

Call for free and fair presidential elections by the Europe-Armenia Advisory Council

Yerevan, 15 February 2013

The Europe-Armenia Advisory Council (EAAC) looks forward to Armenia's presidential elections of 18 February 2013. The Council shares the European Union's desire to see further progress in ensuring free, fair and transparent elections in Armenia, conducted in accordance with the democratic standards to which Armenia has signed up.

The parliamentary elections in May 2012 were marked by a very competitive political environment. They also saw an unprecedented freedom of assembly and most notably of the media. These achievements helped Armenia overcome the traumatic events of the presidential elections in 2008. Today, all major political forces are represented in the Armenian National Assembly and the formerly polarised political environment has been largely transformed into a parliamentary debate. In the elections of May 2012, cases of vote buying and excessive campaign gifts still undermined public trust. But the overall democratic improvements in Armenia are noticeable. We do expect that this on-going process will reach a peak in the upcoming presidential elections. We also call upon the authorities to conduct these elections according to the recommendations of the European observation missions, in particular of the relevant reports by the ODIHR.

In the previous year, Armenia has made promising progress in its negotiations for an ambitious Association Agreement with the European Union. A Visa Facilitation agreement with the EU has been signed in December 2012, giving a strong impetus to people-to-people contacts and encouraging business, academic, cultural and human interactions with Europe. A proper conduct of the presidential elections will strengthen Armenia democratically and politically. It will make it an attractive and advanced partner for the EU. Both sides want to conclude the negotiations for the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area during the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius in November this year. This in turn will strengthen Armenia economically, helping the country face the tough challenges caused by conflicts and closed borders in the region, but also the aftermath of the world-wide financial crisis.

You, the Armenian electorate, can make a difference! Cast your vote and strengthen your country. The EAAC and European Friends of Armenia stand by the people of Armenia in this important political exercise of democracy, crucial for the country's promising future on its European path.

On behalf of the members of the Europe-Armenia Advisory Council:

Dr Kornel ALMASSY (Hungary) former MP; **Mr Elmar BROK** (Germany) MEP; **Prof Massimo CACCIARI** (Italy) Professor of Philosophy, University Vita-Salute San Raffaele in Milan, **Prof Bernard COULIE** (Belgium) Honorary rector, Université Catholique de Louvain; **Mr Agustín DÍAZ DE MERA** (Spain) MEP; **Dr Alexandra DOBOLYI** (Hungary) former MEP; **Mr Frank ENGEL** (Luxemburg) MEP; **Dr Tessa HOFMANN** (Germany) Institute for Eastern European Studies, Freie Universität Berlin; **Ms Marie Anne ISLER BÉGUIN** (France) Former MEP; **Dr Ioannis KASOULIDES** (Cyprus) MEP; **Dr Andrey KOVATCHEV** (Bulgaria) MEP; **Mr Paweł KOWAL** (Poland) MEP; **Mr Riccardo MIGLIORI** (Italy) MP; **Mr Stephen POUND** (United Kingdom) MP; **Ms Michèle RIVASI** (France) MEP; **Mr François ROCHEBLOINE** (France) MP; **Mr François ROELANTS DU VIVIER** (Belgium) Honorary Senator; **Mr Hans-Jochen SCHMIDT** (Germany) until August 2012 Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Armenia; **Dr Charles TANNOCK** (United Kingdom) MEP; **Dr Eleni THEOCHAROUS** (Cyprus) MEP; **Mr John WHITTINGDALE** (United Kingdom) MP.