Negotiations on the EU-Azerbaijan Comprehensive Agreement. Recommendations to the Council, the Commission and the EEAS

2017/2056(INI) - 23/05/2018 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Norica NICOLAI (ALDE, RO) on a European Parliament recommendation to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the negotiations on the EU-Azerbaijan Comprehensive Agreement.

The EU is Azerbaijan's first trading partner and its biggest export and import market, representing 48.6 % of Azerbaijan’s total trade and constituting its largest source of foreign direct investment. Azerbaijan is a strategic energy partner for the EU, allowing for a diversification of the EU’s energy sources.

The European Parliament favours a deepening of relations with all Eastern Partnership members in so far as they respect these core values. The new agreement between the EU and Azerbaijan should advance the interests of the Union in the region as well as promote its values.

Members recommended the following to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy:

General principles

- ensure that the deepening of relations between the EU and Azerbaijan is conditional on it **upholding and respecting the core values** and principles of democracy and the rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- ensure speedy and steady progress in the negotiations, with the objective of signing this new agreement before the next Eastern Partnership summit in 2019, in so far as the abovementioned conditions are fulfilled.

Political dialogue and regional cooperation

- provide for regular and in-depth political dialogue in order to encourage **strong reforms** aimed at bolstering institutions and developing a regulatory environment in which civil society can operate without undue interference, including in the reform process;
- provide for closer cooperation in foreign, defence and security matters so as to ensure as much convergence as possible, in particular as regards responses to global threats and challenges, including terrorism, conflict prevention, crisis management and regional cooperation;
- support the signing of a Framework Participation Agreement (FPA) between the EU and Azerbaijan to provide a legal and political basis for cooperation in common security and defence policy (CSDP) missions and operations;
- ensure that high priority is given to dialogue between Azerbaijan and Armenia and to enhanced EU participation in peacefully solving the **Nagorno-Karabakh** conflict;
- put in place specific provisions to support the authorities’ important efforts in aiding the large number of **refugees** and internally displaced persons, and to support civilians living in conflict areas within Azerbaijan’s internationally recognised borders.

The rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms

- provide support for reform of the judiciary aimed at ensuring its impartiality and independence from the executive and at strengthening the rule of law;
- put in place specific provisions to support Azerbaijan in fighting terrorism, organised and economic crime, cybercrime, radicalisation, money laundering and tax evasion;
- back investigations into laundering schemes notably the “Laundromat” affair.

Trade and economic cooperation

- include fair and ambitious trade and investment provisions which do not undermine EU standards, notably sanitary, phytosanitary, environmental, labour, social, gender balance and non-discrimination standards, and that ensure the recognition and protection of intellectual property rights, including geographical indications, notably for wines and spirits;
- put in place robust measures that would ensure rapid progress towards improving the business and investment climate in Azerbaijan.

Energy and other areas of cooperation

- allow for increased cooperation in the energy sector in line with the EU’s and Azerbaijan’s strategic energy partnership;
- support the completion of the Southern Gas Corridor after addressing the important concerns related to climate change;
- put in place ambitious provisions on environmental protection and climate change reduction;
- provide new prospects for enhanced cooperation in non-energy-related areas, in particular in the fields of education, health, transport, connectivity and tourism;
- enhance cooperation with regard to youth and student exchanges by strengthening existing and already successful programmes such as the ‘Young European Neighbours’ network and the ERASMUS+ programme;
- extend the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) to Azerbaijan.

Institutional provisions

- ensure that the agreement has a robust parliamentary dimension, strengthening the current provisions and mechanisms of cooperation;
- allow for regular and constructive dialogue between the European Parliament and the parliament of Azerbaijan and inform Parliament at all stages of the negotiations;
- ensure that the new agreement is not the subject of provisional application until after the European Parliament has given its consent.