

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

DELEGATION TO THE PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION COMMITTEES EU-ARMENIA, EU-AZERBAIJAN AND EU-GEORGIA

INFORMATION NOTE

ON THE WORK OF THE DELEGATION TO THE PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION COMMITTEES EU-ARMENIA, EU-AZERBAIJAN AND EU-GEORGIA

**DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR
EXTERNAL POLICIES OF THE UNION**

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INTRODUCTION

The relations between the European Parliament and the parliaments of the republics of South Caucasus - Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia - are conducted within the framework of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs). These Agreements between the South Caucasus states and the European Union and its Member States were signed on 22 April 1996 in Luxembourg and entered into force on 1 July 1999.

A key element of each Agreement is the process of interparliamentary cooperation that was established. For all three states a separate Parliamentary Cooperation Committee (PCC) exerts parliamentary control over the implementation of the agreements and acts as an open forum for debate on questions of mutual interest. The PCC has the right to receive information from the Cooperation Council and the Cooperation Committee (executive) and can adopt recommendations to the Cooperation Committee.

The European Parliament is represented on the three PCCs by the Delegation for relations with the South Caucasus Republics. Between 1999 and 2004 the Delegation was chaired by Mrs Ursula SCHLEICHER (EPP-ED, Germany)

From June 2004 the Delegation has been chaired by Mrs Marie Anne ISLER-BEGUIN (Verts/ALE - France).

Prior to 1999 there was already a form of parliamentary cooperation based on meetings between the European Parliament's Delegation and the Delegations of the three republics. This Delegation was constituted on 17 November 1994. It was chaired between 1994 and 1996 by Mr Antonios TRAKATELLIS (EPP - Greece) and between 1997 and 1999 by Mr Alexandros ALAVANOS (GUE/NGL - Greece).

Before 1994 the region was covered by the Delegation for relations with the republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) chaired by Ms Magdalene HOFF (PES - Germany).

The European Parliament closely follows developments in the South Caucasus and the region has been the subject of a series of resolutions. The most recent resolution was adopted on 26 February 2004 entitled "EU policy towards South Caucasus" (the GAHRTON report). These resolutions have formed the basic framework for the position taken by the delegation in its meetings with the three South Caucasus countries.

ARMENIA

Discussion with Armenia at joint meetings has centred on a number of key issues. Top of the agenda is the perennial problem with Azerbaijan over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh, which is a predominantly Armenian populated region that was part of Azerbaijan in the Soviet era. Since 1994 there has been an uneasy truce between the two republics with Armenia occupying the territory and an adjacent part of Azerbaijan. This has resulted in a closed border between the two sides. Armenia also has poor relations with Turkey, which has closed the land border between the two countries - because of Nagorno-Karabakh and as a consequence of the disagreement over the circumstances of the killings of Armenians by Turkey in 1915. The European Parliament position is that the killings constituted genocide and this has caused great annoyance to the Turks.

The EU has concerns over corruption in Armenia, which has hampered economic development. However real change in tackling this scourge is considered to be unlikely as this is linked to foreign policy, where important changes are not expected at present.

Human rights and freedom of conscience issues in Armenia are also a concern to the EU. In particular increasing restrictions have been placed on the electronic media and no Armenian TV channel is sufficiently independent of the government to support the opposition. In 2003 the US-based NGO Freedom House downgraded its assessment of the media climate in Armenia from "partly free" to "not free", citing the use of security and libel laws to silence criticism and the closure of a private TV station in 2002.

The current political situation in Armenia is tense and there has been a stand-off between government and opposition forces. The roots of the current tension lie in the presidential poll of March 2003 when President Robert Kocharian was elected amid allegations of ballot rigging and falsification. The observers concluded that the elections fell short of international standards. The parliamentary elections in May 2003 also failed to meet accepted international standards. In these elections the pro-Kocharian forces won a clear majority, and a dominant position in the National Assembly. The opposition hopes to emulate the success of Mikhail Saakashvili in Georgia, however it is less well organised and the government is stronger and more resistant to change. In addition political discourse to date has tended to focus on external issues (particularly the continuing stalemate over Nagorno-Karabakh) rather than domestic grievances about the competence of the incumbent administration.

The next parliamentary elections will take place on 12 May 2007. There are approximately 80 political formations in Armenia, but only six are represented in Parliament. The situation may change after the May elections, with some parties becoming stronger thanks to political support from new formations. The European Parliament will organise an election observation mission to Armenia in the first half of May 2007. Relations with Turkey may or may not change as a result of the murder of the Turkish journalist of Armenian origin, Hrant Dink, in January 2007.

EP-Armenia Meetings

July 1995 - Ad hoc delegation for election observation

An ad hoc delegation monitored the parliamentary elections. It considered these elections to be an important step towards democracy, despite some problems in the access of the opposition to media and some practices in the electoral process. The elections were therefore deemed "free but not fair".

July 1996 - 1st EP-Armenia Interparliamentary Meeting - Yerevan

Topics discussed included the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict; the international relations of Armenia (especially the role of Russia); cuts in the EU humanitarian aid, social and economic reforms; the TACIS programme; as well as the energy question with its environmental implications.

July 1997 - 2nd EP-Armenia Interparliamentary Meeting - Brussels

The second meeting concentrated on democratisation, protection of human rights and consolidation of civil society. The EP delegation called on the Armenian government to carry out the necessary reforms to the forces of law and order and to strengthen the independence of the judiciary. The unresolved dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh was also widely discussed and the EP side stressed the importance of respecting the principles of territorial integrity and the right to self-rule with necessary security guarantees.

June 1998 - 3rd EP-Armenia Interparliamentary Meeting - Yerevan

At the third meeting the EP delegation stressed the strategic importance of the region due to its energy resources and its prospects of becoming a major transit route between Europe and Asia. It hoped that the opening of an information office in Yerevan would be the first step towards the establishment of a full Commission Delegation. The EP delegation appreciated the progress made in the fields of democracy and protection of human rights. The consolidation of the independent media and civil society organisations were pointed out as areas requiring special attention.

EU-Armenia PCC Meetings

December 1999 - 1st EU-Armenia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee - Brussels

The EP delegation stressed the importance of a functioning judicial system and economic development. It called for the closure of the Medzamor nuclear power station, although the Armenian side stressed that the plant would be closed down as soon as alternative reliable and secure sources of electrical power could be brought into service. Other issues addressed included the problem with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh where the Armenian side pointed to several contacts between the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan to reach a settlement of the conflict.

September 2000 - 2nd EU-Armenia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee - Yerevan

At the second PCC there was a welcome for the economic reforms undertaken by the Armenian government through the mobilisation programme, while there was also a call for increased efforts to attract foreign investment and to increase economic transparency. Concern was also expressed over the high level of unemployment and the "brain drain" abroad of qualified professionals. The PCC also highlighted the environmental damage caused by the earthquake of 1998 and the drought of 2000.

November 2001 - 3rd EU-Armenia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee - Brussels

The third PCC laid emphasis on Armenia's strategic position lying between East and West - the "East of the West and the West of the East" - particularly in the light of the conflict in Afghanistan. The PCC gave its support to all efforts to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute and Turkey was urged to reopen its borders with Armenia. The EU was also called upon to play a more active role in the region and to adopt a common strategy towards it.

September 2002 - 4th EU-Armenia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee - Yerevan

The themes at the 4th PCC were similar, with additional stress on the importance of free and independent media and a welcome for the moratorium on the death penalty. There was also a call for a removal of unnecessary administrative barriers in order to attract more investment. Stress was laid on the European Parliament resolution of 28 February 2002 on the South Caucasus which urged the Union to become more engaged in the region.

March 2003 - 5th EU-Armenia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee - Brussels

The fifth PCC expressed concern that there had been a number of irregularities in the conduct of the recent Presidential elections and members urged the Armenian authorities to address these shortcomings in the May parliamentary elections. It welcomed the economic progress made in Armenia, while underlining the importance of attracting more foreign investment and of tackling corruption. It supported all initiatives, such as the Regional Environment Centre, which brought together the three countries of the South Caucasus.

March 2004 - 6th EU-Armenia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee - Yerevan

The sixth PCC expressed concerns about the conduct of the parliamentary elections of May 2003, which observers considered to have fallen short of international standards for democratic elections and urged the EU to assist the Armenian authorities to address these shortcomings. It applauded the abolition of the death penalty and the appointment of an Ombudsperson. It also welcomed the appointment of an EU Special representative for the South Caucasus and called for the South Caucasus to be given a defined status in the Wider Europe-New Neighbourhood policy.

April 2005 - 7th EU-Armenia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee - Strasbourg

The discussions held during this meeting covered the overall democratisation process of Armenia, focussing on the freedom of the media and respect for human rights. The MEPs stressed the importance of relations between Armenia and its neighbours, the clear definition of cross-border cooperation and expressed concern about the ongoing conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. The Delegation also brought up the necessity to improve the economic, social and environmental situation in Armenia.

April 2006 - 8th EU-Armenia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee - Yerevan

The eighth meeting resumed the discussion on the democratisation process of Armenia, focussing on the implementation of Government anti-corruption strategy and the role of the civil society. Given the present international context, a long debate was dedicated to issues such as energy security and protection of the environment (the likelihood of decommissioning the Medzamor nuclear power plant and protection of Lake Sevan). Discussions on the latest developments in Nagorno-Karabakh continued. The issue of the respect for the cultural and historic heritage was also debated. The state of play of relations between the EU and Armenia was discussed within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the forthcoming adoption of the ENP Action Plan.

29-30 January 2007 - 9th EU-Armenia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee - Brussels

The issues tackled during this meeting were: the political, economic and social situation in Armenia within the context of the forthcoming legislative elections, implementation of the ENP Action Plan, the cultural and historic heritage, the respect for human rights and the rule of law. At this point, the discussions focussed on the principle of freedom of expression and freedom of the media. The conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh was also high on the agenda of the EU-Armenia

PCC. The relations with the neighbouring countries, especially with Turkey, represented a great part of the debates: the members of the Armenian delegation stressed the need to resume the dialogue with Turkey on the possibility of opening the border. The EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus, Mr Peter Semneby, attended the meeting, as well as Mr Armen Baibourtian, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Armenia.

7-8 April 2009 - 10th EU-Armenia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee - Yerevan

The 10th meeting of the EU-Armenia PCC was supposed to be held in November 2008, but it was postponed upon request of the Co-Chairman of the Armenian Delegation, Mr Avet ADONTS, for domestic reasons. The EP delegation was composed by Mrs Marie-Anne ISLER6BEGUIN, Co-Chairperson, Mr Arpad DUKA6ZOLYOMI, Vice-Chairman, Mr Alessandro BATTELOCCHIO and Mr Calin Catalin CHIRITA.

The programme of the visit started on 6 April 2009 with a visit to Vardashen Penitentiary, where the EP Delegation met the Armenian MPs detained after the riots of 1st of March 2008. The EP Delegation also met and discussed with the Prison authorities on the spot.

The discussions on the articles 225 and 300 of the Criminal Code of Armenia were held with Mr David HARUTUNYAN, Chairman of the Armenian Delegation to the PACE. Before and after the PCC meeting, the EP delegation also met Mr Serzh SARGSYAN, President of the Republic of Armenia, Mr Hovik ABRAHAMYA, President of the Armenian Parliament, Mr Alik SARGSYAN, Minister of Home Affairs, Mr Gevorg DANIELYAN, Minister of Justice, Mrs Karine KHAZINYAN, Deputy-Minister of Foreign Affairs and Mr Sergey KAPINOS, Head of the OSCE Yerevan Office.

The members of the EP Delegation paid particular attention to their meeting with representatives of the Armenian NGOs and media.

Mrs Karine KHAZINYAN represented the Government of Armenia at the PCC meeting, Mr Tomasz KNOTHE represented the EU Presidency-in-Office, and Mr Raul DE LUZENBERGER represented the European Commission.

Issues discussed at the 10th meeting:

- State of play of the relations between the EU and Armenia within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, implementation of the ENP Action Plan
- Political situation in Armenia
 - consequences of the presidential elections on the social order in Armenia
 - respect for human rights including the rights of religious minorities, freedom of the media, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly
 - functioning of the judiciary and its role in the fight against corruption and organised crime
 - equal opportunities between men and women in Armenia
- Economic and social affairs in Armenia and the EU
 - macro-economic development and financial crisis management in Armenia and in the EU
 - poverty reduction and development of the labour market
 - functioning of the healthcare and education systems
 - situation in the prison system

- Armenian policy regarding protection of environment
 - EU-Armenia trade and economic relations
 - EU-Armenia cooperation in cultural, educational and other spheres
- Regional issues
- the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict after the Moscow Declaration of 2 November 2008
 - relations with Turkey following the Turkish Stability Platform Initiative
 - consequences of the armed conflict between Georgia and Russia on Armenia
 - regional cooperation, namely in the BSEC framework, and relations with the neighbouring countries

The 11th meeting of the EU-Armenia PCC will take place in 2010 in Brussels.

AZERBAIJAN

Certain key subjects recur at EU-Azerbaijan meetings. The "cold war" between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh and the occupation of 20% of Azerbaijan's territory by its neighbour, is a constant agenda item and all meetings call for a resolution of the conflict, which is preventing political and economic development of the region. The importance of exploiting Azerbaijan's huge oil wealth is also stressed, as are projects for regional development. There are also EU concerns over the human rights situation, the level of democracy, freedom of the media and corruption.

The country is run by a quasi-dynastic regime - the Presidential elections of October 2003 brought Ilham Aliyev, son of the previous President Heidar Aliyev, to power. These elections were severely criticised by international observers and provoked opposition demonstrations. However the opposition is not well organised and has limited access to the media. The new President is surrounded by his late father's associates and appears to entertain few democratic tendencies. He has shown little willingness so far to move towards a settlement on the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute, which has left Azerbaijan with around one million internally displaced persons. The income from oil production has not trickled through to large sectors of the population. There is substantial foreign investment in the energy sector - most notably in the Baky-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. However there has been little investment in other areas and limited diversification from oil.

EP-Azerbaijan Meetings

November 1995 - Ad hoc delegation for election observation in Azerbaijan

The ad hoc delegation for election observation in November 1995 monitoring the first multiparty elections in Azerbaijan, pointed out several deficiencies in the electoral process, especially in the position of opposition parties. The delegation concluded that the elections were neither free nor fair but nevertheless represented an important step in the direction of developing a democratic process.

June 1996 - 1st EP-Azerbaijan Interparliamentary Meeting - Baky

The democratisation of Azerbaijani society, restructuring of the economy, TACIS programmes, the international relations of Azerbaijan, the question of Nagorno-Karabakh and transport and

energy issues dominated the discussions during the first EP-Milli Mejlis interparliamentary meeting.

October 1997 - 2nd EP-Azerbaijan Interparliamentary Meeting - Brussels

The internal political situation, oil economy, the serious environmental situation in Azerbaijan and the Caspian Sea as well as Azerbaijan's relations with its neighbours dominated the discussions of the second meeting.

June 1998 - 3rd EP-Azerbaijan Interparliamentary Meeting - Baky

At the third meeting the EP delegation stressed the strategic importance of Azerbaijan and the Caspian region due to their energy resources and the perspectives of the region to become a major transit route between Europe and Asia. The delegation urged the European Commission to send its resident envoy to Baky as a first step towards the establishment of a full Commission Delegation in Baky. The establishment of independent judiciary and the support to the independent media were underlined as important items in the EU-Azerbaijan relations. The delegation of the European Parliament supported the efforts made by the Minsk Group to find a peaceful solution to the conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh. The delegation underlined the importance of the OSCE principles of territorial integrity of states and the right of the highest degree of autonomy and guarantee of security for the people of Nagorno-Karabakh.

EU-Azerbaijan PCC Meetings

April 2000 - 1st EU-Azerbaijan Parliamentary Cooperation Committee - Brussels

At the first meeting of the PCC the strategic importance of the hydrocarbon resources of the Caspian Basin to the EU was stressed. There was support for the "Oil Fund" which aims to ensure a diversified and sustainable economy. Other issues included the importance of freedom of conscience and a pluralistic media. The meeting also underlined the strategic importance of the region and the possibility of it becoming a major transit route between Asia and Europe. All initiatives to enhance regional cooperation were also welcomed.

May 2001 - 2nd EU-Azerbaijan Parliamentary Cooperation Committee - Baky

The second PCC noted that the overall EC technical assistance to Azerbaijan has been considerable with funding of around EUR 333 million but was still not comparable to other parts of the world. The EU was urged to play a more active political role in the region. There was a welcome for the inauguration of the Baky based secretariat for the EU-financed TRACECA Project (Trans Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia) and also for progress towards the construction of the Baky-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline.

February 2002 - 3rd EU-Azerbaijan Parliamentary Cooperation Committee - Brussels

In addition to the themes discussed at previous meetings, the 3rd PCC welcomed the accession of Azerbaijan to the Council of Europe, along with the other states in the region, and stressed the importance of the Council as a forum for dialogue. It also underlined the need to implement democratic reform in order to build a prosperous and stable country. It reiterated calls for the opening of a full European Commission delegation in Baky. A minute's silence was held at the start of the meeting to pay tribute to the victims of the Khojaly tragedy and all others killed in inter-ethnic conflicts in the South Caucasus.

April 2003 - 4th EU-Azerbaijan Parliamentary Cooperation Committee - Baky

The 4th PCC welcomed the opening of the Europa House in Baky as a signal of greater EU engagement in the country, however it reiterated its call for the opening of a full EC delegation

in Azerbaijan. It stressed the need for the presidential elections taking place later that year to comply fully with international standards. It welcomed the start of construction of the Baky-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline and looked forward to the development of an energy dialogue between the EU and Azerbaijan. It recognised that a solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute had to be reached by exclusively peaceful means.

November 2004 - 5th meeting of the EU-Azerbaijan Parliamentary Cooperation Committee-Strasbourg

The 5th PCC brought up issues such as respect for human rights and democratic development in Azerbaijan, as well as economic and social issues and protection of the environment. The state of play between the EU and Azerbaijan was analysed within the framework of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. As it did in the past, the PCC stressed the necessity of finding a peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

April 2005 - 6th meeting of the EU-Azerbaijan PCC - Baky

For the first time, the 6th PCC discussed the relations between the EU and Azerbaijan within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Taking into account that parliamentary elections were to take place in November 2005, the PCC discussed issues such as respect for human rights and democratic principles, freedom of expression, and the rights of opposition representatives to have access to the media in view of the forthcoming elections. Again, the state of play of relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia was discussed in light of the ongoing conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

November 2005 - ad hoc delegation for election observation to Baky, Ganja, Salyan and Nakhichevan

The general assessment of the EP delegation was that the voting day was calm, with no major incidents identified. On the whole, the Precinct Commissions followed the rules and the voters were generally aware of voting procedures. In some cases, however, the observers noted that the ballot boxes were not properly sealed. Observers had unrestricted access to polling stations. It was also noticed that voters could not express their choice freely because of a general fear of the authorities. A high number of complaints were registered. Consequently, the Constitutional Court and the Constituency Election Commissions cancelled the results of Polling Stations in 87 constituencies. Given the irregularities, elections were re-run in 10 out of 152 constituencies. The OSCE/ODIHR stressed in its statement that the partial repeat of the legislative elections in Azerbaijan underscores the need for electoral reform.

On 7 November 2006 President Ilham ALIYEV paid a visit to the European Parliament. He held a meeting with Mr Borrell-Fontelles, President of the EP, and with Members of the EP Delegation to the EU-Azerbaijan PCC. It was acknowledged that relations between the EU and Azerbaijan have intensified. On the same day, President Aliyev signed a Memorandum on Energy Partnership with the EU. On this occasion, President Aliyev explained that "in Azerbaijan's history there has never been room for a democratic political culture, because the beginning of the 15 years of independence has been spent in wars, civil unrest and coups d'Etat; only recently Azerbaijan has started to build a new political system".

December 2006 - 7th meeting of the EU-Azerbaijan PCC - Strasbourg

Given the recent adoption of the ENP Action Plan between the EU and Azerbaijan, the representatives of the EU Presidency-in-Office, of the European Commission and of the Azeri Government stressed the importance of closer cooperation between the EU and Azerbaijan. The

discussion on human rights continued, in particular concerning the release of political prisoners, following the recent presidential pardon. Freedom of the media and freedom of expression in general were on top of the agenda. As regards regional cooperation and bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia, a step forward towards the improvement of these relations might be provided by their membership in the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation.

On 20 March 2007, the Delegation to the EU-Azerbaijan PCC held a meeting with Mr Araz AZIMOV, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan. The main issues tackled at this meeting were: the current situation of the unresolved conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, the role of the highest authorities of Armenia and Azerbaijan in finding the appropriate solution to the conflict, and the role of the EU in finding a solution to the conflict.

On 26 May 2008, Mr Araz AZIMOV attended another meeting of the Delegation to the EU-Azerbaijan PCC in Brussels. Members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs attended this meeting. The discussion focused on the regional security including energy issues and the role of Azerbaijan in the Black Sea Region.

September 2007 - 8th meeting of the EU-Azerbaijan PCC - Baky

The mission of the EP Delegation to Azerbaijan started with a meeting with representatives of the Azerbaijani NGOs and media, followed by a briefing with the EU Ambassadors and the Head of the European Commission Delegation to Baku.

The composition of the EP Delegation was as follows: Mrs Marie-Anne ISLER-BEGUIN, Chairperson, Mr Arpad DUKA-ZOLYOMI, Vice-Chairman, Mrs Lydie POLFER, Rapporteur of the Committee on Foreign Affairs on the South Caucasus, Mr Johannes SWOBODA, Mr Alessandro BATTILOCCHIO, and Mr Marian-Jean MARINESCU.

During this mission, the EP delegation met Mr Ilham ALIYEV, President of Azerbaijan, Mr Ogtay ASADOV, Chairman of the Milli Mejlis, Mr Safar ABIYEV, Minister of Defence, Mr Mahmud MAMMAD-GULIYEV and Mr Araz AZIMOV, Deputy-Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Mr Fikrat MAMMADOV, Minister of Justice. After the PCC meeting, the EP delegation visited two IDP settlements, held talks with the UNHCR representative on the situation of IDPs, visited Neft Dashlari Oil Rocks, and met Mr Seymour KHALILOV, representative of the BP to Azerbaijan.

Issues on the Agenda of the PCC:

- The state of play of the EU- Azerbaijan cooperation within the framework of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and the European Neighbourhood Policy. At this point, presentations were made by Mr Abid SHARIFOV, Deputy Prime Minister, H.E. Mr Bernhard Amaudric Du Chaffaut, representing the EU Presidency-in-Office, and Mr Wolfgang SPORRER, Coordinator of the Europa House in Azerbaijan.
- The implementation of the ENP Action Plan: democratic reforms, respect for human rights, the rule of law: reform of the judiciary, economic development, social issues including energy and poverty reduction

- Regional cooperation and energy security: within the framework of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation; energy security in the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea Region, EU-Azerbaijan Energy Partnership
- Armenia-Azerbaijan relations: *the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh*.

October 2008: 9th meeting of the EU-Azerbaijan PCC - Brussels

The composition of the Azerbaijani Delegation was as follows: Mr Valeh ALESKEROV, Co-Chairman, Mr Cingiz ASADULLAYEV, Mr Fuad MURADOV, Mrs Gular AHMADOVA and Mr Nizami ISQUANDAROV.

Issues discussed at the meeting:

- The state of play of the EU-Azerbaijan cooperation within the framework of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and the European Neighbourhood Policy
- The political situation in Azerbaijan: Forthcoming presidential election in 2008, respect for human rights and basic freedoms, freedom of media and freedom of expression, the rule of law: reform of the judiciary
- The economic and social situation: macro-economic development and the management of the energy export revenue, poverty reduction and development of the labour market, improvement of health and education service, protection of the environment
- Regional issues: repercussions of the Russia-Georgia war, energy security perspectives, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, cooperation in the Black Sea Region.

The 10th meeting of the EU-Azerbaijan PCC will take place at the end of 2009 or beginning of 2010.

GEORGIA

Georgia has undergone considerable change in recent months. The situation is currently very fluid following the overwhelming victory of Mikhail Saakashvili in the presidential elections of January 2004 and the election of a parliament in March 2004 in which pro-presidential forces hold a large majority. These developments followed the resignation of former President Shevardnadze following the deeply flawed parliamentary elections of November 2003 and the subsequent partial annulment of these elections - events that became quickly known as the "Rose Revolution".

Since independence civil war, crime and corruption have ravaged Georgia. Running sores remain the breakaway territories of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) which enjoy de facto independence. At the time of writing progress has been made towards a resolution of the Adjara problem which had enjoyed a quasi-independent status under its former President Aslan Abashidze. The departure of Mr Abashidze has opened a window of opportunity for a lasting settlement. The loss of cheap Soviet energy and the rupturing of trading ties also caused the economy to nose-dive.

These problems remain a major impediment to development and contribute to regional instability. The EU supports the principle of Georgian territorial integrity and aims to assist Georgia in creating the political, economic and social environment necessary for the country to fully exploit its natural comparative advantages at the crossroad of important transport and energy corridors between Europe and Central Asia. The most notable development in this respect is the ongoing construction of the Baky-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, which will bring oil directly from the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean.

In recent years, and particularly since 11 September 2001, the United States has been heavily involved in the region and Georgia in particular. It also has strong economic interests and has invested heavily in the Baky-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. It has provided training and support to the Georgian armed forces. This increasing US economic and political influence in the country is being watched closely by the Kremlin, which is the main source of energy to Georgia and still retains a strong geo-strategic interest in the country.

EP-Georgia Meetings

1992 - 1996 - Early meetings

The interparliamentary dialogue between the European Parliament and the Georgian Parliament is the most advanced among the three parliaments in the region. The first ad hoc delegation to Georgia went in 1992. In November 1995 an EP delegation observed the parliamentary elections and considered them well organised, free and fair.

June 1996 - 3rd EP-Georgia Inter-parliamentary Meeting - Tbilisi

The discussions dealt with regional conflicts, including those in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the economic and social development in the country, the cooperation with the European Union and Georgia's rapprochement with Euro-Atlantic organisations which is a question where a wide consensus prevails among the political groups in Georgia. The delegation also established close contact with the European Commission's delegation in Tbilisi.

May 1997 - 4th EP-Georgia Inter-parliamentary Meeting - Strasbourg

The EP delegation recognised the important role of Russia in the South Caucasian region but supported the Georgian request for territorial integrity and non-interference in its internal affairs. It considered that the international community should have worked more actively in the resolution of the Abkhazian conflict in order to find a solution to the question of peacekeeping in Abkhazia. The delegation praised the positive political and socio-economic development and supported Georgia's aspirations to seek support from European organisations.

June 1998 - 5th EP-Georgia Inter-parliamentary Meeting - Tbilisi

There was discussion of the steps Georgia had taken in the field of democracy and the protection of fundamental human rights. The delegations approved of plans to guarantee extensive rights for national minorities and the representation of national minorities and regions in the new legislation of Georgia. The meeting stressed the strategic importance of the South Caucasus region due to energy resources and the prospect of this region becoming a major transit route between Europe and Asia. Members also underlined the importance of finding a prompt and peaceful solution to the conflict in Abkhazia, respecting the territorial integrity of Georgia, the right of refugees and displaced persons to return to their homes and the right to a high level of autonomy for the people in Abkhazia.

EU-Georgia PCC Meetings

April 1999 - 1st meeting of the EU-Georgia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee - Brussels

Given the well-established and working links with the Georgian Parliament and the fact that Georgia would be invited to join the Council of Europe on 27 April 1999, the EP delegation decided to constitute the EU-Georgia Partnership Cooperation Committee before the European elections, even though the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement would only enter into force on 1 July 1999.

The PCC noted that the serious economic crisis in Georgia since late 1998 was due to structural problems in the government finances and the negative effects of the global financial crisis. It urged the Georgian government to strengthen its anti-corruption campaign and to continue reforms of the tax collection system and for the Commission to continue its support to the Georgian government in these fields.

The PCC acknowledged the steps taken by Georgia in the consolidation of democratic institutions. It called on Georgian government to continue the process of judicial reform and fight against corruption in the judiciary and the police force. The PCC urged all sides in the conflicts in South-Ossetia and Abkhazia to intensify efforts to find a prompt political solution. The PCC welcomed the extensive EU support to Georgia. It also welcomed the initiatives of the Georgian Parliament to enhance regional cooperation between the countries of South Caucasus.

May 2000 - 2nd meeting of the EU-Georgia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee - Tbilisi

The PCC welcomed the accession of Georgia into the WTO and the steps taken to initiate economic reforms. There was support for the Georgian government's anti-corruption campaign. The PCC stressed the importance of religious freedom. It underlined too the importance of improving the situation in prisons and mental hospitals. It welcomed the adoption of a law on alternative military service and urged the Georgian government to improve the conditions of service in the armed forces. Other issues to come up included the need to reach a political settlement of the unresolved conflicts in the region. There was also welcome for the agreement to rehabilitate the Inguri Hydro power plant with EU assistance, which would contribute to solving energy problems.

June 2001 - 3rd meeting of the EU-Georgia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee - Brussels

The PCC devoted considerable attention to EU aid to Georgia - particularly support for legal, institutional and administrative reform. There was also a welcome for the humanitarian aid and the Food Security Programme as well as the assistance in border management. The low level of EU-Georgia trade was regretted. Deep concern was expressed at the unilateral introduction by the Russian Federation of a visa regime for Georgia and the exemption from this regime given to Georgian citizens who are residents of Tskhinvali/South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The PCC considered that this could be considered as a de facto annexation of these regions. The PCC also denounced the holding of local elections in Abkhazia and considered their results null and void. The Committee condemned too a referendum held in April 2001 by the Tskhinvali authorities on the adoption of a constitution aimed at full independence of the territory.

April 2002 - 4th meeting of the EU-Georgia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee - Tbilisi

In addition to the subjects discussed at other meetings there was emphasis on the strategic political and economic importance of Georgia in the post September 11 world situation and its potential as a strategic corridor between Europe and Asia. There was particular concern about the unauthorised movement of Russian troops in the Kodori Valley on Georgian territory. Concern was expressed at the lack of progress in resolving the internal conflicts in Georgia and members underlined that they did not recognise the "elections" that had taken place in the two breakaway regions.

February 2003 - Ad hoc delegation to Abkhazia, Georgia

The Georgian Parliament invited the European Parliament to send an ad hoc delegation to examine the situation in the secessionist region of Abkhazia. The delegation visited Abkhazia under the auspices of the United Nations and met with the de facto authorities in Sukhumi. In its final declaration the delegation underlined its support for the territorial integrity of Georgia and called for a peaceful resolution of the dispute.

June 2003 - 5th meeting of the EU-Georgia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee - Brussels

The 5th PCC stressed the need to ensure that the parliamentary elections to be held in November 2003 complied with the highest international standards. It welcomed the start of the Baky-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline and underlined its importance for energy supplies. It also looked forward to the rapid appointment of an EU Special Envoy for the South Caucasus region.

November 2003-March 2004

The European Parliament sent four ad hoc delegations to Georgia chaired by Demetrio VOLCIC (PSE - Italy) between November 2003 and March 2004. The first two delegations went to observe the parliamentary elections on 2 and 23 November 2003. However these elections were partially annulled following the resignation of President Shevardnadze and condemnation of the conduct of the elections by international and domestic observers. Two further delegations subsequently observed the presidential elections on 4 January 2004 and the rerun of the parliamentary elections on 28 March 2004. The delegation welcomed the two elections of 2004 as a significant improvement on the previous contests.

November 2004 - 6th meeting of the EU-Georgia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee - Tbilisi

During this meeting, the members of the two delegations discussed in detail the state of play in the cooperation between the EU and Georgia within the framework of the PCA. Regional cooperation within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy was also discussed. Members of the EP stressed the need for adopting a more transparent policy in tackling corruption. The members of the Georgian delegation expressed their concern about the critical situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia/Tskhinvali Region. Both sides agreed that the economic and social prosperity of Georgia is hampered by the frozen conflicts in the country. The members of the EP delegation insisted that the Georgian civil society needed to be encouraged, stimulated in its development. If this is the case, the process of democratisation of the country is on the right path.

June 2005 - 7th meeting of the EU-Georgia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee - Brussels

This meeting was dedicated to the following topics: respect for human rights and democratisation in Georgia, economic development, social adjustment, efforts to tackle corruption. As far as the internal frozen conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, it was clear that no tangible progress has been made and that the situation remained tense. Members also

discussed the state of play of relations with the EU, the USA and Russia. The Members of the Georgian delegation understood the need to support government initiatives concerning the process of democratisation of the country, but also to scrutinise its activities as far as the internal development of Georgia is concerned.

September 2006 - 8th meeting of the EU-Georgia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee - Tbilisi

The 8th PCC meeting took place in Tbilisi on 12 September 2006. The meeting was preceded by bilateral meetings of the EP delegation with representatives of Georgian NGOs and media, the Ambassador of the Russian Federation to Georgia, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Euro-Atlantic Integration and the Minister of Justice. The EP Delegation visited the Regional Environment Centre for the South Caucasus and the Civil Registry Office. One day was dedicated to the visit to Tskhinvali, in South Ossetia, where the delegation met Mr Eduard Djabeevich Kokoity, leader of the self-proclaimed Republic of South Ossetia, and the Commander in Chief of the Joint Peace-Keeping Forces in South Ossetia. The visit to South Ossetia was organised under the auspices of the OSCE. On the last day of the mission to Georgia, the EP delegation had a bilateral meeting with President Mikhail Saakashvili.

November 2006 - Visit of President SAKASHVILI to the European Parliament

The President of Georgia, Mikheil SAKASHVILI, visited the European Parliament on 14 November 2006 during the Plenary Session in Strasbourg. President Saakashvili addressed the Plenary, held a meeting with President Borrell-Fontelles and with the EP Delegation to the EU-Georgia PCC.

Among the issues discussed with President Saakashvili there were: the democratisation process in Georgia after the "Rose Revolution", closer relations with the EU within the framework of the ENP Action Plan, reform of the judiciary, respect for human rights, freedom of the media and freedom of expression, the difficult relation with the Russian Federation and the separatist regimes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, energy security, the Russian embargo on Georgian products. President Saakashvili stressed that "the EU should be prepared, if necessary, to commit troops to a new peace-keeping force in Georgia". He also urged the Council and the Commission "to work out ways of helping Georgia overcome and counterbalance the economic and social repercussions of the measures taken by Moscow".

June 2007 - 9th meeting of the EU-Georgia PCC - Brussels

Issues discussed during the 9th meeting:

- EU-Georgia cooperation in the framework of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
- EU-Georgia relations:
 - state of play of implementation of the ENP Action Plan;
 - efficiency of the EU assistance to Georgia within the framework of the ENP Instrument;
 - impact of the EU-Russia relations on Georgia;
- The political situation in Georgia: present political situation; Georgia's NATO aspirations; current situation of the Russian military bases after the departure of the Russian soldiers;
- Economic and social issues, environment protection: dynamics of the economic development in Georgia; poverty reduction; reform of the health-care system; gender equality in Georgia and in the EU; energy security; Georgian official position on environment protection;

- Internal conflicts in Georgia: a more active and effective role of the EU in conflict resolution in Georgia; recent incidents in Abkhazia and the UNSC resolution of April 2007; the new Georgian Conflict-resolution Plan for South Ossetia: the EU involvement;

- Regional cooperation within the framework of Organisation of the BSEC (Black Sea Economic Cooperation) in light of the Communication from the European Commission on the Black Sea Synergy.

Mr Dimitri SANAKOEV, Head of the Interim Administrative Unit created on the territory of the former South Ossetian Autonomous District, addressed the Members of the PCC stressing that he expressed the dream of the Georgian people to get closer to Europe, and the South Ossetian people should have the chance to do so too.

Mr Sanakoev added that "there is no doubt that the conflict – which was caused by the bad Soviet heritage, by ethnically motivated aggressive nationalism, by grave mistakes on both sides, and by the policy of an external force guided by the imperial principle “divide and rule” – must end and relegated to the history as a tragic and shameful mark in the annals of centuries-old fraternal coexistence of Ossetians and Georgians".

"Our Ossetian children grow up in an environment of endless conflict, under constant stress and tension. They don't have a normal childhood. They don't know what is going on beyond checkpoints and turnpikes; instead they are aware how a machine gun sounds, how it can be assembled, how an armoured carrier is driven, and how cannons drone".

Mr Sanakoev concluded his allocution by saying that: "Today the flag of Georgia is the very flag under which Georgians and Ossetians have achieved historical victories in the golden age of the united Georgia. I believe that under the same flag we will lay the foundation for new joint victories of our two fraternal people. I believe that together we shall build a modern state, which will be worthy of our great ancestors and where our children will live in happiness".

April 2008 - 10th meeting of the EU-Georgia PCC - Tbilisi

The 10th meeting of the EU-Georgia PCC took place in Tbilisi on 29-30 April 2008.

Before the PCC meeting, the EP Delegation visited Zugdidi and Gali. The UNOMIG accompanied the EP Delegation on its flight from Tbilisi to Kutaisi and then from Kutaisi to Gali. The EP delegation was briefed by Mr Roman Sishchuk, Civil Affairs Officer and Mr Michael Hummel, UN Police Forec, on the current situation in the region. The EP Delegation also met representatives of Gali NGOs at the Human Rights Centre. This was followed by one hour meeting with Mr Ruslan KISHMARIA, representative of the Gali de facto authorities. Talks focused on the education possibilities for Georgian citizens, who were the majority of the population in Gali District, about the Georgian army conscripts, the economic and social situation of the region.

In the afternoon, the EP Delegation visited the IDP housing centre in Zugdidi "Collective Centre Hospital": here the Members of the EP delegation witnessed the appalling living conditions of a great number of ethnic Georgians who had been chased out of their own houses by the Abkhaz authorities and obliged to live as Internally Displaced People (IDPs) since 1992.

The PCC meeting was preceded by a meeting with a great number of Georgian NGOs and media representatives, who informed the EP Delegation about freedom of assembly and freedom of expression and the overall political situation in Georgia.

Issues discussed at the PCC meeting:

- EU-Georgia cooperation in the framework of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
- EU-Georgia relations: State of play of implementation of the ENP Action Plan; Visa facilitation regime for Georgian citizens
- The political situation in Georgia: the political configuration in the aftermath of the Presidential elections of January 2008; the upcoming parliamentary elections in light of the new electoral rules; cooperation between the government and the opposition; developments in the judiciary and fight against corruption; functioning of the local public administration: decentralised authority and responsibility; Georgia's application for NATO membership
- Economic and social measures: economic situation: economic indicators, trade and WTO membership; reducing poverty and creating employment; reform of the healthcare system; ongoing reform of the education system
- Energy security of Georgia within a wider regional context
- Regional cooperation within the BSEC (Black Sea Economic Cooperation) framework: conclusion of the Kiev Black Sea Synergy Ministerial Meeting
- Internal Conflicts in Georgia: the state of play of the Georgian-Russian relations; implementation of the new IDP Strategy.

After the PCC meeting, the EP Delegation held bilateral meetings with Mr Mikheil SAAKASHVILI, President of Georgia, Mr Temur IAKOBASHVILI, Minister of reintegration, Mr Boris FRLEC, head of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission to Georgia, and Mrs Giovanna BARBERIS, representative of UNICEF Georgia. The discussions focused on the post-war situation

February 2009 - 11th meeting of the EU-Georgia PCC - Brussels

The composition of the Georgian Delegation was as follows:

Mr David DARCHIASHVILI, Chairman of the Delegation United National Movement (newly-elected), **Mr Akaki MINASHVILI**, United National Movement, **Mr Giorgi KITIASHVILI**, United National Movement, **Mr Akaki BOBOKHIDZE**, United National Movement, **Mr Gia TORTLADZE**, Powerful Georgia (Opposition).

This meeting took place a few months after the August 2008 armed conflict between Georgia and the Russian Federation.

The discussions were held on the following items on the Agenda on the meeting:

- EU-Georgia cooperation in the framework of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement

- The current political situation in Georgia in the aftermath of the conflict with Russia;
- Georgian expectations with regards to the EU-Georgia relations
- The situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, in particular concerning the cease-fire agreement and the situation of IDPs
- Economic and social situation
- Energy security policy of Georgia within the framework of the new crisis in the gas sector
- Regional cooperation organisations and initiatives (BSEC, GUAM, Black Sea Synergy and Eastern Partnership)

The discussions focused on the post-war situation in Georgia and the consequences for the territorial integrity of Georgia of the recognition by Russia of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The economic recovery of the country and dealing with the social consequences of the war were issues for a more lengthy debate in the PCC.