

P5_TA(2002)0085

EU relations with South Caucasus

European Parliament resolution on the communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the European Union's relations with the South Caucasus, under the partnership and cooperation agreements (COM(1999) 272 – C5-0116/1999 – 1999/2119(COS))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission communication (COM(1999) 272 – C5-0116/1999),
- having regard to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Armenia, of the other part¹; the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and Georgia, of the other part²; the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Azerbaijan, of the other part³;
- having regard to the Joint declaration of the European Union and the Republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, adopted in Luxembourg on 22 June 1999,
- having regard to the Council conclusions on South Caucasus of 27 February 2001 and subsequent statements in which the EU has declared its intention to reinforce its policy towards the South Caucasus,
- having regard to the Joint Communiqué issued after the meeting between the EU Troika and the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in Luxembourg on 29 October 2001,
- having regard to the European Union Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts, endorsed by the Göteborg European Council,
- having regard to the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, which is the only regional cooperation that includes the three countries of Southern Caucasus among its eleven member countries of the region,
- having regard to the recommendations adopted by the EU - Armenia, EU - Azerbaijan and EU - Georgia Parliamentary Cooperation Committees,
- having regard to its resolution of 13 December 2000 on the implementation of the common strategy of the European Union on Russia⁴, and in particular paragraph 41 thereof,

¹ OJ L 239, 9.9.1999, p. 3.

² OJ L 205, 4.8.1999, p. 3.

³ OJ L 246, 17.9.1999, p. 3.

⁴ OJ C 232, 17.8.2001, p. 176.

- having regard to its resolution of 13 December 2001 on the Commission communication on conflict prevention (COM(2001) 211 - C5-0458/2001 - 2001/2182(COS))¹,
 - having regard to its previous resolutions on developments in the South Caucasus,
 - having regard to Rule 47(1) of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy (A5-0028/2002),
- A. whereas the humanitarian, political and security situation in the entire Caucasus region, and particularly in the Chechen republic of Ichkeriya, calls for increased engagement by the EU, in terms of political strategy and planning, in cooperation with other actors at international level, including the United Nations and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe,
 - B. whereas, owing to their geographical position and their history, culture and traditions, these countries constitute a strategically important region for the EU in terms of its common foreign and security policy as well as a genuine gateway to Central Asia,
 - C. whereas several armed conflicts have shaken the South Caucasus region, in particular the conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh and in Abkhazia, since the fall of the Soviet Union and these have led to flights of refugees and created break-away regions and territories, where serious crises are looming,
 - D. whereas only limited progress has been achieved in attempts to resolve the conflicts; whereas despite very promising results during the Armenia-Azerbaijan negotiations at Key West in April 2001, the follow-up talks planned for June 2001 in Geneva did not take place; whereas President Shevardnadze of Georgia has nominated a new negotiator for Abkhazia who seems to meet with approval in Georgia, Abkhazia and Russia; whereas the risk of full-scale war involving the whole region still must be taken seriously,
 - E. whereas comprehensive international involvement is necessary in efforts to resolve conflicts and stabilise the region, both because outside powers de facto play important roles, which must be brought fully in line with these objectives, and because of the scale and type of the resources that need to be mobilised,
 - F. whereas mutual confidence is essential in this region as a primary basis for further cooperation and stabilisation,
 - G. whereas the peaceful resolution of all conflicts in the region is a precondition for the development of an effective framework for regional geopolitical stability, cooperation, the consolidation of democratic state structures and sustainable economic development,
 - H. whereas the extraction and transport of energy resources in and close to the region is the major geopolitical factor and must be organised in a way that benefits peaceful relations and cooperation between all states concerned; whereas it should also be ensured that the

¹ Texts Adopted, Item 15.

potential of these activities to foster a general economic upturn is harnessed and that this will serve the populations in their entirety,

- I. whereas the EU should continue to play as much as possible an effective and constructive role in these regards, through its political dialogue with all relevant states, as a commercial partner and also as a provider of assistance, which since independence amounts to grant-based aid of EUR 286.13 million to Armenia, 333.9 million to Azerbaijan and 301.28 million to Georgia,
- J. concerned at the increase in the level of corruption in all the countries of the South Caucasus, a liability which weighs very heavily on their political and economic future,
- K. whereas considerable improvements are needed for the proper functioning of the democratic process in the states of the Southern Caucasus and for implementing European standards of governance, universal standards in respecting human rights and civilised norms in promoting a free and independent media, components of civic society which, ten years after independence from the Soviet Union, fall short of what is required of states which are members of the Council of Europe,
- L. whereas, in addition to these reasons for the EU to conduct an active policy, the need to address 'soft security' problems, such as the smuggling of arms and drugs, money laundering and trafficking of human beings and environmental hazards, like the Medzamor nuclear power plant situated in an earthquake region in Armenia, should also be seen as an important motive,
- M. whereas the countries of South Caucasus have repeatedly expressed their wish for a much more active EU role in the region and there should be a response to their desire to become more deeply integrated in Europe,
- N. whereas it is precisely the countries of the South Caucasus that could assume a key role as a bridge between Asia and Europe at the extreme edge of Europe after enlargement of the European Union,
- O. whereas the EU is well placed to take the lead in formulating a comprehensive approach towards the region as well as serving as a mediator, but only the countries of the South Caucasus themselves can take the courageous and decisive steps necessary to secure for themselves a brighter future,
- P. whereas the approach to the complex web of conflicts and tensions in South Caucasus must comprise restabilisation of the entire region, given that the North Caucasus is a dangerous region of crisis and conflict in Russia and is for the time being largely inaccessible to international political involvement (i.e. OSCE, UN, EU); this being so, the EU should definitely promote and provide financial support for North-South and East-West regional cooperation efforts,
- 1. Calls on the Council to work on a comprehensive and long-term Common Strategy for the countries of the South Caucasus and to implement it as swiftly as possible, and on the Commission to start preparing a proposal;

2. Considers that this Common Strategy should be clearly focused, in line with the Council's conclusions on the Common Strategy instrument of 27 February 2000, notably on prevention of violent conflicts and the promotion of a framework for security and cooperation, both between the three countries of the region and between them and neighbouring countries;
3. Considers that this framework could draw lessons from the experience of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe and that it should facilitate the reestablishment of cross-border contacts between individuals, organisations, institutions and enterprises and enhance respect for the rights of minorities;
4. Takes the view that this Stability Pact absolutely must be accompanied by specific measures to combat the illegal transfer of small arms and handguns and that the EU should develop and provide financial backing for initiatives and programmes to this end;
5. Proposes a Conference of the three states of the Southern Caucasus and the European Union in order to draw up a strategy for regional cooperation which promotes peace, human rights, democracy, social and cultural development, economic growth and cooperation on shared environmental problems;
6. Believes, in this respect, that the Regional Environmental Center for the Caucasus, of which the EU is one of the founders, together with the governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, is a good example of effective regional cooperation and urges, therefore, the Commission to use a fgreater number of economic instruments in environmental protection in order to improve governance and contribute to fighting corruption;
7. Reiterates to the Council its call for consideration of the possibility of appointing a EU Special Envoy for the South Caucasus who would operate on behalf of the Council and Commission so as to increase the effectiveness of the EU's action in the region and contribute to the peaceful solution of ongoing conflicts, in collaboration with the UN and OSCE;
8. Believes that approaches to certain territorial disputes that seek to bridge the conflict-provoking polarisation between sovereignty and non-sovereignty should be encouraged;
9. Calls on the Council and the Commission to fully implement the EU programme for the prevention of violent conflicts in relation to South Caucasus; considers that the civilian peace corps in the framework of the Commission's rapid reaction mechanism recommended by Parliament could help build confidence between different ethnic groups;
10. Urges, in this regard, the Commission to set up within the TACIS framework ad-hoc twinning programmes between EU regions with special autonomy status and regions in South Caucasus with minority problems so as to exchange experiences on the protection of minority rights and the development and implementation of different degrees of autonomy in local and regional administrations;
11. Notes that the EU has declared itself ready to enhance its contribution to conflict prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation, in the light, in particular, of the

abovementioned joint communiqué; reminds the Commission and the Council of the necessity to ensure that they have adequate resources available for this;

12. Calls on the Commission and Council to increase their contribution to strengthening civil society and democracy in the South Caucasus; calls in particular for the EU to support bridge-building projects involving civil society in the South Caucasus republics and in neighbouring Russia, Iran and Turkey;
13. Recommends the Council to focus its political dialogue with the countries of South Caucasus on conflict resolution, the refugee question, regional cooperation, reconstruction, human rights, democracy and environment; calls for caution as regards the provision of advice on economic issues, bearing in mind the experience of privatisation in central and eastern Europe and its socio-economic consequences;
14. Proposes that the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCA) with these countries be brought into line with each other in order to create a coordinated approach on the part of the EU on advisory and technical services and economic and administrative support; such alignment could lead to an institutional structure for coordination in the South Caucasus;
15. Welcomes the recent inclusion of Turkey among the routes planned under the TRACECA programme, which will allow the European Union to contribute to improving the infrastructures between Anatolia and the Caucasus through Armenia, once the border is opened;
16. Reiterates its demand that Commission Delegations be opened in Armenia and Azerbaijan;
17. Reminds Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia of the obligations they have accepted by acceding to the Council of Europe and calls on them to respect these obligations, in particular in the area of human rights, including freedom of the media, religious freedom and respect for private life;
18. Reminds Armenia and Azerbaijan of their undertaking, made in the same context, to step up their efforts to find a solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and related issues with the mediation of the Minsk Group; calls for the constructive engagement of the authorities in Stepankert in the peace process, and for them to refrain from all measures that might prejudice a future solution; calls upon Armenia to refrain from all measures in the occupied Azeri territories that might be interpreted as aiming to make Armenian control permanent;
19. Calls on the neighbouring countries Russia, Iran and Turkey to contribute constructively to the peaceful development of the South Caucasus Region; in this respect especially calls upon Russia to fulfil commitments to downgrade its military presence and calls upon Turkey to take appropriate steps in accordance with its European ambitions, especially concerning the termination of the blockade against Armenia; reiterates in this respect the position in its resolution of 18 June 1987 on the political solution to the Armenian question¹ recognising the Armenian genocide of 1915-1917 and calls upon Turkey to create a basis for reconciliation;

¹ OJ C 190, 20.7.1987, p. 119.

20. Points to the continuing and devastating influence that corruption and major weaknesses in the rule of law have on political stability as well as on social and economic development prospects, including the capacity to attract foreign investment; however, recognises the different degrees of these problems in the three countries;
21. Underlines the importance of the existing European endeavour to reform and improve economic and political structures in the Southern Caucasus and asks that priority be given to support in the field of internal security, establishment of the rule of law and border control;
22. Underlines that safeguarding the freedom of the media and allowing civil society to develop freely are not only necessary in order to respect democratic rights, but are also of vital importance for successful development of society in other regards;
23. Encourages initiatives for regional cooperation, especially the Black Sea Economic Cooperation; calls on the Commission to study possibilities of facilitating entry into the EU market of products from the region, drawing inspiration from the asymmetric trade preferences given to the countries of the Western Balkans;
24. Calls for a conference on investment and economic development in the Southern Caucasus by European institutions engaged in the region and in cooperation with banks and firms in the European Union with special emphasis on energy;
25. Urges the Armenian government to stop defying EU demands to close down the Medzamor nuclear power station by 2004 as agreed by Armenian authorities when it was re-opened seven years ago and welcomes the EU promise to grant Armenia a credit of EUR 100 million to develop its energy sector;
26. Calls on the Commission and Member States to elaborate proposals on increased cooperation in the cultural area and in education and science with the aim of halting the continuing brain drain and promoting citizenship based on tolerance;
27. Warmly appreciates and supports the aspiration of the countries of the region to belong to Europe and to cooperate closely in the economic, political and other fields with European institutions and organisations, including the European Union;
28. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the governments of the Member States, the governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, the governments of Russia, Turkey and the other member states of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Zone and the governments of Iran and the USA.