



PO-Box 2024
D-37010 Göttingen
Phone: +49 551 499 06-0
Fax: +49 551 580 28
Email: info@gfbv.de
www.gfbv.de

Human Rights Organization
with consultative status at
the UN ECOSOC and with
participatory status at the
Council of Europe

Kaja Kallas

High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Vice President of the European Commission

Berlaymont Building

Rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200

B-1049 Brussels

Göttingen, 24.02.2025

**Continued Human Rights Violations Against the Armenian Population of Nagorno-Karabakh:
Urgent Call for EU Action**

Dear Vice President Kallas,

As an international human rights organization, the **Society for Threatened Peoples** has been actively advocating for the protection of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) and has addressed European and national leaders on multiple occasions regarding the ongoing human rights violations committed by Azerbaijan. In our communications with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, and European Council President Charles Michel, we have consistently highlighted the alarming escalation of violence, arbitrary detentions, and cultural erasure of Armenian heritage in the region. Besides these efforts, the situation remains dire, and immediate action from the European Union is urgently required.

After the attack of the Azerbaijan military against Nagorno-Karabach in September 2023 120.000 Armenians had to flee from the de facto republic. Despite international legal frameworks intended to prevent such crimes, Azerbaijan has continued to detain political prisoners, including former leaders of the Republic of Artsakh, many of whom face degrading treatment and torture. Furthermore, the systematic destruction of Armenian cultural and religious heritage in the region has been widely documented and constitutes a clear violation of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in Armed Conflict.

We urge you, as the EU's chief diplomat, to take immediate and decisive action by directly engaging with Azerbaijani counterparts to address the plight of illegally held Armenian political prisoners, especially Ruben Vardanyan. Their continued imprisonment is not only a violation of their fundamental rights but also a critical test for the EU's commitment to upholding justice and human dignity. We are particularly alarmed by the case of Ruben Vardanyan, a well-known philanthropist and former State Minister of Artsakh, who has been detained under arbitrary conditions. Reports indicate that he has been subjected to torture, solitary confinement, and physical abuse, and most recently, he has resorted to a hunger strike once again to protest his

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treatment and the injustices faced by Armenian prisoners. He is being tried in an illegal military tribunal rather than a civilian court.

All hearings have been held in secret, with foreign journalists and independent observers barred from attending have been denied by Mr. Vardanyan's right to defense – his local lawyer, Avraam Berman, has had his access to materials restricted, his documents confiscated, and he has been subjected to psychological pressure. Further, Mr. Vardanyan's international legal team has been barred from communicating or visiting him and has not had access to any of the case materials. Mr. Vardanyan's deteriorating health is of utmost concern, and we urge you to intervene immediately to ensure his safety.

Thank you in advance for your initiatives for Ruben Vardanyan and the other political prisoners from Nagorno-Karabach held in Azerbaijan.

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Concrete Steps the European Union Must Take:

1. Sanctions on Azerbaijani Officials and Institutions

Given Azerbaijan's ongoing human rights violations, the EU must implement **targeted sanctions** against those responsible, including senior political and military figures and reassess its **economic and energy relations** with Azerbaijan to avoid complicity

2. Securing the Release of Armenian Political Prisoners

The EU should **pressure Azerbaijan for the immediate release** of Armenian detainees, including Ruben Vardanyan, and ensure **independent international monitoring** of their conditions

3. Monitoring and Preventing Further Cultural Destruction

The EU Satellite Centre (SatCen) should document and monitor the systematic destruction of Armenian cultural sites in Nagorno-Karabakh. This documentation is critical to ensuring accountability and preserving historical evidence for future legal action.

4. Guaranteeing the Right of Return for Displaced Armenians

The EU must advocate for **international protection mechanisms** to enable the safe and voluntary return of displaced Armenians

A Test for the EU's Commitment to Human Rights

The EU has repeatedly positioned itself as a **global leader in defending human rights and the rule of law**. Allowing Azerbaijan's continued ethnic cleansing and suppression of Armenian

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identity to go unchecked **undermines the credibility of EU foreign policy** and sets a dangerous precedent for authoritarian regimes worldwide.

As we have emphasized in our previous communications with European and German leadership, **a failure to act will further embolden Azerbaijan's leadership and put the security of Armenia itself at risk.** The EU must **seize this moment to take decisive action**, ensuring that justice prevails and that the fundamental rights of the Armenian people are protected.

We remain at your disposal for further discussions and urge you to act with the urgency that this situation demands.

Sincerely,

Sarah Reinke,
Head of the Human Rights Desk, Society for Threatened People

Dr. phil. Tessa Hofmann
Head of human rights NGO
Working Groups Recognition – Against Genocide, for international Understandi

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