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on an EU Strategy for the South Caucasus
(2009/2216(INI))

Committee on Foreign Affairs

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on an EU Strategy for the South Caucasus (2009/2216(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on the South Caucasus, including its resolution of 15 November 2007 on strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)¹ and its resolutions of 17 January 2008 on a more effective EU policy for the South Caucasus² and on a Black Sea Regional Policy Approach³,
 - having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council of 3 December 2008 entitled ‘Eastern Partnership’ (COM(2008)0823),
 - having regard to the Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit of 7 May 2009,
 - having regard to the ENP Action Plans adopted with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia and to the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), closely linked to the implementation of the ENP Action Plans,
 - having regard to the ENP Progress Reports on Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia adopted by the Commission on 23 April 2009,
 - having regard to the Country Strategy Papers 2007-2013 and the National Indicative Programmes under ENPI agreed upon with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia,
 - having regard to the Mid-Term Review of the ENPI Programming Documents for Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia,
 - having regard to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements concluded with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia,
 - having regard to the relevant monitoring reports of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE),
 - having regard to the report of the International Fact-Finding Commission on the Conflict in Georgia published on 30 September 2009 (the Tagliavini Report),
 - having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A7-0000/2010),
- A. whereas at the Foreign Affairs Council held on 8 December 2009 the EU reaffirmed its intention to promote stability, cooperation, prosperity and good governance throughout

¹ OJ C 282E, 6.11.2008, p.443.

² OJ C 41E, 19.2.2009, p.53.

³ OJ C 41E, 19.2.2009, p.64.

the South Caucasus, including through technical assistance programmes,

- B. whereas as a result of the August 2008 war in Georgia, of the EU's successful intervention to achieve a Ceasefire Agreement and of the great need for further engagement that followed from these developments, the EU became a significant security actor in the region, through the deployment of the EU Monitoring Mission, the launch of a major post-war assistance programme and the start of a fact-finding mission on the causes and course of the war,
- C. whereas 2009 has seen intensification of Nagorno-Karabakh peace talks mediated by the Co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group,
- D. whereas Armenia and Turkey's signing in October 2009 of protocols on the establishment of diplomatic relations and on the opening of their shared border and cooperation was a promising step, but ratification has not yet followed,
- E. whereas guaranteeing peace, security and stability in the region is essential for the improvement of the standard of living, for the achievement of democratic standards and respect for human rights for all, and to maximise regional and macro-regional development opportunities,
- F. whereas the Eastern Partnership creates new possibilities for deepening bilateral relations and also introduces multilateral cooperation,
- G. whereas the Eastern Partnership aims at accelerating reforms, legal approximation and economic integration, is based on conditionality, differentiation and joint ownership and envisages the negotiation of new Association Agreements, which will require the assent of the European Parliament,
- H. whereas the challenges for the EU in the South Caucasus and its engagement in this region are such that a mainly reactive and impromptu policy has become a non-option and whereas the launch of the Eastern Partnership and the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty provide a good opportunity to devise an EU strategy,
 - 1. Considers that the EU needs to play a more active political role and develop a strategy to assist the transformation of the South Caucasus into a region of sustainable peace, stability and prosperity and to use fully its potential to contribute to the peaceful solution of the conflicts in the region by combining its soft power with a firm approach;

Security issues and peaceful resolution of conflicts

- 2. Emphasises that for each of the conflicts in the region, the status quo is unacceptable and unsustainable;
- 3. Notes that conflict management and conflict resolution necessitate inter alia the recognition of the rights and legitimate interests of all relevant parties and communities, openness to review perceptions of past events, serious willingness to overcome hatred and fear, preparedness to give up maximalist ambitions, interest in innovative approaches, including to the exercise of sovereignty, and readiness to make real concessions;

4. Points to the importance of conflict prevention, including through respect for the rights of all national minorities, religious tolerance and efforts to strengthen social and economic cohesion;
5. Stresses the responsibility of external actors to use their power and influence in ways that are fully consistent with international law, including human rights law; believes that reduction of the competition between external actors in the region should be pursued, but cannot come at the price of effectively accepting any actor's claim to have 'privileged interests'; is of the opinion that introducing conditions for respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the South Caucasus states is unacceptable;

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

6. Fully supports the Minsk Group Co-chairs' mediation, the Madrid Principles and the Moscow Declaration; condemns the idea of a military solution and calls on both sides to avoid militant rhetoric; furthermore calls on both sides to show more ambition in the peace talks and to abandon the tendency to prefer perpetuating the status quo created through military conquests in defiance of UN Security Council resolutions; calls on the international community likewise to show courage and political will to overcome the remaining sticking points which hinder an agreement;
7. Recalls that hundreds of thousands of persons who fled their homes during or in connection with the Nagorno-Karabakh war remain displaced and denied their right to return; calls on all parties to unambiguously and unconditionally recognise this right and the need for its prompt realisation; calls on the Armenian and Azerbaijani authorities and leaders of relevant communities to demonstrate their commitment to the creation of peaceful inter-ethnic relations through practical preparations for the return of displaced persons and other means; considers that the situation of the IDPs should be dealt with according to international standards, having regard inter alia to the recent PACE Recommendation 1877(2009), 'Europe's forgotten people: protecting the human rights of long-term displaced persons';
8. Notes that interim status for Nagorno-Karabakh could imply interim legitimisation of the de facto authorities there; believes that inter alia in order to raise their credibility with a view to such a prospect, these authorities should rapidly abandon the positions that Nagorno-Karabakh includes all Armenian-occupied Azerbaijani lands and that displaced persons' right of return cannot even be discussed at the present stage; calls on the Government of Armenia to exercise its influence in this respect and on the Council and Commission to join this call;
9. Stresses that security for all is an indispensable element of any settlement; recognises the importance of robust peace-keeping arrangements;

The Armenia-Turkey rapprochement

10. Welcomes the protocols on the establishment of diplomatic relations, border opening and cooperation; calls on both sides to seize this opportunity to mend their relations through ratification and implementation; does not support the introduction of conditions for ratification not mentioned in the protocols, but notes that if implemented, they will have

wide-ranging, potentially overall very positive consequences in the region and that they can therefore not be seen in isolation; calls on Armenia, as well as Azerbaijan, to intensify their efforts in the Minsk Co-chairs-led talks on the principles for a settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict;

The conflicts in Georgia

11. Welcomes the Tagliavini Report and supports its main conclusions; supports the EU Monitoring Mission mandate and its implementation of the part which is not blocked by Russia and the de facto authorities of the breakaway regions;
12. Is seriously concerned about the use of ethnic cleansing as a prelude to the Russian recognition of South Ossetian and Abkhazian statehood; notes with satisfaction that the international community remains united in its rejection of the unilateral declaration of independence; calls on Russia to honour its commitment in the Ceasefire Agreement to withdraw its troops to the positions held before the outbreak of the August 2008 war and to cease its blocking of EUMM access to South Ossetia and Abkhazia;
13. Stresses the importance of protecting the safety and rights of the ethnic Georgians still living within the breakaway regions, promoting respect for displaced persons' right of return under safe and dignified conditions, achieving a reduction in the Iron-Curtain character of the de facto borders and obtaining possibilities for the EU and other international actors to assist people within the two regions; underlines the need for more clearly identified short- and medium-term objectives in this respect;

Progress on the way to democratisation and respect for human rights and the rule of law

14. Considers democratisation, good governance and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rights of minorities and the rule of law to be basic principles for and of peaceful and stable democratic states;
15. Highlights the importance of engaging in democratic reforms and the essential role of political dialogue and cooperation as the key to developing national consensus; welcomes the adoption of significant legislation related to the judiciary in Armenia and calls on the authorities to ensure the effective implementation thereof; welcomes the progress in Azerbaijan in the field of reform of the judiciary and calls on the authorities to work on the independence of judges; welcomes the announcement by the Georgian President regarding a 'new wave of democratic reforms', calls for such reforms to be effectively adopted and implemented, such as strengthening parliamentary control over the executive and increasing independence of the judiciary, and considers that democratic reforms need to be pursued and democratic institutions consolidated;
16. Points to the still widespread corruption in the region and calls on the authorities to step up the measures to fight it, as it threatens the economic growth and social and economic development of the countries concerned;
17. Underscores the importance of free and fair elections to be held in accordance with international commitments and standards; notes that the last presidential elections held in Armenia in February 2008 were once again violent and that repercussions of the internal

crisis in their aftermath are still being felt; takes note of the municipal elections held in a peaceful manner in Azerbaijan on 23 December 2009 and awaits the report of the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities observation delegation thereon; calls on the Georgian authorities to ensure that the local elections scheduled for 30 May 2010 take place in accordance with international standards and that the electoral law is amended accordingly, and reaffirms that securing direct election of mayors is crucial; confirms its and the EU's position that elections and referenda in breakaway regions are illegitimate; defends the political rights of displaced persons;

18. Considers freedom of expression to be a fundamental right and principle and the role of the media essential, is disturbed by the limitations on freedom of expression and the lack of media pluralism in the countries of the South Caucasus and calls on the authorities to ensure both; is preoccupied about attacks on journalists in Armenia and in particular about the continued detention of opposition journalist Nikol Pashinian, despite the welcomed amnesty of 18 June 2009 leading to the release of a number of imprisoned opposition activists; is concerned about the deterioration of the media climate in Azerbaijan with cases of harassment and intimidation of media professionals and deplores the detention and sentencing of the two youth activists and bloggers, Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade; accordingly calls for their release following the appeal procedure in accordance with international standards and with respect for the principles of a fair trial as set out in Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights;
19. Takes the view that freedom of assembly must be guaranteed, as it is instrumental to the development of a vibrant civil society; is worried about the difficulties, direct and indirect, which civil society faces in organising itself and disturbed by the adoption of laws and practices that might indirectly limit freedom of assembly, including through administrative harassment, such as the intensified checks by the fiscal authorities in Armenia; is concerned about the lack of any serious investigation into the events following the presidential elections of February 2008 when 10 people were killed and which led to the imposition of a state of emergency and restriction of a number of freedoms and rights; calls on the authorities in Azerbaijan, including the local authorities, to implement in a non-restrictive manner the legislation on freedom of assembly which, as amended, meets most international standards; is concerned that in Georgia the 2009 amendments to the Law on Assembly and Manifestations may limit freedom of assembly and curtail the ability of the opposition to mobilise; underlines the important role of civil society for the peace and reconciliation processes in the region;
20. Calls on the countries in the region to participate actively in the work of the EU-European Neighbourhood Parliamentary Assembly (EURONEST) and use the possibilities it affords for multilateral and bilateral exchanges of views; in this regard notes that the intensified dialogue between the members of parliament of the countries in the region is crucial;

Economic issues and social development

21. Holds the view that broader cooperation on a regional level and with the EU in sectors such as the economy, transport, energy and environment is essential for the optimal development of the sectors themselves and for ensuring stability in the region, but that cooperation should also embrace the building of human capital in the whole region as a

long-term investment; welcomes the fact that all three countries benefit from the EU's GSP and takes note that all of them qualify for the GSP+ for sustainable development and good governance; notes that regional cooperation in the judicial and police fields and the establishment of integrated border management are essential for further promoting mobility in the region and with the EU;

22. Underscores the importance of building a favourable business climate and the development of the private sector; commends Azerbaijan on its noteworthy economic growth and the reform process, which makes the economy more attractive to foreign investors, and hopes that Azerbaijan will continue and eventually complete its negotiations on accession to the WTO; welcomes the progress in implementing market-economy reforms aiming at liberalisation of the market in Armenia and Georgia; notes however that the economic development of Armenia and Georgia has been affected by the general economic crisis and welcomes the decision at the end of 2009 to provide macrofinancial assistance to the two countries;
23. Notes the strategic geopolitical location of the South Caucasus and its increasing importance as an energy, transport and communications corridor connecting the Caspian region and Central Asia with Europe;
24. Recognises the significance of the region for the EU's energy cooperation and energy security; notes the great value of Azerbaijan's energy resources and the essential role these play in its economic development; underscores the importance of ensuring that the benefits deriving from the exploitation of natural resources are evenly distributed and invested in the development of the country as a whole, permitting it to brace itself against the negative repercussions of an eventual decline in oil production; welcomes the intention of Azerbaijan to diversify its economy;
25. Underscores the importance of investing in renewable energy sources and ensuring that environmental concerns are catered for; welcomes the establishment of the Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus; considers the plans proclaimed by Azerbaijan to make the development of alternative energy sources a government priority praiseworthy and encourages the pursuit of such objectives; is glad to take note of the decision of Armenia to decommission the nuclear plant in Medzamor, but regrets that a new nuclear plant will be built in the same seismic area;
26. Considers that promoting social cohesion and social dialogue, investing in education and health and building human capital, ensuring adequate standards of living, are essential in order to build vibrant democratic societies; takes positive note of the adoption by the three countries of their respective programmes on poverty reduction and encourages their thorough implementation;

Towards an EU strategy

27. Welcomes the Eastern Partnership and takes note of the related initiatives that have been activated and the meetings that have been held; intends to develop further the parliamentary dimension of the Partnership;
28. Considers that the ENP Action Plans and the implementation thereof constitute an

essential basis for evaluating respect for commitments, in accordance with the principle of conditionality, for evaluating the progress of bilateral relationships with the EU and for considering upgrading of agreements with the countries concerned; takes the view that the European Parliament should be involved in this process; notes the different progress made by the three countries in the implementation of the respective ENP Action Plans; believes that negotiations on the new association agreements should take into account this diversity and the different objectives but at the same time that the process of negotiation should preferably move at the same pace for all three countries, taking into account the regional dimension;

29. Recalls that all the South Caucasus countries are also part of the Black Sea Synergy initiative, which by fostering regional cooperation in certain areas could enhance mutual confidence between the partners;

Security issues and peaceful resolution of conflicts

30. Believes that providing support to conflict resolution processes is crucial and that the EU is well placed to support confidence-building, reconstruction and rehabilitation and has the possibility to help involve the communities affected; furthermore considers it essential to maintain a high level of international attention to all the conflicts in the region to ensure their swift resolution;
31. Takes note of the current EU involvement in conflict resolution processes in the region and believes that the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty justifies a more prominent role for the EU; welcomes the work of the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia and calls for increased EU action to persuade Russia and the relevant de facto authorities to stop blocking the EUMM from entering South Ossetia and Abkhazia; considers that the EU now has the opportunity to play a greater role in the solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and could do so by participating in the negotiations through the establishment of an EU mandate for the French Co-chair of the Minsk Group, by standing ready to launch reconstruction aid programmes and by supporting civil-society projects that aim to promote reconciliation and contacts between individuals in the region;
32. Calls on the High Representative for the Union's Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to follow closely the developments in the region and to be actively involved in the conflict resolution processes; acknowledges the work of the Special Representative for the South Caucasus and expresses the hope that the High Representative will ensure its continuity and consistency; encourages the Council to consider the possible use of tools from the CSDP to step up its participation in the peace-building and conflict-management processes;
33. Calls on the Commission to grant substantial financial and technical support to measures building confidence and promoting trust between and among the populations and to participate in rehabilitation and reconstruction in the region, such as income-generating projects and projects on socio-economic integration of IDPs and returnees, on the rehabilitation of housing and aiming at dialogue and mediation;

Democratisation, human rights and the rule of law

34. Supports EU funding and assistance to the region to promote these principles and processes and considers that such EU assistance should take place within the framework of political conditionality, such as reform of the judiciary and progress in democratisation processes; warns against the misuse of conflicts by governments to distract the interest of the international community from domestic issues;
35. Calls on the Commission and the Council to ensure that the commitments included in political conditionality packages are respected, such as the specific commitment by the Georgian Government to inject new momentum into democratic reforms included in the EU post-conflict assistance agreed between the Commission and Georgia in January 2009, and to report regularly to the European Parliament on progress;
36. Welcomes the work of the EU High Level Advisory Group to Armenia; believes that within the framework of the Eastern Partnership and the negotiation of new association agreements the EU has the opportunity to offer technical assistance and calls on the Commission to study the possibility of offering such assistance to Azerbaijan and Georgia;
37. Recognises the potential role of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum as the space to foster the development of a genuine civil society and strengthen its entrenchment in the states of the region, and calls on the Commission to ensure that the Forum receives sufficient financial and technical support; draws attention to the importance of financing civil society projects and the role that the EU Delegations in the region play in selecting these, and the significance that the projects can have in promoting contacts at regional level;

Economic cooperation and social development

38. Recalls that energy security is a common preoccupation; urges the EU therefore to give more robust support to the energy projects in the region, to step up its cooperation on energy issues and to work towards the completion of the Nabucco pipeline; also calls on the Commission to ensure that the energy- and transport-related projects in the South Caucasus foster relations between the three countries and are not a cause of exclusion of certain communities; reaffirms the importance of the Baku Initiative and its corresponding supporting programmes, INOGATE and TRACECA;
39. Considers that the EU should continue to support economic development, trade and investment in the region, and believes that the negotiation and establishment of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements plays a very important role in this respect; calls on the Commission to consider possible ways to assist the countries in the region to prepare them and enable them to negotiate and then implement and sustain the commitments provided for in possible future FTAs;
40. Reiterates the significance of people-to-people contacts and mobility programmes, especially aimed at youth; calls on the Council and Commission to make progress towards visa facilitation with the three countries and welcomes the initialling of the visa facilitation and readmission agreements with Georgia;

41. Reaffirms the need for the EU to develop a strategy for the South Caucasus, given the importance of the region for the EU and the potential role that the EU has in fostering further the development of the region and in the solution of its conflicts;
42. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments and parliaments of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.