EU-Azerbaijan relations

2021/2231(INI) - 15/03/2023 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 475 votes to 35, with 76 abstentions, a resolution on EU-Azerbaijan relations.

Parliament noted that for more than three decades and still ongoing, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan have resulted in the occupation of territories internationally recognised as belonging to the sovereign territory of Azerbaijan, tens of thousands of casualties, immense destruction, including of cultural and religious sites, and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people.

Deadly military confrontations between Azerbaijan and Armenia continue to erupt periodically. The ceasefire statement of 9 November 2020, introduced following the 44-day war waged by Azerbaijan in 2020, has not been fully implemented.

Conflict resolution and normalisation of Armenia-Azerbaijan relations

Members are convinced that sustainable peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan cannot be achieved through military means and the threat of use of force but requires a **comprehensive political settlement** in accordance with international law. They reaffirmed that, to be effective, a **comprehensive peace treaty** must include provisions that guarantee the integrity of Armenian sovereign territory, the rights and security of the Armenian population residing in Nagorno-Karabakh and other conflict-afflicted areas and the prompt and safe return of all refugees and internally displaced people to their homes.

The resolution welcomed the numerous steps undertaken by the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaderships to overcome their differences and achieve lasting and sustainable peace in the region and commended their sustained engagement in ongoing negotiations. Denouncing, in this regard, the behaviour of the Azerbaijani leadership in undermining these efforts, Members called on both parties not to lose momentum, to agree on concrete steps forward and to **ensure a safe, secure and prosperous environment** for the benefit of all ethnic populations in the region.

Parliament condemned the latest large-scale military aggression by Azerbaijan in September 2022 against multiple targets on the sovereign territory of Armenia as a serious violation of the ceasefire statement of November 2020. It called for the return of all forces to their original positions, condemned any attempt to undermine the peace process and called on all parties to the conflict to refrain from any further use of force.

Reaffirming that the **territorial integrity of Armenia and Azerbaijan** must be fully respected by all parties, the Parliament called on the Azerbaijani authorities to:

- ensure freedom and security of movement along the Lachin corridor as prescribed by the trilateral statement of 9 November 2020;

- ensure the safety and respect of the rights of all minorities in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, as this is an essential prerequisite for the creation of conditions conducive to post-war rehabilitation and genuine reconciliation.

Both Azerbaijan and Armenia are urged to:

- fully implement the tripartite ceasefire statement of 9 November 2020 in all its aspects;

- refrain from any hostile rhetoric or actions that may be perceived as inciting hatred or outright violence or as supporting impunity, or from actions that risk undermining efforts to establish and promote an atmosphere conducive to trust, reconciliation, cooperation and sustainable peace, including people-to-people contact;

- find a viable solution to link the Nakhchivan region with the rest of Azerbaijan;

- set up a transitional justice mechanism as a confidence-building step towards acknowledging the suffering on both sides and to work towards reconciliation based on a factual assessment of events that have occurred during the armed conflict, starting in 1988 ;

- draft a comprehensive and mutually acceptable peace treaty that should address the rights and security of the entire population of Nagorno-Karabakh, the return of internally displaced persons and refugees and the protection of cultural, religious and historical heritage.

Enhanced EU involvement

Parliament recalled that the EU's passive stance during and immediately after the 2020 war gave other regional actors, such as Russia, Iran and Turkey, the opportunity to continue exerting their influence in the region. It also recalled that more active European preventive diplomacy could have prevented such an outcome.

Members underlined the EU's readiness to be more actively involved in settling the region's protracted conflicts and expressed strong support for the initiative taken by President Charles Michel to convene and mediate bilateral meetings of the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan and encouraged the work on the ground of the EU's special representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia.

While welcoming the humanitarian assistance provided by the EU to the conflict-affected population in and around Nagorno-Karabakh, the Commission is called on to ensure additional funding and assistance for demining efforts. The Commission is also called on to increase EU assistance to people in need, including in Nagorno-Karabakh, facilitate the implementation of more ambitious confidence building measures, promote interreligious and interethnic dialogue, protect minority rights and enhance people-to-people contacts between citizens on both sides of the border in order to build the foundations for a sustainable and peaceful coexistence.

Human rights and fundamental freedoms

The report emphasised the need to make any further cooperation between the EU and Azerbaijan conditional on the country's **effective and tangible progress towards respect for international standards and international commitments**, in particular those related to democracy, human rights, the rule of law and fundamental freedoms, particularly freedom of expression and association, good governance, the rights of minorities, freedom of the media and gender equality.

Parliament called on Azerbaijan to **reform the judiciary** and the prosecution service to ensure the full independence of the judiciary. It regretted that Azerbaijan had made little progress in preventing and combating corruption.

Security and geopolitical challenges

Parliament is strongly concerned by the Declaration on Allied Interaction between Azerbaijan and Russia signed in February 2022 in Moscow. It noted furthermore, the lack of support from Azerbaijan for the

resolutions voted on in the UN General Assembly on Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and urges Azerbaijan to ensure that sanctions against Russia are not circumvented.

Lastly, recognising the strategic role played by Azerbaijan as a provider of fossil fuel energy to the EU, Parliament called on the Commission to support foreign investments from international partners aimed at increasing connectivity between the EU and Azerbaijan. The Commission is called on to guarantee that no gas imports from non-EU countries could be whitewashing Russian gas under European sanctions.