Remarks by HRVP Catherine Ashton following her meeting with Foreign Minister Edward Nalbandian at the end of her visit in Armenia

Minister, can I first of all say what a great pleasure it is to meet with you and with your Prime Minister and with your President, and to meet you here in Yerevan. You and I have met a number of times, in Brussels and indeed all over the world, but it's the first time I have the opportunity to be here and it's wonderful to do so and it certainly won't be my last visit here.

Like you, I want to express my pleasure at the progress in the bilateral relations between the European Union and Armenia. As I described it earlier to you, I think we have made real progress in developing the strength of this relationship, and as you rightly say, a relationship based on the values that we share, the values of support of these people of this country and support for democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

You and I also had the opportunity to talk about the region and some of the challenges that you face, and the need to try and move forward in order that this region can grow economically and politically, and indeed strengthen its relationships to the European Union.

The European Union very much wishes to see our relationships get stronger. And although all countries across the world are dealing with the economic situation, there is a strong desire in Europe to make sure that we honour the commitments that we have and that we keep the strength of our relationships. So we'll now be looking to how much we can do together. This relationship is not just about money, it's also about the kind of cooperation and the way in which we can work together. So for example with the free trade agreement it will be the opportunities we offer our businesses to collaborate. It's going to make a huge difference. The opportunities to develop small business, to export and so on. The President last night was explaining to me you have I think 350 companies employing 5000 people in new technology. The more that we can offer them, opportunities, as well as for example your agricultural markets, then the more that the economy can grow and the more that this country will be able to develop in a way I know the Foreign Minister and the government wish.
And of course we also touched upon the international agenda where we're very conscious of the role that you are playing and - as Armenia develops and grows in its international relations - ready to work together. This is often expressed in our bilateral relationship, where we look at what we can do to support our economies, and also through the progress made on moving towards a free trade agreement. I think these efforts will come to fruition in the next few months.

Finally, on visas - as I was explaining to the Minister and to the Prime Minister earlier, the process of moving on visas and moving on trade takes a long time at the very beginning. And the reason is because there are many issues to be resolved of a technical nature. And it's often seen that's the longest and most difficult part of the process. Once you've done all the technical work then the process of negotiation moves much more quickly. So you shouldn't see this as being about delay, it's about making sure that everything is actually in place. And the technical teams have to do their work on both sides, because it's important that your people and for the people in Europe that this is done properly and done well. I'm confident that we're now at the phase when we'll see significant movement shortly, but it is for the technical people to finish their work first.

So, Minister, thank you for your hospitality, it's very nice to be here and I do want to say how much we appreciate the strength of the cooperation we have.