/16803034e5>