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PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA
TO THE OSCE

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STATEMENT
delivered by Ambassador Andranik Hovhannisyan
in response to the address by the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Civil Society
at the 1585th meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council

Vienna, 12 November 2026

Mr. Chair,

The Delegation of Armenia welcomes the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Civil Society, Ms. Anu Juvonen, to the Permanent Council and thanks her for the address. We appreciate her efforts over two consecutive Chairpersonships, and we thank the Swiss Chairpersonship for keeping civil society at the heart of its priorities.

Armenia is convinced that a free, independent and vibrant civil society is not an optional complement to democracy, but one of its foundations. Civil society organizations, human rights defenders, independent journalists and activists give voice to citizens and hold public institutions accountable. They help participating States to identify gaps and turn obligations into practice. They also bring knowledge and invaluable expertise from the grassroots that governments alone cannot provide. In doing so, they enrich the entire OSCE area and remain one of the main drivers of democratic societies and reforms. Its voices make our Organization more credible and bring it closer to the people it serves, whether at Human Dimension meetings or in the work of ODIHR and the other OSCE institutions.

This understanding is firmly rooted in our common commitments. In the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, our leaders acknowledged the major contribution of civil society to our shared goals and pledged to further support its role in implementing our commitments. That pledge was made at a historic moment, when citizens' movements had helped bring down the walls dividing our continent.

Armenia speaks on this subject from its own experience. In the spring of 2018, the peaceful, non-violent Velvet Revolution demonstrated what engaged citizens can achieve. Civil society organizations, students, young people and ordinary citizens of all backgrounds came together to demand accountability, the rule of law and genuine democratic change. That movement opened

the way to free and fair elections and to an ambitious reform agenda, where the civil society remained an indispensable partner.

Mr. Chair,

At the same time, we cannot ignore a worrying trend in parts of the OSCE area, where genuine civil society is increasingly marginalized and the civic space is shrinking. In parallel, this space is gradually filled by so-called government-organized non-governmental organizations, or GONGOs.

The participation of such entities in OSCE platforms is a matter of serious concern. They sideline authentic voices, distort discussions and undermine pluralism. In doing so, they devalue the important contributions of genuine civil society representatives. In some cases, they even condone violence, disseminate hatred, promote conflict narratives, which is contrary to our common commitments of civil society participation at the OSCE events. Such practices aim at shielding governments from accountability and creating an artificial appearance of civic support.

We firmly believe that the strength of civil society lies precisely in its independence, its diversity and its ability to challenge established narratives, including those of governments, without fear of intimidation, harassment or reprisals. At the same time, addressing malign activities of GONGOs must not become a pretext for restricting legitimate civil society participation. Our objective must remain the protection of an open, inclusive and genuinely pluralistic civic space.

We therefore encourage the Special Representative, the Chairpersonship and ODIHR to continue exploring ways to safeguard the integrity of civil society participation, in line with the OSCE commitments. In this regard, we welcome the Helsinki Recommendations on Meaningful Engagement with Civil Society in the OSCE, presented by the Special Representative last December, which also address the challenge posed by GONGOs.

In conclusion, Armenia reaffirms its commitment to an enabling environment for civil society, both at home and across the OSCE area, as well as its support for the mandate of the Special Representative.

Thank you.