

EU strategy for the South Caucasus

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the need for an EU Strategy for the South Caucasus.

It reaffirms that the EU's main objective in the region is to encourage the development of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia towards open, peaceful, stable and democratic countries, ready to establish good neighbourly relations and able to transform the South Caucasus into a region of sustainable peace, stability and prosperity.

Overall, the European Union has to play a more active political role in the region, by developing a strategy that would **combine its soft power with a firm approach**.

Security issues and peaceful resolution of conflicts: Parliament emphasises that retaining the status quo in the conflicts in the region is unacceptable and unsustainable, since it bears the constant risk of an escalation of tensions and a resumption of armed hostilities. It considers that all sides should actively engage to achieve stability and peace. It notes that conflict management and conflict resolution as well as basic dialogue necessitate inter alia recognition of the rights and legitimate interests of all relevant parties and communities, openness to review perceptions of past events and reach a common understanding of past events, willingness to overcome hatred and fear, preparedness to compromise over maximalist positions, abandon revanchist attitudes and readiness to discuss real concessions, in order to be able to consolidate stability and prosperity. Members call on external players (including the European Union) to use their powers and influence, in ways that are fully consistent with international law to ensure that there is progress in the settlement of conflicts but without introducing conditions for the respect of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the South Caucasus states.

Parliament then moves on to review the conflicts under way in the region and make the following remarks:

- **Nagorno-Karabakh:** although Parliament welcomes the dynamic pace of the negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, it calls on the parties to intensify their peace talk efforts for the purpose of a settlement. It condemns the idea of a military solution and calls on both parties to avoid any further breaches of the 1994 ceasefire. The international community is called upon to show courage and political will to assist in overcoming the remaining sticking points which hinder an agreement. In the meantime, the urgent problem of the refugees and displaced persons needs to be resolved. Members call for the **withdrawal of Armenian forces from all occupied territories of Azerbaijan** allowing the return of displaced populations to their homes and request international forces to be organised so that the displaced persons can return to their homes. To prepare for a lasting peace, Members call on all relevant authorities to avoid provocative policies and rhetoric, inflammatory statements and manipulation of history so that public opinion accepts and fully understands the benefits of a comprehensive settlement. Members believe that the position according to which Nagorno-Karabakh includes all occupied Azerbaijani lands surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh should rapidly be abandoned. They note that an interim status for Nagorno-Karabakh could offer a solution until the final status is determined and that it could create a transitional framework for peaceful coexistence and cooperation of Armenian and Azerbaijani populations in the region;
- **The Armenia-Turkey rapprochement:** Parliament welcomes the strengthening of diplomatic relations between Armenia and Turkey, including the opening of the common border. It calls on both sides to seize this opportunity to mend their relations through ratification and implementation without preconditions and in a reasonable time frame;
- **The conflicts in Georgia:** Parliament reiterates its unconditional support for the **sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability** of the internationally recognised borders of Georgia, and

calls on Russia to respect them. It encourages the Georgian authorities to make further efforts to achieve a settlement of Georgia's internal conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It supports the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) mandate and calls for its further extension. It calls on Russia and the de facto authorities of the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to stop blocking parts of its implementation. Parliament also notes with satisfaction that the international community almost unanimously rejects the unilateral declaration of independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. It deplores the recognition by the Russian Federation of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as contrary to the international law. It calls on all parties to **respect the Ceasefire Agreement of 2008** as well as to guarantee the safety and free access of EUMM personnel on the ground and calls on Russia to honour its commitment to withdraw its troops to the positions held before the outbreak of the August 2008 war. It notes with concern the agreement between the Russian Federation and the de facto authorities of Abkhazia to establish a Russian military base in Abkhazia without the consent of the Government of Georgia and notes that such an agreement is in contradiction with the Ceasefire Agreements of 12 August and 8 September 2008. In parallel, Parliament stresses the importance of protecting the safety and rights of all people living within the breakaway regions, of promoting respect for ethnic Georgians' right of return under safe and dignified conditions, of stopping the process of forced passportisation, of achieving a reduction of the de facto closed borders, of obtaining possibilities for the EU and other international actors to assist people within the two regions. It underlines the need for more clearly identified short- and medium-term objectives in this respect. It encourages Georgia to continue implementing its IDP Action Plan and assisting the IDPs within its territory. Parliament emphasises the importance of confidence-building measures and people-to-people contacts across the conflict. Furthermore, it calls on the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR) to make every effort to give new and fresh impetus to these talks with a view to reaching a satisfactory stabilisation of the situation and fully implementing the August 2008 Ceasefire Agreement. Parliament welcomes the Tagliavini Report and supports its main observations and conclusions. It expects that the extensive background information provided by the Report can be used for legal proceedings at the International Criminal Court and by individual citizens as regards infringements of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Progress towards democratisation and respect for human rights and the rule of law: recalling that any progress in the region cannot take place without efforts towards democratisation, good governance, political pluralism, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, Parliament calls upon the countries of the region to pursue their efforts in these vital areas for good cooperation with the EU. Efforts are also required to strengthen the political dialogue with these countries and to consolidate the democratic institutions of these countries (e.g. including the independence of the judiciary, strengthening parliamentary control over the executive,...). Particular efforts are required to fight against corruption, to guarantee the holding of free and fair elections (with the help and supervision of the EU), to enhance freedom of expression and of the press, to fight against torture and harassment and ill-treatment of journalists or civil society. Members also invite the parties to participate in the work of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly in order to facilitate the coming together of parliamentarians from all the parties.

Economic issues and social development: Parliament holds the view that broader cooperation on a regional level and with the EU in sectors such as economy, transport, energy and environment is essential for the optimal development of the sectors themselves and for ensuring stability in the region. Cooperation needs to be regional but also to involve legal and police aspects and include border management. Initiative should also be taken to stimulate a favourable climate for economic activity.

Parliament expresses its concern at the rapidly increasing military and defence spending in the South Caucasus and **the build-up of military arsenals**. It points out that this relevant part of domestic budgets drains away a remarkable amount of financial resources from more urgent issues like poverty reduction, social security and economic development. It calls, in this regard, on the Council and the Commission to **prevent EU macrofinancial assistance from funding indirectly the military build-up in the region**. It

notes the strategic geopolitical location of the South Caucasus and its increasing importance as an energy, transport and communications corridor connecting the Caspian region and Central Asia with Europe and considers it of the utmost importance and, therefore, that **EU cooperation with the South Caucasus be given high priority** (this region is an important transit zone for energy supplies to the EU thanks to the Nabucco and White Stream corridors). It recognises the vital role of the development of new infrastructures and transport corridors, projects connecting the Caspian Sea and Black Sea regions through or from the South Caucasus.

Towards a European strategy: Parliament welcomes the Eastern Partnership and takes note of the related initiatives that have been activated but stress that, in order to make it credible, it should be accompanied by concrete projects and adequate incentives. The partnership, according to Members, should focus on the following aspects:

- **resolution of conflicts:** in Members' opinion, the EU is well placed to support confidence-building, reconstruction and rehabilitation. They call for the creation of spaces for civic engagement not just between leaders but also between civic organisations and strengthening of regional cooperation measures. Concerned by the risk of a spillover of frozen conflicts in the region, Members recommend the setting-up of a Conference on Security and Cooperation in the South Caucasus, embracing the countries concerned and the relevant regional and global actors. The entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty justifies a more prominent role for the EU and, in particular, in regard to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Humanitarian aid and assistance to the population in the Nagorno-Karabakh region is called for, in particular for refugees. Aid distribution programmes and information dissemination programmes should also be deployed in Abkhazia and Ossetia. Members also call for the funding of confidence-building measures between parties;
- **democratisation and respect for human rights and the rule of law:** although Members support aid being given to the region they consider that the partner countries need to respect their political commitments (such as that of the Georgian government to relaunch democratic reforms). They suggest that targeted aid be given to Azerbaijan and Georgia and that funding to strengthen the rights of minorities be given to Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Actions in regard to media freedom and strengthening civil society also need to be considered;
- **economic cooperation and social development:** Parliament stresses that the Union must continue to support the economic development, trade and investment in the South Caucasus. The establishment of a comprehensive free trade area should be considered, including among the South Caucasian countries themselves. Given the geopolitical situation of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan in relation to the European Union, Turkey as an EU candidate country, Russia and Iran, Members consider that trade is one of the key components of the EU's overall policy. They call on the Commission to identify common areas of economic interest that can overcome divergences, facilitate dialogue and promote regional cooperation. They call for greater EU engagement and involvement with a view to bringing about integration in the region. Welcoming initiatives taken to foster relations between the partner countries, Members call on Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan to improve their progress towards fulfilling their respective ENP Action Plans. Particular attention should be accorded to energy security because it is a common concern. These projects should respect European standards and seek to develop sources of alternative energies. Once again, Members reaffirm that political stability is essential for the reliable and uninterrupted supply of energy resources and recall that the double energy corridor formed by the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) pipelines fosters rapprochement between the EU and the Caspian region. Lastly, they insist on the significance of people-to-people contacts and mobility programmes.

In conclusion, Parliament highlights the necessity for the EU to develop a strategy for the South Caucasus, given the importance of the region for the EU and the potential role that the EU has in fostering further its

development and in the solution of its conflicts. Reiterating their full support for the European Neighbourhood Policy, Members call for the European Parliament to be kept immediately and fully informed of all initiatives taken in this area.