Relations between European Union and Russia

2003/2230(INI) - 26/02/2004 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Bastiaan BELDER (EDD, NL) on EU-Russia relations. (Please see the document dated 21/01/04). Parliament stated that Chechnya is not only an "internal affair" of Russia's, in that violations of human rights are self-evidently threats to international security, of a kind already felt in some neighbouring countries. Parliament stated that Russia has not undergone a transition of the kind envisaged when the international community, including the EU, formulated its basic response to developments there a decade ago. If instead, contrary to the common values on which the EU-Russia bilateral relationship is to be built, a "managed democracy" is being consolidated, if economic reforms remain relatively slow, at least as long as the extractive industries continue to prosper and if, in practice, pursuit of increased leverage on some neighbours is as important as the search for mutually beneficial co-operative solutions, then the EU must fully take these developments into account in its assessment of its Russian policy. Parliament recommended that the Council and the European Council structure the revised Russian policy around certain prescribed objectives. These include promoting human rights, democracy, independent media, civil society development, religious freedom, the rule of law and transparency, with special focus on urgently seeking an improvement in the situation in Chechnya. The Council should revive and further develop the two-track approach according to which the EU should actively pursue a change in Russia's policy in relation to Chechnya, while at the same time continuing cooperation with Russia in other areas. The launch of an inclusive, genuine peace and reconciliation process remains an urgent necessity. Parliament felt it important to prepare detailed proposals for alternative approaches to the conflict, taking into account important aspects of the conflict such as its deep historic roots, the lack of interest in ending it on the part of actors who under the current semi-anarchic conditions in the republic can conduct lucrative unofficial and criminal economic activities there, the sociological characteristics of Chechen society, the need for massive reconstruction efforts and the possibility of the EU contributing thereto if requirements for the aid to be effective can be met, the terrorism aspect and, indeed, legitimate Russian security concerns. Parliament also wanted co-operation in addressing the 'frozen conflicts' in the south Caucasus, contributing significantly to the solution of the Transnistria issue and controlling the international arms trade and promoting disarmament and non-proliferation. With regard to human rights, Parliament stated that it is aware that the privatisation process in the 1990s was carried out in a chaotic economic climate which gave rise to instances of dishonest and corrupt conduct. There are several possible ways of dealing with those actions that, despite the ill developed legal framework at the time, can be identified as illegal. It stressed, however, that respect for the principles of equality before the law and non-interference by political authorities in judicial proceedings, as well as respect for the rights of defendants, are fundamental for democratic states upholding the rule of law. These principles enshrined in the 1993 Russian Constitution form an integral part of the internationalobligations which the Russian Federation freely assumed when it ratified the European Convention on Human Rights in 1996, and it must therefore respect its obligations not only in word but also in deed.