European Union policy towards the South Caucasus

2003/2225(INI) - 26/02/2004 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Per GAHRTON (Greens/EFA, S) on EU policy towards the South Caucasus. (Please see the document dated 27/01/04.) Parliament recommended giving the South Caucasus region a defined status in the 'Wider Europe - New Neighbourhood' policy, in accordance with the principle of avoiding the creation of new dividing lines in Europe, to stimulate the countries in the region to advance in political and economic reforms, while at the same time confirming the EU's wish to increase its political and conflict resolution roles in the region. Parliament also felt that there should be certain initial minimum requirements for the South Caucasus countries to fulfil, in order to be included in the 'Wider Europe - New Neighbourhood' policies. Furthermore, all the countries in the region were asked not to block efforts to bring the three states closer together by demanding a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a precondition. The question of the three peace processes in South Caucasus and the future of the region should be included in the development of the EU-Russia partnership to create the necessary momentum to overcome the present deadlock and to engage Russia in a long-term policy of conflict management. The European Parliament rejected the recent statements by Russian President Putin and Foreign Minister Ivanov stating that Russia retains the option to make use of pre-emptive strikes on bordering countries in case of danger. The Russian Federation was urged to respect its commitments taken in 1999 OSCE Istanbul Summit on the reduction and withdrawal of the Russian military forces from the territory of Georgia and to take note that the free consent of the host country is mandatory for the presence of foreign military bases on its territory. Parliament went on to express its concern about the human rights situation and the independence of the media in Azerbaijan, and urged the Azerbaijani government to carry out a full investigation about the events which took place after the presidential elections of 15 October 2003. On the development of a Stability Pact for the South Caucasus, Parliament stated that the pact should include neighbouring states and other important actors in the region and territories with breakaway pretensions should be involved. In the framework of the Pact, it was necessary to promote economic cooperation in the areas of lowering trade barriers, development of energy, transport and communication networks, increased freedom of movement for persons, improved border management, measures against cross-border crime and cooperation on environmental issues. Parliament emphasized the importance of supporting the development and stability of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia and refraining from any involvement in conflicts based on the importance of oil in the region. Finally, Parliament stated the necessity of finding an overall solution to the refugee problem, which affects all of the states in the region. While refugee return should form part of negotiated settlements, refugees and displaced persons should not be exploited as tools in conflicts. Parliament insisted that under no circumstances should the displaced population be used as an argument for political aims and that durable solutions, including integration for those who wish to integrate, should beelaborated and implemented without delay in full co-operation with the international community.