

## **Media Review on the visit of Belgian delegation to Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh**

**06.09.2015-12.09.2015**

Broadcast media on the visit of the Belgian parliamentarians to Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh on 6 -12 September, 2015.

Both Armenian and Artsakh TV channels and online media actively covered the visit of the Belgian delegation to Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

### **1. Public TV of Armenia**

The public TV of Armenia dedicated a four-minute summarizing news coverage to the visit of Belgian Parliamentarians to the Republic of Armenia and Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), accompanied by EAFJD. The report states that the delegation consisting of Belgian Parliamentarians is the third European delegation visiting Artsakh in the past two weeks, thus continuing the process of de-isolating Nagorno-Karabakh. According to the report, the aim of the delegation is to get acquainted with the situation on the ground. The report quotes the head of the delegation, Ms. Julie de Groote who states that it is important for the delegation to be in Nagorno-Karabakh and see that democracy is a lifestyle here. Ms. de Groote also mentions that they have not witnessed complaints. Instead, they saw people full of dignity and optimism towards the future. The report further focuses on the meeting with the President of Nagorno-Karabakh Bako Sahakyan, quoting the President's words that Artsakh is interested in deepening the relations and cooperative ties with Belgium and its administrative units, particularly on the parliamentary level. Afterwards the report quotes Mr. André du Bus who says that that it is his second visit to Artsakh. "The first visit was a discovery whereas the second is already a conviction. Peace is a vital necessity here," says Mr. Du Bus. According to the report, parliamentary diplomacy is of great importance for Artsakh, since it enables to show how functional Nagorno-Karabakh Republic in fact is. The Belgian delegation noticed that there was no disagreement between the opposition and the government concerning the independent status of the country. According to the report the Belgian parliamentarians saw freedom of expression and active opposition, both of which are essential prerequisites of democracy. The report further emphasizes that the Belgian deputies approach the matter with caution in order not to damage the efforts of the international intermediaries mandated to find a peaceful solution to the conflict. The report further quotes Ms. Julie de Groote: "It is certainly your intention to be recognized by various parliaments. But it was very attractive for us that neither here nor in

Yerevan we were told that we were going to Artsakh in order to recognize it. Everybody tells us to do what we consider right. This was impressive. We are here to break the indifference towards you.”

Mr. Karim van Overmeire emphasizes that the first thing one notices in Artsakh is people's strong determination to establish peace and the optimism that they can reach this goal. “Despite the conflict there is democracy and a functioning state here where free and fair elections are held,” says Mr. Van Overmeire. According to the report the delegation also expressed a desire to meet the youth of the country. Thus they had a meeting with the students and the rector of Artsakh State University (ASU). The report further mentions that the guests liked the fact that the Catholic University of Louvain was among the 20 Universities ASU cooperates with.

Ms. Fatoumata Sidibé is quoted saying that they found a country with people who naturally had chosen the path of democracy without being obliged to do so. Ms. Sidibé also says that she does not feel a foreigner in Artsakh and that they saw a unanimous approach. “All the three musketeers think the same way,” says Ms. Sidibé.

Ms. Susskind recalls the recent critical resolution on the massive breach of human rights in Azerbaijan adopted by the European Parliament. She says that they saw a high level of freedom in Nagorno-Karabakh which means that there was a big contrast between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan. “Unfortunately we cannot visit Azerbaijan and follow the situation there ourselves, as we are already on the country’s black list”, says Ms. Susskind.

At the end of the report the journalist mentions that although Europe does not openly recognize the right to self-determination of Artsakh because of its internal issues, it is a well-known fact that many European countries emerged due to this principle. A piece of advice addressed to the people in Artsakh was to efficiently use the relative peace and stability for state-building and activate the steps towards international recognition when the circumstances become more favorable. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gf\\_v51-0JPK](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gf_v51-0JPK)

## **2. Armenia TV**

Another leading Armenian TV channel - Armenia TV mainly focuses on delegation’s visit to Artsakh. The report starts with the statement that the Belgian participants of the delegation were impressed with what they saw in Artsakh, where they had meetings with both officials and the civil society. According to the report, Belgian MPs saw functioning democratic institutions in Nagorno-Karabakh and call on deepening private and official exchange between Artsakh and Europe. The report quotes Ms. Simone Susskind saying that there is little information about Artsakh in Europe. According to Ms. Susskind European delegations should visit Artsakh more

often while various Armenian delegations should visit Europe too and speak out about the situation on the ground as well as people. The report further quotes Ms. Susskind saying that official Azerbaijan registered the fact that they visited Nagorno-Karabakh and that the deputies received warnings from the Embassy of Azerbaijan in Belgium. But this will not prevent them from visiting Artsakh in the future. The report further touches upon the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide which was also on the agenda of the delegation. The journalist recalls the Resolution on the recognition of the Armenian Genocide adopted by the Belgian Chamber of Representatives in July 2015. <http://www.armeniatv.am/hy/news/57623>

### **3. Artsakh-TV**

Artsakh TV - the public TV of Nagorno-Karabakh presents the visit of the Belgian parliamentarians in a few reports.

The report broadcast on 10.09.2015 focuses on the meeting of Belgian deputies with the Members of NKR National Assembly. It starts with quotes from the introductory speech of the Speaker of National Assembly of Artsakh Ashot Ghouljian, where he emphasizes the importance of the inter-parliamentary cooperation with European countries. According to the report, the head of the delegation of Belgian MPs, Ms. Julie de Groote also considers such cooperation important. In the meanwhile she stresses that they are in Nagorno-Karabakh on a study visit and the main goal of the delegation is not to harm the process of the peaceful settlement of the conflict led by OSCE Minsk Group. Ms. de Groote further states that she certainly realizes that Nagorno-Karabakh would like to be internationally recognized but she appreciates the fact that neither in Armenia nor in Artsakh they were asked to recognize Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. "Instead we were told do what we consider right," says Ms. De Groote. The MP from the opposition "Veratsnound party" mentions that the people of Artsakh are grateful to OSCE Minsk Group for its efforts but they realize that the peace in Artsakh is guaranteed by its army just as in the beginning of 90ies and not by the principles of international law since the enemy has not respect for them. During the Q&A session, the Belgian MPs raised questions to the parliamentarians of Artsakh. Mr. Andre du Bus asked with whom exactly Nagorno-Karabakh officials were ready to negotiate with over the regulation of the conflict. Karim van Overmeire advised the people of Artsakh to effectively use the period of relative stability by making progress in state-building and make steps towards international recognition when the circumstances are more favorable. Fatoumata Sidibé was interested in the international response over the elections in Artsakh.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tna1LdouKwA>

Another report from 11.09.2015 focuses on the meeting of the delegation with the students and Rector of Artsakh State University. It presents the observations and comments of Belgian parliamentarians. The report mentions that this is Mr. André du Bus's second visit to the University of Artsakh. It further quotes Ms. Fatoumata Sidibé saying that she witnessed the prerequisites of a democratic state in Artsakh, namely freedom of speech and opposition. Ms. Julie de Groot describes this meeting as a lesson of cooperation. Mr. Karim Van Overmeire sees self-determined people in Nagorno-Karabakh. The Flemish Parliamentarian considers it a shortcoming that the international community is hesitant in recognizing Artsakh. Simone Susskind notices that in Artsakh children are taught literacy and not hatred. During the Q&A session, the students of the university raised questions regarding the international recognition of NKR. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fbTP6sya3mo>

The last report of Artsakh-TV elaborates on the press-conference of the Belgian Parliamentarians in Stepanakert. According to the journalist, the peculiarity of the press conference was that all the members of the delegation expressed their opinions which did not always coincide. Nevertheless, there was one thing they agreed on, namely on the fact that in Artsakh they saw a country that defended its borders and despite the war continued building democratic institutions. It is this lifestyle of people of Artsakh that obliges the democratic forces to come, see and to appreciate the results of the efforts of the people of Artsakh. The head of delegation emphasized that they were in Nagorno-Karabakh to see and to understand the situation on the ground. She further stressed that the aspirations towards the future and democracy was what the people of Artsakh could export.

Simone Susskind mentioned that they were impressed with the level of freedom of expression in Artsakh which contrasts with what is being reported about Azerbaijan. Fatoumata Sidibé stated that they saw a country which naturally carried and developed European values. This impression became more substantial after the various meetings they had, including with the civil society. According to Ms. Sidibé there was however one question where everyone shared the same opinion, namely the future of Artsakh. According to the coverage the parliamentarians considered their mission to spread the word about what they witnessed in Artsakh. This would create the basis for the necessity of developing cooperation in various fields between Artsakh and Belgium. Hervé Doyen concluded that he and the other parliamentarians have a lot to reflect on and upon returning back to Belgium with Kaspar Karampetian and the Armenian community in Brussels they have a lot of work to do so that Artsakh is not forgotten. According to the

parliamentarians the results of the visit could be evaluated in 2 years. This was the promise of the Belgian deputies. The parliamentarians expressed a wish to visit Artsakh once more.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7wFe2bWFg4Q>

## **Online media on the visit of Belgian delegation to Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh**

### **Armenpress**

Belgian MPs are impressed with freedom of speech in Armenia

<http://armenpress.am/eng/news/818447/belgian-mps-are-impressed-with-freedom-of-speech-in-armenia.html>

### **News.am**

Belgium deputy: Karabakh is rich in democracy, not oil

<http://news.am/eng/news/285841.html>

Belgium MPs impressed with Electric Yerevan protests

<http://news.am/eng/news/285835.html>

Belgian MP: We can explain why Armenia can host limited number of Syrian refugees

<http://news.am/eng/news/285890.html>

### **Aravot**

A Belgian parliamentarian. There is a high level of freedom of expression in Armenia

<http://en.aravot.am/2015/09/14/171990/>

### **Armradio**

Belgian MPs visit Artsakh

<http://www.armradio.am/en/2015/09/11/belgian-mps-visit-artsakh/>

### **President. NKR**

Meeting with a group of Belgian parliamentarians

<http://www.president.nkr.am/en/news/meetingsWithForeignDelegations/2937/>

### **NKR.am**

The NKR Minister of Foreign Affairs Received Parliamentarians of the Kingdom of Belgium

<http://www.nkr.am/en/news/2015-09-10/753/>