
EU LAWMAKERS BACK PARTNERSHIP PACT WITH ARMENIA, CALL ON GOVERNMENT TO PURSUE REFORMS

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The European Parliament has given its green light to an agreement on deepening Armenias links with the European Union, while calling on the government of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinian to pursue reforms.

At a plenary session in Strasbourg, the European lawmakers on July 4 backed the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) by a vote of 573-50, with 45 abstentions, paving the way for deeper cooperation between the bloc and the South Caucasus nation.

A separate resolution, adopted 598-52 and 27 abstentions, said the agreement signed by both sides in November 2017 is a tool to promote domestic reforms and their implementation.

The European Parliament's rapporteur, Laszlo Tokes of Hungary, said the vote sends a strong message of support to the Armenian citizens, adding that the EU is ready to support the reform efforts to which the new government has committed.

We encourage them to continue combating corruption and reforming the electoral framework, in line with the recommendations of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE ODIHR) and the Venice Commission, a group of independent legal experts, Tokes said.

The lawmakers called on Armenia to make significant progress on how elections are run, the independence of the judiciary, the fight against corruption, money laundering, tax evasion, abusive oligarchic control, and on media freedom, according to a statement by the European Parliament.

The implementation of these reforms could unlock further prospects for cooperation, including the opening of a dialogue on visa liberalization, they added.

The European legislators also regretted that the CEPA cannot include the removal of tariff barriers, due to Armenias membership of the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU).

The CEPA is a less ambitious alternative to an Association Agreement negotiated by Armenian and EU officials in 2013. Then-President Serzh Sarkisian unexpectedly scuttled that deal in September

2013 after Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Yerevan. Armenia joined the EEU in January 2015.

Members of the European Parliament also applauded Armenian citizens on the recent peaceful transition of power and congratulated Pashinian on his election as the new prime minister in May.

Pashinian had led weeks of peaceful street protests that prompted the resignation of his predecessor, Sarkisian, some six days after taking the premiership.

<https://www.rferl.org/a/eu-lawmakers-back-partnership-pact-with-armenia-call-on-government-to-pursue-reforms/29340585.html>

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