European Union policy towards the South Caucasus

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Per GAHRTON (Greens/EFA, S) on EU policy towards the South Caucasus. It was critical of the unambitious strategy which the Union had pursued vis-à-vis this region (a future neighbour of the enlarged EU), to the extent that the three countries in question - Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia - continued to be excluded from the EU's "Wider Europe - New Neighbourhood" initiative. MEPs called for the Union to pursue a more proactive approach to the peace and stabilisation processes in the region and to promoting democratisation and economic reform in South Caucasus. They stressed that the EU could play a constructive role in the region as a civil power, with experience in successfully employing economic incentives linked to political and diplomatic initiatives. The report added that in the coming decade the region would become increasingly important for energy supply to the EU, owing to its oil and gas reserves. MEPs welcomed the fact that Parliament's idea of appointing an EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus had been taken up by the Council, and called for him to be given the necessary resources to carry out his task effectively and visibly. They also wanted the Council to act on Parliament's proposal to develop a Stability Pact for the South Caucasus. The committee made a number of other recommendations to the Council, i.e.: - including the question of the three peace processes in South Caucasus and the future of the region in the development of the EU-Russia partnership. Moreover, Russia should respect its commitments on the reduction and withdrawal of the Russian military forces from the territory of Georgia; - taking full account of the need for the EU to provide further support for the rehabilitation of energy, transport and telecommunication networks and, possibly, to help finance the development of the energy supply system in the region (particularly in Armenia and Georgia); - taking full acount of the strategic importance of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline and urging the countries concerned to meet EU environmental impact assessment standards for this project. Moreover, special attention should be devoted to security and anti-terrorism measures when constructing this pipeline; - developing multi-presidency programmes for cooperation on justice and home affairs issues with the South Caucasus states, emphasising the fight against terrorism, organised crime, drug trafficking, small arms trading, kidnapping, and other criminal activities which have destabilising effects; - reminding the three South Caucasus Republics, especially Azerbaijan and Georgia which have concluded reciprocal Bilateral Immunity Agreements with the US, that support for the International Criminal Court is an important element of cooperation with the EU. Lastly, the report urged Turkey to be "fully committed to its candidate status" and to establish good-neighbourly relations with the South Caucasus countries, "with particular regard to the lifting of the trade restrictions and the gradual reopening of the land border with Armenia".