

EU-Armenia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee

NINETH MEETING

29 - 30 January 2007

Brussels

Final Statement and Recommendations

pursuant to Article 89 of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement

Under the co-chairmanship of Mrs Marie Anne ISLER BEGUIN (Greens/EFA, France) and Mr Armen RUSTAMYAN (Armenian Revolutionary Federation), the ninth meeting of the EU-Armenia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee was held in Brussels on 29-30 January 2007. The Committee exchanged views with Mr Armen BAIBOURTIAN, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, representing the Government of the Republic of Armenia, Dr Manfred DEGEN, Counsellor in the German Representation to the European Union in Brussels, representing the German Presidency-in-Office of the Council of the European Union, and Mr Victor Andrés MALDONADO, Head of Unit DG RELEX E3, representing the European Commission.

The Parliamentary Cooperation Committee

1. welcomes the ongoing efforts of all political parties taking part in the forthcoming parliamentary elections in Armenia in May 2007 to ensure that the elections will be free and fair, and in line with international standards; acknowledges the importance of the electoral process in state-building through continued democratic reforms, consolidation of the civil society and the political system;
2. believes that a genuine and vibrant opposition, capable of holding the government to account, is essential in a modern democracy;
3. welcomes the amendments to the Armenian Electoral Law adopted by the Armenian Parliament in December 2006, which will bring more transparency to the electoral process, with accurate voter lists, and vote counting; appeals to the authorities to implement the newly-adopted provisions of the law and show respect for all those involved in the electoral race;
4. calls on Armenia to fully adopt and implement the measures demanded by the Council of Europe as regards constitutional changes; expresses satisfaction with the newly-adopted legislation which gives Armenian citizens direct access to the Constitutional Court;
5. in line with Armenia's strong European vocation and its commitment to become more fully integrated into the European structures through shared values and a common vision, stresses that the holding of free and fair elections will be an important step in that direction and will strengthen Armenia's involvement in the ENP;
6. welcomes the European aspirations expressed by Armenia and considers the European Neighbourhood Policy as an important instrument in fostering EU-Armenia political, economic and trade relations, and calls on the European Commission to assist Armenia in achieving the objectives of the ENP₁Action Plan;

7. welcomes the adoption on 14 November 2006 of the ENP Action Plan; calls upon the European Commission and Armenian authorities to focus on the priority areas and the need to raise public awareness of the EU, including the setting up of a European Information Centre in Yerevan;
8. stresses that proper implementation of the ENP Action Plan will reinforce the EU-Armenia political dialogue;

Nagorno Karabakh

9. continues to support the efforts made by the Minsk Group in finding a viable negotiating formula acceptable to the main parties involved in the conflict;
10. recalls the positions of the European Parliament and the Armenian Parliament as expressed in previous joint statements; reiterates its full support for the peaceful settlement and fair resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict in accordance with the principles of international law, which include the right to self-determination and respect for minority rights;
11. regrets, once again, that no agreement to the conflict over Nagorno Karabakh has been reached so far during the various meetings between the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan; urges the highest authorities in the two countries to do their utmost with a view to reaching an agreement as soon as possible;
12. stresses that reconciliation between the Armenian and Azerbaijani peoples is essential for regional prosperity and stability; calls for their constructive cooperation based on goodwill, progressive thinking, and the opportunities offered by the ENP, and to resume trading by lifting existing barriers;
13. reiterates its strong support for the involvement of the EU Special Representative in working out a viable solution to the conflict;
14. stresses with regret that efforts by the international community to bring the three countries of the South Caucasus closer together are hampered by the persistent conflicts; supports regional cooperation initiatives in the Southern Caucasus, e.g. environment, water management, energy, education, border management, transport and transport communication, as well as in the parliamentary sphere;
15. shares the view that the resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict must include an agreement on the status of Nagorno Karabakh; the authorities representing the parties involved should ensure proper conditions for the safe return of refugees to their homes; the people of Nagorno Karabakh should be involved in the negotiations to resolve the conflict; further consolidation of democracy and progress on good governance in Nagorno Karabakh will contribute towards a peaceful solution to the conflict;

Cultural heritage

16. takes note of the European Parliament's resolution of 16 February 2006 on cultural heritage, stating that "the destruction or desecration of any monuments or objects of cultural, religious or national heritage infringes on the principles of the EU"; expresses its concern about the destruction of the Djulfa cemetery; regrets that the planned ad

hoc EP fact-finding mission has not yet taken place;

Relations with Turkey

17. recalls the European Parliament's position on relations between Armenia and Turkey as reflected in its resolutions on Turkey's progress towards accession; urges both the Turkish and Armenian governments to continue the process of reconciliation; urges Turkey to be fully committed to its candidate status and to take the necessary steps without any preconditions to establish diplomatic and good-neighbourly relations with Armenia, in accordance with the resolutions adopted by the European Parliament between 1987 and 2005, and to open the land border at an early date, also enabling the re-opening of the Kars-Gyumri railway;
18. supports the strengthening of regional cooperation using the existing infrastructures and communication possibilities;

Respect for human rights and the rule of law

19. stresses the importance of the implementation of existing legal and institutional reforms in the field of human rights and the rule of law;
20. strongly condemns the assassination of Hrant Dink who was a journalist and public figure of Armenian origin and an advocate of freedom of expression in Turkey; he was a strong supporter of the establishment of a fully-fledged democracy in Turkey through the EU accession process and the opening of the Armenian-Turkish border, as well as the recognition of the Armenian Genocide; calls on the Turkish authorities to continue investigating this crime and to bring the perpetrators to justice, preventing the repetition of these kinds of acts in the future;
21. welcomes the measures already taken by the Armenian authorities to combat corruption; underlines that corruption remains a serious problem and that further efforts in the fight against corruption are needed; urges the Armenian authorities to produce an effective and functioning anti-corruption strategy;
22. draws the attention of the Armenian authorities to the vital role played by a free and independent media as a precondition for the development of democracy; however, stresses that the full independence of the media can only be achieved by guaranteeing freedom of expression and a clearly defined legal framework; urges the Armenian authorities therefore to investigate seriously all the cases of harassment of journalists; takes the view that representatives of the government as well as the opposition must have balanced and equal access to the media;
23. underlines that the civil society is an essential element of a fully-functioning democracy; calls on the Armenian authorities to support the NGOs, as a pillar of the development of the civil society, and that the role of the Ombudsman must be entirely independent;
24. reiterates, once again, its call on Armenia to initiate its accession to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court;
25. is concerned at the manner in which property rights have been waived;

EU-Armenia relations

26. stresses that the proper implementation of the ENP Action Plan can reinforce the ongoing political dialogue between the EU and Armenia;
27. underlines again the importance of the full implementation of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement which remains the cornerstone and legal basis of the EU-Armenia relationship; commends the adoption of the National Programme for the PCA implementation;
28. calls on the European Commission to ensure that there will be a significant increase and reallocation in funding for the European Neighbourhood Policy, which is compatible with the future Financial Perspectives as decided by the European Parliament, now that the newly established European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) has replaced the TACIS programme;
29. strongly reiterates its call on the European Commission to open a full Delegation in Yerevan, which will help increase the effectiveness of EU's activities in Armenia;
30. expresses its support for the EU's attractive offer to enhance broad cooperation with its neighbours, including intensifying cooperation within specific sectors by concluding sectoral agreements. In this regard, is in favour of continuing the scientific cooperation with Armenia under the EU Seventh Framework Programme, and underlines the importance of promoting people-to-people contacts between the EU and Armenia, including the facilitation of visa procedures for students, scientists and young people, as well as entrepreneurs;
31. calls on the European Commission to undertake a feasibility study for the possible establishment of a free trade agreement between the EU and Armenia which will also look at regional trade and economic integration aspects;

Economic policies

32. welcomes the improvements to the tax administration and tax and customs reforms that are helping to realize the country's Poverty Reduction Strategy;
33. is concerned that Armenia's trade deficit has reached US\$ 1 billion;
34. notes that maintaining prudent macroeconomic policies will support effective implementation of the ENP's Action Plan for Armenia for the sustainable development of the country;
35. draws attention to the fact that the lack of job opportunities and low wages have led to large-scale emigration. In this regard, expresses its hopes that the ENP's Action Plan for Armenia will focus on cooperation projects to improve the economic situation and will reduce this emigration flow and help realize Armenia's tourism potential;
36. welcomes the Armenian government's economic policy priorities aiming to further improve the investment climate and raise Armenia's attractiveness to foreign investors; believes that social and environmental aspects are also contributing factors;
37. recalls that the problem of corruption is considered to be one of the main obstacles to

the economic and social development of Armenia; calls on the Armenian government to enhance its fight against this scourge, as initiated in 2003 with the National Anti-corruption Strategy, and to implement further the 24 recommendations made by the Council of Europe's Group of States Against Corruption, in its evaluation report on Armenia, adopted on 10 March 2006;

Energy security

38. referring to the recent energy supply difficulties in Armenia, that highlighted Armenia's dependence on gas imports from the Russian Federation, takes note of the need to diversify the country's energy sources; in this context, notes the ongoing construction of the Iran-Armenia gas pipeline and hopes that this project will help Armenia diversify its energy supplies; in this regard also stresses that the project, as well as any other similar efforts, should comply with international environmental standards and that alternative sources should be sought and developed including renewable sources; regrets nevertheless the absence of a common approach by the three countries of the South Caucasus in solving the energy supply problems in the region;
39. reiterates the need to implement a comprehensive energy strategy, which would increasingly converge with EU energy objectives. The strategy should aim at the development and modernization of the energy sector and the development of modern energy efficient technologies as well as energy sector reform, including the question of the Medzamor nuclear power plant;

Protection of the environment and health

40. welcomes the initiative taken by the Armenian Ministry of the Environment to establish a "pollution fee system" in which taxes are levied on air and water emissions and solid waste disposal; their resulting revenues are used for environmental protection activities; supports the environmental projects to preserve water quality and the biodiversity of Lake Sevan, which may be endangered by a high level of pollution;
41. commends Armenia's contribution to the work of the Regional Environment Centre (REC) and its projects as an essential step towards constructive cooperation between Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in the environmental field, bringing positive benefits for all the people in the region; calls on the three South Caucasus countries to pursue their full involvement in the discussions on the Charter in order to improve and accelerate the valuable work of the REC;
42. stresses that, for Armenia to reach its millennium development goal by 2015, the maternal mortality rate has to fall a further 61%; notes the good results already achieved after the introduction of emergency obstetric care.

Adopted unanimously.