European neighbourhood policy

2004/2166(INI) - 19/01/2006 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Charles **Tannock** (EPP-ED, UK) on the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

Towards European neighbourhood agreements: Parliament declared that the enlargement process must be accompanied by a flexible neighbourhood policy for those European countries which are not at present EU Member States and which cannot yet join, or do not wish to join, the EU but are nevertheless aligning themselves with the values of the EU and are minded to take part in the European project. It emphasised that the Nice Treaty was not an acceptable basis for further decisions on the accession of any more new Member States and therefore insisted that the necessary reforms be brought into force within the framework of the constitutional process. The ENP should be tailored to the needs of the individual countries to which it applied and should not be a 'one size fits all' policy. Parliament also emphasised the need to establish an effective monitoring mechanism and a readiness to restrict or suspend aid and even to cancel agreements with countries which violate standards of respect for human rights and democracy. It called on the Commission to operate a vigorous policy of support for democratic forces in those neighbouring states, in particular by ensuring access to independent media and information. The Commission should define the purpose and priorities of the European neighbourhood policy**,** thus setting criteria for the evaluation of achievements.

Parliament welcomed the idea of providing a European neighbourhood agreement at the end of the ENP process for those countries which are not applying for EU membership but which have come closer to the EU's body of law. It asked the Commission to develop specific policies to extend the ENP where feasible to Atlantic island countries neighbouring EU outermost regions adjacent to the European continent, where special questions of geographical proximity, cultural and historical affinity and mutual security may be relevant. Such a neighbourhood agreement could encourage step-by-step progress towards full access to the internal market and participation in the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), which will require appropriate financial and technical support from the EU. Close cooperation in the field of justice and home affairs must also be allowed.

Parliament supported the development of action plans with all countries covered by the neighbourhood policy and insisted that the development of human rights, democracy and the rule of law be regarded as a key priority in all national action plans. It proposed that the Commission publish monitoring reports at annual intervals, setting out an assessment of ENP progress in the individual countries concerned, in accordance with clearly defined criteria and standards, to serve as the basis for further steps on the path to a European Neighbourhood Agreement. The partner countries for their part must provide detailed information for the joint monitoring process.

Parliament went onto underline the crucial link between the EU's Russia strategy and the ENP. The success of that policy in some of the ENP states depends on the relations between the EU and Russia. It asked the Commission and the Council, therefore, to reformulate the Common Strategy on Russia in such a way as to entrench the same democratic, legal and human rights considerations as have been accepted under the ENP. The Russian government was encouraged to allow for greater flexibility in decision-making instruments for its regions neighbouring EU countries. This development was an important precondition for viable cross-border relationships.

Whilst the possibility of membership of the EU must remain the ultimate incentive for all European countries to follow the common European ideals and participate in the European integration process, the fact of non-membership should not be used as a stick or a whip to punish non-member countries.

Parliament emphasised that all bilateral relations and all existing multilateral organisations must be utilised in promoting our goals of European cooperation and integration.

Linking neighbouring countries with one another: It is the aim of the ENP not only to strengthen bilateral relations between the EU and the neighbourhood countries but also to bring about the development of regional integration between neighbouring countries. In this connection, consideration should be given to creating for the European neighbour states an instrument along the lines of the European Economic Area, covering not only participation in the single market but also political matters. Parliament expressed its concern at the serious delays in this area. It was vital for the Union, together with all neighbourhood policy partners, to undertake to activate all political and institutional instruments capable of supporting the development of the multilateral dimension.

On the Ukraine gas incident, Parliament stated that, whilst recognising the strong need for an eventual negotiated move to worldwide free-market rates for the prices enjoyed by Russia in its supply of oil and gas as well as the prices paid by Russia for transit rights through intermediary countries, it regretted the unilateral suspension by Russia of gas supplies to Ukraine on 1 January 2006. Parliament called on Russia not to use its market dominance as a political instrument in the conduct of its foreign policy.

Energy policy is an important aspect, since the EU is surrounded by the world's largest oil and natural gas reserves (Russia and the Caspian basin, the Middle East and North Africa), and many countries in the neighbourhood, such as Russia, Algeria, Egypt, Libya and Azerbaijan are suppliers or, as in the case of Ukraine, Belarus, Morocco, Tunisia, Georgia and Armenia, transit countries. An improvement in energy network links will benefit both the EU and its partner countries. The relations in the field of energy between the EU and neighbouring countries should be considered within the framework of a broader European energy policy, the aim of which would be to contribute to the diversity and security of energy supply of both the EU and its partner countries. Parliament asked the Commission to present a communication on the foreign and neighbourhood policy aspects of the energy policy.

Parliament went on to discuss the following matters as likely to improve links: stepping up trade and tourism between the EU and the partner countries; cooperation on the environment and in such key areas as water quality and water management, waste management, air pollution**,** flood management and combating desertification; and the problem of legal and illegal immigration should be tackled in the context of the neighbourhood policy.

Maghreb: Parliament called on the Commission to adopt an action plan for Algeria in the near future, so as to give fresh momentum to the Arab Maghreb Union. In addition, the EU must explain the Barcelona Process and the new ENP, so as to erase the image of a fearful Europe, more concerned with its own security and combating immigration than with the sustainable development that is both expected and necessary.

Middle East and Mashreq: Parliament welcomed the elections in the Palestinian Authority in January 2005, and welcomed Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza strip and the northern part of the West Bank. It stated that Syria must cooperate without any further delay in the international fight against terrorism and the international investigation into the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. Parliament welcomed the withdrawal of the Syrian army from Lebanon, and the holding of legislative elections in Lebanon in June 2005, but expressed its deep concern at the recent attacks on journalists and publishers and called for the full implementation of UNSCR 1559(2004) including the disarmament of Hezbollah. On Egypt, Parliament expressed its deep concern about the conviction of Ayman Nour.

Eastern Europe: Parliament recognised Ukraine's and Moldova’s European aspirations and called for a long-term European perspective to be established. It expressed concern at the present developments in Belarus, which is a dictatorial regime in which opposition activities of any kind are suppressed. Support

for the civil-society activities of non-governmental organisations and of the opposition must be increased. The question of Belarus must be raised with Russia, pointing out that the democratisation of that country is in the interests of both the EU and Russia.

Southern Caucasus: Parliament welcomed the fact that the European Council has, at the insistence of the European Parliament, included the countries of the Caucasus in the neighbourhood policy. It referred to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, calling on both parties to refrain from unilateral actions and aggressive statements and to work for settlement of the conflict in a constructive dialogue with all the forces concerned.

Finally, Parliament proposed an EU stability pact for southern Caucasus – including a parliamentary and civil-society dimension modelled on the EU stability pact for south-eastern Europe – involving the EU (with the participation of Turkey as an accession candidate), Russia, the United States and the United Nations (the Quartet). Such a stability pact is likely to help settle the regional conflicts through a dialogue between all the parties concerned.