

**Select Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Defence**

**Consideration of Dáil motion approving the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between the EU and Armenia**

**21 November 2019**

**Statement by Mr. Ciarán Cannon, T.D., Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade with special responsibility for the Diaspora and International Development, to the Select Committee**

I wish to thank the Chair and the Members of this Select Committee for the opportunity to discuss the Motion referred to the Select Committee for consideration.

The Motion which Dáil Éireann has been asked to approve is as follows:

*That Dáil Éireann approves the terms of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Armenia, of the other part, signed at Brussels on 24 November 2017, a copy of which was laid before Dáil Éireann on 11 November 2019.*

This modern, comprehensive and ambitious Agreement was signed in the margins of the Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels in 2017 and provides a framework for Armenia and the EU to work together for the benefit of the citizens of Armenia in the areas of strengthening democracy and human rights, creating more jobs and business opportunities, fairer rules, more safety and security, cleaner environment as well as better education and opportunities for research.

Concluded within the context of the Eastern Partnership Initiative the scope of the new Agreement is comprehensive, covering issues of EU competence and interests, which reflects the existing wide range of cooperation in economic, trade and political areas, and on sectoral policies. It develops these areas further, thus providing a long-term basis for the further strengthening of EU-Armenia relations.

In addition to facilitating stronger economic relations, this Agreement aims to enhance political dialogue and to promote peace and stability. By intensifying this dialogue and improving cooperation across the broad range of areas, the Agreement lays the foundations for more effective engagement with Armenia.

At its core is a commitment to strengthen the promotion, protection and implementation of fundamental freedoms, human rights, and the respect for democratic principles, the rule of law, and good governance.

Chairman

Armenia is currently undergoing a period of rapid and positive political change.

In what was termed the ‘Velvet Revolution’, the Spring 2018 protests against the then Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan eventually forced his resignation and led to the elevation of Nikol Pashinyan to the office of Prime Minister.

Along with our EU partners, Ireland watched the events of Spring 2018 in Armenia with great interest. The revolution resulted in a remarkable peaceful transition of political power in the country.

Ireland, together with the EU, continues to encourage and support Armenia's reform efforts with a number of positive steps taken already, including their new five-year Government Programme containing a series of political, economic, judicial reforms as well as on governance, which focusses on enhancing rule of law, fighting corruption and improving protection of human rights.

Currently Ireland's bilateral trade with Armenia is not hugely significant. However, this Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement will allow for more access in to the region and will help develop greater opportunities for trade and investment, including in the areas of education, research and innovation.

Chairman,

While Armenia are not seeking EU membership, relations have gone from strength to strength in recent years due to the EU's Eastern Partnership mechanism. The most visible illustration of this is the 2017 Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement.

The EU is the biggest provider of financial support and a key reform partner in Armenia. The EU stands ready to continue engaging in Armenia and provide support through political dialogue, financial and technical assistance, to support the Armenian government ambitious reforms for the benefit of the citizens of Armenia and EU-Armenia cooperation.

This support is critical to ensuring a sustained approach to ongoing reform efforts in Armenia aimed at enhancing democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights, with the ultimate aim of increasing security, prosperity and socioeconomic resilience.

The EU currently contributes €40 million annually to Armenia in grants with the focus towards supporting the reform agenda of the new government, private sector development, education, and development of focal regions including the promotion of e-governance.

In addition, since 2014 more than €1 billion in the form of blended loans and grants has been invested in the energy, agriculture and transport sectors.

Chairman,

Before closing, I wish to acknowledge the ongoing concerns over the so-called frozen conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The Armenian Prime Minister recently reaffirmed Armenia's commitment to the peaceful settlement of the conflict which the EU along with Ireland has welcomed.

I understand that there has been some progress in talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan, with the EU welcoming the current decrease in tension on the ground and the constructive and calm attitude shown by both leaderships.

Ireland's position, like that of the EU as a whole, has been supportive of the OSCE Minsk process with the aim of moving towards the peaceful resolution of the conflict on the basis of mutual compromises.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to present this Motion.

This Agreement will not only broaden and deepen the EU's relationship with Armenia and provide for closer economic and political ties, but will also provide the framework for further constructive dialogue on human rights, fundamental freedoms, rule of law and governance.

I must emphasise that by ratifying this Agreement we will be in a position to add our voice to the EU and 27 other Member States in encouraging Armenia on its path to reform, rather than sitting on the sidelines as others engage.

I hope the Committee will support the motion, and that Dáil Éireann may approve the terms of this Agreement so that Ireland may proceed to ratification before the end of 2019.

I am happy to take questions at this point.