

## Van Rompuy: EU expects to hear about Armenia's further plans

Written by armenians.hu

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The European Council President Herman Van Rompuy addressed Thursday, Sept 5, the students of the European University at St. Petersburg and its distinguished guests, professors and representatives of the media while visiting the city to attend G20 Summit hosted by Russia this year.

When speaking about the possible visa-free travel between Russia and Europe, Van Rompuy said that it cannot be done overnight but the interested parties 'are making progress'. Then he referred to some of the common neighbors, such as Ukraine, Armenia and Moldova, according to the publication on the University's website.

"We believe that an Association Agreement with Ukraine would not damage Russian-Ukrainian relations. We have overcome the Cold War and we are proud. In this regard, problems such as that of Transnistria could also be overcome," Van Rompuy said.

"Just look at what France and Germany have gone through," he said.

On a separate note about Georgia, the European Council President welcomed the gradual restoration of economic ties between Georgia and Russia but stated again that the EU supports Georgia's territorial integrity.

What happens in Libya and Syria now was qualified as a tectonic shift by Van Rompuy. "The international community can't remain idle, the status quo is unacceptable but we believe that a non-military solution is necessary in Syria," he said, adding that Russia has a key role in helping bring the parties of the conflict to the negotiations table.

Asked to comment on Armenia's recent decision to join the Russia-led Customs Union, Van Rompuy said that Armenia, Moldova, and, if possible, Ukraine will hopefully sign the Association Agreement at the Vilnius Summit in November 2013.

"This is a political agreement. The Agreement would allow Armenia to go through comprehensive change both politically and economically. Therefore, after getting the news about Armenia's plans of joining the Customs Union the EU expects to hear from Armenia what her further plans are. We have not received official explanations from Armenia, yet we don't think this is a zero sum game and the same refers to Ukraine. Some benchmarks will be necessary to meet. There are some outstanding issues but we hope to see results in Vilnius. We are still engaged with these countries and still expect to sign the Association Agreements," he said.

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Armenia completed technical talks on a 'deep and comprehensive free-trade agreement' (DCFTA) with the EU in July and it was set to be signed at a summit with the EU in late November.

In addition to a free-trade deal, Armenia has been working towards the signing of an association agreement with the EU, a framework agreement on co-operation that is seen as a first step towards political integration with the EU.

During a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Armenian leader Serzh Sargsyan said Armenia is ready to join Customs Union, with further plans to be involved in formation of EurAsEC.

Mr. Putin supported the initiative, voicing readiness to assist Armenia in the process. He also noted that Russian Railways may invest 15 billion rubles in development of Armenia's railway network.

The Customs Union was formed in 2010 to include of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia; Kirghizia and Tajikistan later expressed willingness to join the Union.

Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt described Armenia's intention as a U-turn in relations with the European Union. "Seems as if Armenia will break talks on free trade agreement with EU and integrate with Russia instead," he said on his Twitter account.

Linus Linkevicius, the Foreign Minister of Lithuania, which holds the rotating EU presidency, said Armenia "has blocked its chances of signing a free trade deal with the European Union by choosing to join the Russia-led union."

EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton expects Armenia to explain the decision to join the Russia-initiated Customs Union. "We expect clarifications from Armenia, and then we will be able to assess the consequences this move may have," Ashton's spokesperson Maja Kocijancic said in Brussels.

On November 28-29, the EU's Lithuanian presidency will host the Eastern Partnership Summit, where association agreements with Moldova, Georgia and Armenia are expected to be initialed, and where an EU-Ukraine association agreement is expected to be signed. These agreements are accompanied by Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTA) with the EU.