

Strengthening the European neighbourhood policy

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Charles **TANNOCK** (EPP-ED, UK) and Raimon **OBIOLS i GERMA** (PES, ES) in response to the Commission's communication on strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). It states its full support for the principal objectives of the ENP, which is aimed at consolidating a ring of prosperity, stability and security, to develop close ties with our neighbouring states and to commit them to pursue reforms towards democracy. Parliament underlines the need for special attention to be paid to the promotion of equal rights, in particular the improvement of women's rights, but also as regards minorities.

Members express doubts about the meaningfulness of the **ENP's geographic scope**, as it involves countries which geographically are European together with Mediterranean non-European countries. However, it does not currently seem realistic to change this overarching policy framework. Therefore, they stress the need for a greater effort to define the multilateral objectives of this policy so as to enable the EU and its neighbouring states to face shared challenges, and at the same time to respect the different conditions and specific characteristics of the countries involved. Parliament strongly advocates that the entire implementation of the policy take as much account as possible of the differing identities of all the countries covered by the ENP, in order to develop the most appropriate middle- and long-term incentives for reform and to strengthen the commitment of these societies to the process of modernisation and cooperation and integration with the EU. It notes that the conditionality enshrined in the ENP approach draws on the positive experience of enlargement, and considers that conditionality can constitute an appropriate incentive for acceleration of reform processes in the ENP countries towards their convergence with the EU if conceived positively and differentiated according to the specific needs and capacities of the country concerned. Parliament strongly underlines that **respect for universal human rights** is the core principle of EU policy. Regardless of the degree of willingness of partner countries' governments to cooperate and to share in these values, civil society in all ENP countries must be strongly supported. The Commission was asked to negotiate the setting-up of subcommittees on human rights with all ENP countries. Parliament urges that partnership fora should be held on a periodic basis. Actions aiming to intensify people-to-people contacts are strongly supported by MEPs, such as city and region-twinning programmes, exchange programmes (Erasmus Mundus).

Parliament advocates the deepening of regular political dialogue between the EU and the ENP countries and welcomes the fact that Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and Armenia align themselves with most of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) declarations and positions. Such alignment with EU foreign policy should be open to all other ENP countries. It welcomes the longer-term aim of establishing a neighbourhood-wide free trade area and supports the negotiation of bilateral deep free trade agreements between the EU and the respective ENP country, which should go beyond tariffs and encompass services and the protection of investments. It regrets that the EU has not hitherto considered it possible to open up its market to products which the ENP countries are in a particularly good position to supply at competitive prices and which are of a quality that meets EU standards. It also supports the development of multilateral cooperation between the EU and its partners on sectoral themes.

On **migration**, Parliament advocates that visa facilitation and readmission agreements be negotiated with all ENP countries. It stresses the need to improve the capacity of ENP countries to manage migration flows, effectively combat illegal migration and ensure that international human rights obligations are respected. Member States, the EU and all ENP countries must intensify their cooperation in the fight against trans-national organised crime, terrorism, trafficking in human beings and drug trafficking. The

implementation of readmission agreements must fully respects the principle of non-refoulement, and ensure access to a fair asylum procedure. The Commission is urged to organise effective monitoring of the treatment of persons returned under readmission agreements concluded with ENP countries, in particular with regard to possible 'chain refoulement'.

The report also advocates better dialogue and coordination and more joint actions between the EU and the USA in advancing common goals such as the promotion of democracy, the enhancement of energy security and the strengthening of regional security in the EU's neighbourhood.

Financing: MEPs stress the need for appropriate levels of funding and close coordination with other financial institutions in order to make the neighbourhood policy successful. They believe that advantage should be taken of the review of the 2007-2013 financial perspective planned for 2008-2009 to increase the budget of the ENPI. They strongly underline the need to maintain an overall balance between the eastern and the southern parts of the ENP, reflecting the EU's ambitions and objectives in the regions, the effectiveness of previous assistance and the size of the population concerned. They call on the Commission to coordinate its financial resources and policy analysis capabilities with those of the international financial institutions (EIB, EBRD, World Bank), so as to generate synergies in conditioning and stimulating reforms along the lines of the ENP action plans. The motivating concept of the Governance Facility to provide additional financial support to best-performing countries is welcomed. This should reward real progress made in terms of objectives related to human rights and democratic governance, be based on transparent allocation criteria, and be used to further support the reform process.

Eastern European Neighbourhood: the report notes that that democratic neighbours which are clearly identifiable as European countries and which respect the rule of law may in principle apply for membership of the EU if they meet the Copenhagen criteria. It reiterates that the current negotiations with **Ukraine** should result in the conclusion of an association agreement which contributes to Ukraine's prospects in Europe and initiates the corresponding process, including the possibility of EU membership. A corresponding approach should be taken in relations to **Moldova**.

However, with regard to **Belarus**, Parliament is seriously concerned by the lack of a positive response on the part of the government of Belarus to the conditional cooperation offer formulated by the Commission on 21 November 2006. It condemns the continued executions carried out in Belarus, the only country in Europe still imposing the death penalty, and other violations by Belarusian authorities of fundamental human rights and freedoms, and calls upon them to release all political prisoners and to stop any oppression of democratic forces. The EU should provide more effective support for civil society, free media and political parties committed to democracy. Parliament encourages the Commission to make more effective use of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), and to ensure that the means provided by the EU financial instruments cannot be misused by the Belarusian government against Belarusian citizens and civil society. Belarus has the same European vocation and perspectives as Ukraine and Moldova, once it embraces democracy, respects fundamental human rights and freedoms and enhances the rule of law.

Parliament is convinced that a motivating framework with medium-term implementation targets should be established, based on a new generation of association agreements to be negotiated with ENP countries which respect fundamental European values, are willing to integrate more closely with the EU and demonstrate objective performance in terms of ENP action plan implementation. Those agreements should envisage the development of the bilateral relationship with the EU in progressive stages, negotiating concrete conditions and timetables to be met, including binding performance benchmarks to be specified in the jointly adopted action plans, and accompanied by a regular monitoring process. Parliament reiterates its earlier proposal to develop with those countries clearly identifiable as European deep free trade agreements in the context of a possible 'European Economic Area Plus'.

It commends the conclusion of the visa facilitation and readmission agreements with Ukraine, as well as the initiation of such a process with Moldova, and urges that similar agreements be negotiated with the South Caucasus countries. The prospect of a visa-free regime should be envisaged in the long term. In the case of Georgia the progress of reforms and the unintended negative impact of the visa facilitation agreement between the EU and Russia on the settlement of conflicts in the breakaway **Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia** necessitate a speedy conclusion of the visa facilitation agreement between Georgia and the EU. Members believe that the gradual integration of the EU's eastern neighbours into the European Energy Community should be pursued, and urge that reforms of energy sectors be implemented as a matter of priority. The report underlines the need for a stronger involvement on the part of the EU in frozen conflicts, inter alia through confidence-building programmes, conflict management and projects on education, culture and civil society building in breakaway territories.

Parliament calls on **Turkey** to establish normal diplomatic relations and to re-open its land border with its neighbour **Armenia** as part of the confidence-building measures necessary for lasting peace and economic integration in the region. Turkey and Armenia should commence a frank discussion on all outstanding issues. It also underlines the importance of elaborating a more sophisticated policy for the Black Sea area, complementing the ENP, and emphasises the importance of having Turkey and Russia as partners in the development of a viable strategy for that region. The report considers it important to enhance the parliamentary dimension of the political partnership between the European Parliament and the countries involved in the eastern part of the ENP and suggests, therefore, the setting-up of an **EU-Neighbourhood-East Parliamentary Assembly (EURO-NEST)**, following the example of the multilateral parliamentary assemblies already established with the participation of the European Parliament, and involving the Parliaments of Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, as well as pro-democracy observers from Belarus.

Parliament stresses the need to use the strategic partnership between the **EU and Russia** to insist that fundamental human rights and freedoms, international law, democratic choice and the rule of law be respected as principles governing the approach of both partners to the shared neighbourhood. Parliament calls on the Russian authorities to assume their responsibility to help restore the territorial integrity of ENP countries, to comply with Russia's obligation to protect minorities in areas where it is involved in peace-keeping operations, and not to oppose possible European involvement in civilian and military peace-keeping operations in the frozen conflict areas. It regrets the use of energy resources as a tool for the realisation of political objectives, and invites Russia to enter into a constructive dialogue with the EU and our common neighbours about possibilities for deepening multilateral cooperation in the Black Sea area.

Distinctive and far-reaching cooperation should be developed between the European Union and the countries of Central Asia. Given **Kazakhstan's** key political, economic and energy role in this region, as well as its distinctive and successful secular multi-ethnic structures, this country could be the first example of a reinforced relationship between the countries of Central Asia and the European Union, subject however to Kazakhstan's undertaking extensive political reforms, with special attention being paid to the respecting of human rights and democratic principles.

Southern Mediterranean Neighbourhood: the European Union should actively support and encourage the reform processes in the southern ENP countries, as the potential benefits of far-reaching political, economic and social reforms amply exceed their cost. MEPs call on the Commission to further explore the various options for the next generation of broad-scope agreements with the Southern ENP countries including provision for arrangements to implement the human rights clause as well as the creation of a free trade area. Those bilateral agreements should not be at the expense of furthering multilateral cooperation in the region, and in particular the pursuit of the Barcelona Process goals, including the creation of a free trade area. Parliament calls on the Member States to reflect on possible ways of strengthening cooperation, including by means of increased flexibility in opening agricultural and labour markets in the future, in ways compatible with social protection and equity. The Southern ENP countries

must redouble their efforts to open economic systems to a greater extent and to harmonise their economic rules with the relevant parts of the EU acquis. Parliament; stresses the need to grant Mediterranean countries the right to control the pace at which their markets are opened up and their national economic and social development strategies. Members regret that, although, since the beginning of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, substantial progress has been achieved as regards democracy and human rights, this progress has not been sufficient. They urge the Commission to continue working with governments, regional and local authorities and civil society actors in these countries. The report acknowledges the different circumstances, interests and priorities of each of the southern countries, which are taken into account in the negotiation and implementation of action plans. It stresses the utmost importance of an increase in regional cooperation within the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) framework and underlines that the **ENP in no way replaces or competes with the EMP**, but that the two policies are complementary, making it possible to combine the multilateral approach of the Barcelona Process with the bilateral perspective.

Lastly, Parliament reiterates the need for stronger political will on the part of the EU institutions and the Member States to engage actively in conflict resolution in the region, whilst preventing the conflicts from standing in the way of the development of the ENP. The ENP will not reach its full potential without resolving conflicts which make regional cooperation difficult or impossible.

The role of the European Parliament: Parliament reiterates its commitment to continue to scrutinise the implementation of the ENP, in particular by making use of its powers, including, as a last resort, its budgetary powers, and by continuing the dialogue with the Commission concerning the application of the ENPI and the EIDHR. It intends to examine regularly the ENP progress reports, but regrets the fact that it has not been consulted on the ENP Action Plans, the assessment of their implementation or progress in the discussions within the human rights subcommittees.