

**Statement by Mr. Tigran Samvelian
Counsellor, Embassy of the Republic Armenia
At the Conference “Acquainting Armenia”
(Citta di Castello, 7 March 2008)**

Bona sera a tutti,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to thank the organizers for the continued commitment to engage actively in the processes of acquaintance, friendship and cooperation with Armenia. The history of the present phase of our co-operation dates back to 1988, when the Italian people were among the first to extend humanitarian assistance following Armenia’s devastating earthquake. The overall effectiveness of Italian assistance to Armenia over the past years is reflected first of all in its practical and target-oriented nature, producing very tangible results.

We believe, that there is considerable value in today’s event, as it is an opportunity for a collective search for further designs of assistance and cooperation. I have been examining with great interest the presentations made by previous speakers, and in particular by Mr. Robert Attarian, concerning Italian investments in Armenia. In our view, the overall approach adopted in the proposed strategy, bears considerable relevance to the changing cultural and socio-economic environment.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the remaining time, I would try to outline the basic elements of Armenia’s integration in the European structures. However, before doing so, I believe there is also relevance in discussing some of the broader political and strategic implications for sustainable development and stable political environment in Armenia.

First of all, given its geographical location and proximity to expanding European borders, the region of South Caucasus represents a considerable security link in the broader European continent, as well as in its relations with other regions. The present status of international relations, following the outburst of terrorism in 2001, has become an added challenge and requirement for sustaining strong political institutions and state structures in the region in order to maintain immunity from insurgences and spread of terrorism. Furthermore, the stability of the region, its development along the patterns of the democratic world, its manifest engagement in the community of democracies will remain basic factors to resist the risks of generating, as much as transiting instability.

Second, the expanding common European economic and political area, the extension of the European Union borders closer to South Caucasus, bring forward considerable opportunities both for our region and for broader Europe. Having acceded to several European organisations, Armenia has already been benefiting from the multi-layered structures of Europe, which provide substantial development and security mechanisms for smaller countries. Our present engagements have also been of importance in terms of consolidating our reforms and upgrading our institutional structures and legal frameworks to European standards. The continuous commitment to engage the region further into Europe is a considerable factor for the spread of common European values, for predictability of European security, as well as for Europe's wider interactions both within, as well as with other regions.

Finally, given its history and geography, the region bears considerable potential for providing new quality for access to neighbouring regions, including the Middle East and Asia. Such role is not necessarily related only to providing effective transportation routes, but may also enhance the commercial and political links with these regions. The effectiveness of such potential depends to a large extent on the ability of the countries of the region to maintain common development patterns, and to interact extensively within the region. It also depends on the strengthening of predictable and understandable economic environments mirroring European standards, as much as on political stability within the region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Economic growth in the independent Armenia restarted in 1994, with average rates of GDP growth at 6.7% between 1994 and 2002. In the past years it registered an unprecedented growth of GDP by double-digit figures.

The engagement of the Armenian Diaspora continues to remain an important factor to stimulate growth. In particular, such was the role of the Lincy Foundation, which has injected hundreds mln. US dollars, most of which has been spent on earthquake zone rehabilitation and upgrading of Armenia's road infrastructure.

While having approached an important turning point in its economic recovery, Armenia's growth has not yet been effectively translated into a widespread improvement of social and economic conditions of the population. Armenia recognises the most important challenges to its transformation, which manifest themselves in the needs to formulate and implement sustainable growth policies, related institutional reforms and improved government. These objectives are in essence reflected in the Government's programme of activities for the years to come.

The European community will remain an important contributor to achieving development goals in Armenia. We believe that our achievements, as well as our present challenges and clearly articulated policy objectives make us worthy recipients of assistance. It is also evident, that bilateral sources remain important components of overall finance assistance.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Armenia's continuous commitment to engage into Europe is a considerable factor to spread the common European values. In this context Armenia is deeply engaged and does rely to the potential for cooperation and collaboration offered by the ENP (**European Neighborhood Policy**) between EU members and other countries – a Policy of a privileged relationship, which has been developed in 2004, with the objective of avoiding the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and our neighbours and instead strengthening the prosperity, stability and security of all concerned.

The EU's individual approach toward member countries and neighbourhood countries will be complemented by a regional approach. This too is enlargement of a sort, but enlargement of a vision and of methodology – of working together towards specific objectives for the common good.

The Schumann-Monet-Spinelli dream was for peace and prosperity -- at a time when both seemed to be out of reach. Today, they can be taken for granted by Europeans who have begun to create a bond between human beings that transcends older boundaries and makes out of this new institutional form something that really is a community.

We in the neighbourhood embraced this welcome. We appreciated deeply the vision and the generosity of spirit. From where we sit, the results, even in the first years of this policy have been extremely gratifying.

The current political dialogue with the EU is more immediate, it brings us into the loop more frequently and forces us to regularly review our policies in light of international and European norms and principles. The onus remains on us to continue actively with needed political, economic and institutional reforms.

We are confident, that the success of today's Meeting shall be measured not just by the extent and number of individual projects, but also by the audacity of our intent to work together for a common goal and a common future.

Grazie di cuore.