

# EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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

### MINUTES OF THE MEETING

Thursday, 23 February 2006

10h15 - 11h15

BRUSSELS

#### CONTENTS

1.	Adoption of the draft agenda (PE 366.174/rev.) .....	2
2.	Chairman's announcements .....	2
3.	Exchange of views with Ms Silvia ZEHE, desk officer for Armenia in the European Commission.....	2
4.	Preparation for the eighth meeting of the EU-Armenia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee to be held in Yerevan on 18/19 April 2006.....	2
5.	Any other business .....	2
6.	Date and place of the next meeting.....	2

The meeting opened at 10h20 with Ms ISLER BEGUIN, Chair of the delegation, in the chair.

1. The agenda of the meeting was adopted unanimously...

2.

Ms ISLER-BÉGUIN mentioned that the hearing on the South Caucasus that took place on 22 February 2006 was a very useful opportunity for MEPs to meet with representatives of International Organisations on the spot and the public. She drew the attention to the complexity of the situation in the region. She suggested that, in case of emergencies, the political groups in the EP be briefed in such way that a compromise resolution be adopted on finding solutions to conflict situations.

3.

The representative of the European Commission Ms Silvia ZEHE presented a summary of Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner's visit to the South Caucasus on 16-17 February 2006.

In Armenia: the Commissioner had talks with the President, the Foreign Minister and the Speaker of Parliament.

Issues discussed: the European Neighbourhood Action Plan, its priorities, energy issues (early closure on Medzamor power plant), relations with Iran (the very worrying nuclear issue), regional cooperation and Nagorno-Karabakh after the Rambouillet Presidential meeting. The former Armenian position was that they wanted to clarify the status question before they would withdraw. The present position is that they would be prepared to withdraw from five regions without any conditions. Two regions would still remain under Armenian control, until the referendum.

During the meeting with the Speaker of the Armenian Parliament, the Commissioner encouraged the parliament to actively cooperate on the Action Plan, since most of its provisions would be followed up after the constitutional reform in Armenia, mainly legislative reform. The 2007-2008 elections would be very important as far as the general progress of the country is concerned. The Armenian Parliament is very active on regional cooperation, for instance as regards relations with Turkey.

President Kocharian stressed that Armenia would like to be treated by the EU individually not in a regional context any more.

It has become increasingly obvious for the Armenian authorities that it would be very difficult to close down the Medzamor power plant, especially given the rise of gas tariffs by 20% in April 2006. Therefore, they are trying to diversify the energy resources, such as hydro and thermo power plants, in order to reduce Armenia's dependence on Russian gas.

As regards the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, there is no criticism towards the Minsk Group from the Armenian authorities, unlike the one from Azerbaijan. President Kocharian expressed hope that the St. Petersburg G8 Summit in June 2006 might bring some positive development on this matter.

Issues discussed during the press-conference:

- relations with Turkey: opening of the border, as provided for in the Framework Agreement between the EU and Turkey.

- the incidents in Julfa, which go back to the beginning of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. The Commissioner stressed that more first-hand independent information was not readily available.

- regional cooperation: there will be no EU support for the Kars-Akhalkalaki and Kars-Kum project in the railway sector, which was initiated as one of the TRACEA corridors.

Negotiations on the Action Plan: first round of talks on 28 November 2005. Armenia agrees on the priorities proposed by the Commission. Second round of talks: on 6 March 2006: will focus on the Medzamor power plant, to be closed by 2016, and Armenia's new energy strategy.

Ms ISLER-BÉGUIN: EP resolution on the question of the Armenian cemetery in Nakhichyvan: the Commission did inform the EP on the situation on the ground; therefore, the EP received contradictory information on this matter. Ms ISLER-BÉGUIN also enquired on recent contracts on energy resources. She stressed on the need of more clarity on all matters.

Vice-Chairman Arpad DUKA-ZOLYOMI enquired about the referendum on Nagorno-Karabakh: who should be involved: only the residents of Nagorno-Karabakh or all Azeri citizens? Do authorities accept the presence of the Russian forces? He would also like to know what sort of military forces are present in Nagorno-Karabakh. On energy: Medzamor nuclear power plant is the main source of energy; if the Armenians wish to keep the plant operational before its decommissioning in 2016, the modernisation of the plant would be viable option. Alternative energy sources would never replace traditional ones. Demolition of cultural heritage in Julfa: the EP resolution was a little premature. We have only one side of the story. We should have proof following a thorough investigation before taking a stand.

Mr Robert EVANS asked about the possibility of the Delegation to visit Nagorno-Karabakh. He also asked for more details on Armenia's relations with Iran. Mr Evans described Armenia as a serious business partner, which confer the prospect for building up future economic projects.

Ms ISLER-BÉGUIN admitted that a trip to Nagorno-Karabakh is difficult to organise, given the situation on the ground. We need the agreement of both parties.

In reply to this set of questions, Ms ZEHE recognized that situation is not clear, which explains the reluctance of the Commission to take an official position on the matter. Medzamor power plant provides 40% of the energy supply. The Armenian authorities are working on finding alternative energy sources. In order to be able to close down the plant, the authorities would need soft loans for financing earlier enough replacement capacities. According to experts' opinion, modernising Medzamor is not an option for the EU. Relations with Iran are mostly commercial. Mrs ZEHE agreed that Armenia is the business front-runner in the Caucasus.

4.

Ms ISLER-BÉGUIN referred to the strict administrative rules on the official trip to Armenia: only 7 MEPs can travel. EP political authorities should assess the situation and revise the existing rules.

Mr BLOKLAND also referred to the "ridiculous rules" that allow only 7 members to travel to the South Caucasus. Referring to the EP resolution on cultural heritage, Mr BLOKLAND asked for more clarifications from the Commission. Mrs ZEHE admitted that the situation is very unclear. More information is necessary.

Ms ISLER-BÉGUIN asked Ms ZEHE to provide the Delegation with relevant documents following the second round of negotiations on the Action Plan (on 6 March 2006), particularly regarding the question of parliamentary participation in drawing up the plans. It is impossible for

the EP to base its position on erroneous information. The Commission representatives on the ground should inform the EP regularly on the evolution of the situation. Ms ZEHE said that various Commission documents exist, but not in the status that would make them ready for distribution.

5. No other business at this point.

6. The Chair informed the delegation that the final preparatory meeting would take place in Strasbourg on 5 April 2006.

The meeting was closed at 11h20.

\*\*\*\*

Participants:

MEPs: ISLER BÉGUIN (Chair), DUKA-ZOLYOMI (Vice-Chair),  
BATTILOCCHIO, BLOKLAND, BREPOELS, STAUNER  
EVANS, JEGGLE

Political Groups: MCCONE (PSE)

European Commission: ZEHE

Armenian Mission: AGHADJANIAN, HOVHANNISYAN

DG EXPO: STOKELJ, SOURANDER

Secretariat: POPESCU-BLACK, SCHMUTTERER