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THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE CAUCASUS

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The European Unions interest in the Southern Caucasus is developing within the framework of Eastern partnership and European neighborhood policy. President of the European Commission, following his official visit to Azerbaijan which constituted a first to this region, visited Armenia at the end of November and met with the government officials. Visits of high level EU officials to the region present the indication that relations of the countries in the region with the EU are developing and deepening.

Following the meeting with the Armenian President, the statement of the President of the EU Commission to the press expands the horizon of the future of relations to a degree not conveyed before. The President has said we believe that Armenia is a European country, you belong to the European family of nations. Taking into consideration the existence in the European Union of a view which argues that Turkey is not European by putting forth that most of its territories are in Asia, such a definition for a country lying to the east of Turkey is without doubt welcome. On the other hand, the Armenian Presidents statement, basing common values on religion and emphasizing that even the struggle against the Sassanide state in 451 was to protect Christianity, requires an assessment on whether religious affinity is the benchmark.

President of the EU Commission has also referred to EUs interest in peace, stability and security in the region and in this context, has pronounced his support to the work of the Minsk Group by focusing on the resolution of the Karabakh conflict. However, as well known, the occupation of Karabakh is only one part of the problem. The other seven regions under Armenian occupation and the situation of the people forced to migrate not being mentioned at all in his statements, has most likely, not been encouraging for the EUs intentions and its capacity to be able to resolve the problems in the region.

As pointed out in another article published in the AVIM bulletin, it is to be seen that the EU is willing to respond equally warmly to Armenia in its search for establishing a balance to its current strong ties to Russia through maintaining relations with the West and the EU. Furthermore, differing with the harsh statement that Armenia must choose either that side or this side that an EU representative made during a meeting in Yerevan a short while ago, President of the EU Commission has emphasized that he warmly welcomes Armenias policy of getting as close to the EU as the EU will let them and has said in terms of sharing our values, of being a part of our internal market we want you to be very close indeed, thus taking into consideration the current restrictions of Armenia and providing

leeway in time.

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