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A new parliamentary effort to create a stability pact in the South Caucasus

Information report¹

Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy

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Summary

The Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy deeply regrets that relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan have deteriorated to a point where concrete proposals for the establishment of instruments for co-operation between the three South Caucasian States cannot be considered.

It decides, however, to publish its efforts as an information report.

1. Reference to committee: [Doc. 12680](#), Reference 3802 of 3 October 2011. Information report approved by the committee on 24 January 2013.

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1. Introduction

1. Article 3 of the Statute of the Council of Europe states that “[e]very member of the Council of Europe must accept the principles of the rule of law and of the enjoyment by all persons within its jurisdiction of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and collaborate sincerely and effectively in the realisation of the aim of the Council as specified in Chapter I”.

2. In its [Opinions 221 \(2000\)](#) and [222 \(2000\)](#), respectively on Armenia’s and Azerbaijan’s applications for membership of the Council of Europe, adopted on 28 June 2000, the Parliamentary Assembly expressed the view that both countries were “able and willing to fulfil the provisions of Article 3 of the Statute”. The Assembly also pointed out that “the accession of both Armenia and Azerbaijan could help to establish the climate of trust necessary for a solution to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh”.

3. In both these opinions, the Assembly noted that “the frequency of meetings between the presidents of the two countries has been stepped up. The speakers of the parliaments of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia have decided to institute regional parliamentary co-operation, consisting in particular of meetings of the speakers of the parliaments and parliamentary seminars to be held in the capitals of the three countries and in Strasbourg. The first meeting in the region, which was held in Tbilisi in September 1999, made it possible to establish an atmosphere of trust and détente between the parliamentary delegations of Armenia and Azerbaijan”. Finally the Assembly called on the Armenian and Azerbaijani authorities “to pursue their dialogue with a view to achieving a peaceful settlement of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh and giving new impetus to regional co-operation”.

4. The rapporteur is of the opinion that the people living in the South Caucasus deserve to have a better future and increased opportunities for economic development, and also not to be hostages of an ongoing conflict which deprives them of the opportunity for a better life.

5. This requires a “bottom-up” approach, starting with non-controversial areas for co-operation not only between decision-makers, but also between ordinary citizens. The aim is to improve the climate of relations in the South Caucasus, eliminate hate, and encourage dialogue with a view to finding a lasting solution to the conflict. In this respect, the positive example of the Stability Pact for South-East Europe could be taken into consideration.

6. The idea of institutionalising co-operation in the South Caucasus was launched for the first time at the sixth Summit of OSCE Heads of State, held in Istanbul in November 1999, by both President Kocharian of Armenia and President Aliyev of Azerbaijan; it was then reiterated by outgoing Turkish President Demirel in January 2000, and again by Mr Kocharian in March 2000. However, as Mr Adrian Severin wrote in his 2006 report on the establishment of a Stability Pact for the South Caucasus ([Doc. 11082](#)), objections raised by Russia and Iran to various aspects of these proposals left them without follow up.

7. The first sitting of the Plenary Assembly of the South Caucasus Parliamentary Initiative (SCPI) was held on 20 December 2003 in Craigellachie, Scotland, with the participation of parliamentary delegations from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, and was led by a rotating presidency. During this event, a formal bilateral meeting between the Armenian and Azerbaijani parliamentary delegations was also organised. The second sitting of the Plenary Assembly of the SCPI was held in Sofia, Bulgaria, from 1 to 3 July 2004, at which a By-Law of this parliamentary forum was adopted. A representative of the Dutch Presidency of the European Union and the Chairperson-in-office of the OSCE, as well as the Speaker of the Bulgarian Parliament and several members of the Bulgarian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly, participated in and contributed to the work of this sitting. This forum was active until 2007; its activities were subsequently suspended in 2008 due to a lack of political will to continue.

8. It is already 20 years since the OSCE Council (then the “CSCE Council”) requested the Chairman-in-Office to convene, as soon as possible, a conference on Nagorno-Karabakh, to take place in Minsk, in order to provide an ongoing forum for negotiations towards a peaceful settlement of the crisis. The Minsk Group, co-chaired by France, Russia and the United States, is still in charge of the international community’s effort to find a political solution to this conflict, but to date it has not been possible to hold the conference.

2. The first Parliamentary Assembly initiative

9. Based on my experience as Assembly rapporteur on the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, and being native to this region, I tabled, on 5 May 2004, a motion for a recommendation on the establishment of a stability pact on the Caucasian Region ([Doc. 10175](#)). The Political Affairs Committee appointed Mr Adrian Severin, member of the Romanian delegation to the Assembly and Chairperson of the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE, as rapporteur.

10. In its report on the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), adopted in 2005, the European Parliament expressed its support for this idea. This encouraged the Assembly to move forward with it, hoping that, with the support of the two assemblies, it would have a chance of success.

11. The European Parliament organised a hearing in Brussels on 22 February 2006, on “Promoting Stability and Democratization in Our Neighbourhood: What Role for the EU in the South Caucasus?”. The Political Affairs Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly organised another hearing in Brussels on 12 May 2006 with the participation of representatives of the three countries concerned, the European Union, and other international players.

12. It was obvious at the time that the establishment of a stability pact for the South Caucasus would require the full and active support of all those concerned.

13. The Assembly noted in 2006, however, that the idea of a Stability Pact for the South Caucasus did not have sufficient support from all parties concerned, in particular the three Caucasus Republics, but also the European Union, Russia, Turkey and the United States. The hearings in Brussels had shown that all those concerned, involved or having a vested interest in the project seemed to be, for the time being, indifferent or even against the idea of the establishment of a stability pact for the South Caucasus.

14. On behalf of the Political Affairs Committee, Mr Severin presented his report on 18 October 2006 and, in November 2006, the Assembly adopted [Resolution 1525 \(2006\)](#) and [Recommendation 1771 \(2006\)](#) on the establishment of a Stability Pact for the South Caucasus. Among other considerations, the Assembly pointed out that the pact should include the withdrawal of foreign military forces from the internationally recognised territory of another country, it being clear that co-operation was unrealistic as long as one country occupied the territory of another.

15. Whilst it resolved to pursue its efforts aimed at facilitating regional co-operation at the parliamentary level, the Assembly recommended that the Committee of Ministers:

- consider the idea of the establishment of a stability pact for the South Caucasus;
- consider the possibility of organising an international conference on security and co-operation in the South Caucasus, with its main goal being to assess the specific needs and to establish the practical conditions for launching such a stability pact in agreement with all those concerned;
- invite the authorities of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia to launch a serious political debate on this subject in their respective countries;
- invite all other member States to examine the idea and consult other international players, particularly the European Union, on the possible establishment of a stability pact.

16. In its reply of 16 July 2007 (CM/AS(2007)Rec1771 final), the Committee of Ministers indicated that it shared the Assembly's concerns about the continued lack of a political solution to the various “frozen” conflicts in the South Caucasus and concurred with the idea of establishing reinforced regional co-operation that would help create a positive climate across the region, foster its economic development, reduce tensions and facilitate mutual understanding.

17. The Committee of Ministers considered, however, as did the Assembly, that the idea of a stability pact in the region had not yet gained sufficient, active, unreserved support from all the parties concerned, and that they were not yet ready to involve themselves in such a project. The time did not seem ripe to hold an international conference on the subject.

3. The second initiative

18. In 2011, the situation in the Caucasus region had not improved, notwithstanding the efforts aimed at strengthening democratic processes and promoting peaceful coexistence in Council of Europe member States from the region, and despite continuing work by the OSCE Minsk Group on the situation regarding Nagorno-Karabakh.

19. Unfortunately, not much has changed at the level of regional stabilisation. On the contrary, the rhetoric between Armenia and Azerbaijan has toughened. There are mutual threats of war and, without a peace agreement and co-operation between the countries in the region, there is a genuine risk of the conflict escalating.

20. Given the lack of success of all the measures taken in the last five years, and considering that the views of the parties concerned on a stability pact in the Caucasus might have evolved since 2007, a new motion for a resolution on a new parliamentary effort to create a stability pact in the Caucasus was tabled on 30 June 2011 by Mr Gross and others ([Doc. 12680](#)). The Political Affairs Committee appointed me as rapporteur on 14 November 2011.

21. The motion indicated that the Assembly should:

- consider the necessity for the creation of a permanent dialogue and political, economic and cultural co-operation between the States from the Caucasus region;
- invite Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia to co-operate more actively with the Council of Europe and the European Union in order to achieve and strengthen stability and democracy in the Caucasus region;
- invite the parties and civil society representatives of the countries concerned to discuss this idea and to reach an agreement for the establishment of a stability pact for the Caucasus region;
- actively support and assist the OSCE Minsk Group in its effort to reach a lasting peace agreement.

22. To pursue our work at committee level, I started by consulting our colleagues from the three South Caucasus member States on their readiness to act with a view to establishing such a pact. Fact-finding missions to the area and a parliamentary hearing with the participation of those concerned were also proposed as being appropriate for achieving this goal.

23. In this respect, the success of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, which had been established by the European Union in co-operation with key international organisations operating in the region, could be an example. The concept of this Pact was the following: under the aegis of the Stability Pact, the countries concerned would elaborate projects of common interest involving two or three of them in different areas including infrastructure, economy, environment and social development. The Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe did not have its own funds; its role consisted of looking for possible sources of financing and bringing together projects and donors.

24. At the beginning of 2012, meetings were held between the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan, which seemed encouraging for an improvement of the situation in the South Caucasus. For example, on 23 January 2012, the two Presidents met in Krasnaja Poljana, near the resort of Sochi. The meeting was mediated by the then Russian President, Mr Medvedev.

25. With the committee's authorisation, I went to Georgia from 4 to 7 June 2012 in order to consult the Georgian authorities on the proposal to set up instruments for co-operation between the three south Caucasian States.

26. During this visit, I met representatives of international organisations, parliamentarians, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Mr Tornike Gordadze, the Ambassador of Armenia, Mr Hovhannes Manoukian, and representatives from the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies. The Ambassador of Azerbaijan, whom I had also asked to meet, was not available.

27. I was pleased to note that both the government and the opposition in Georgia supported the idea of establishing a stability pact in the South Caucasus. My interlocutors stated, however, that such a pact could only be successful if the Council of Europe and the European Union were to be actively involved in it and were ready to be the driving force. Georgia, for its part, was ready to be a partner in this process.

28. The Speaker of the Parliament, Mr David Bakradze, told me that Georgia would support any initiative whose aim was to increase stability in the region.

29. The Armenian Ambassador felt that the initiative was positive. He recalled, however, the role of the Minsk Group in the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and advised that its work should not be interfered with.

30. During the Parliamentary Assembly's June 2012 part-session, I met with Mr Davit Harutyunyan and Mr Samad Seyidov, Heads of the Armenian and Azeri delegations respectively, who agreed with my plan to visit both capitals and then, if reactions were positive, to organise a parliamentary round table to discuss how best to pursue the initiative.

31. A conference on Georgia's European Way took place in Batumi in July 2012 in which the Presidents of both Armenia and Azerbaijan, together with European Union Commissioner Füle, responsible for enlargement and European neighbourhood policy, were due to participate. If the presidents had participated, even if they did not hold direct talks, it would have shown a certain change in the attitudes of both countries towards possible reconciliation. Unfortunately this was not the case.

32. After the elections in Georgia in October 2012, a new political force – the “Georgian dream” coalition – came to power, and it is not clear yet whether or not it will pursue the commitments of the previous Government of Georgia in this respect.

33. Encouraged by a first, definitely positive visit, I started preparing a visit to Baku and Yerevan, due to have taken place in September 2012. Sadly, the Safarov case² at the beginning of September, and the serious deterioration of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan which ensued, rendered my visit inopportune. The Assembly held a current affairs debate on the Safarov case on 4 October 2012.

4. Conclusion

34. Today, as in 2006, the establishment of instruments for co-operation between the three south Caucasian States would require the full and active support of all those concerned. Unfortunately, the climate, already unfavourable, has deteriorated to such a point that I do not consider it advisable to put forward concrete proposals at this stage.

35. Armenia and Azerbaijan must, however, be reminded of the commitments they entered into when they joined the Council of Europe, commitments which are monitored by the Assembly's Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee).

36. The invitation extended by the President of the Assembly to the leaders of the delegations of Armenia and Azerbaijan to the Parliamentary Assembly should be welcomed, but a greater involvement of the Assembly is needed.

37. The resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict could open up the opportunity to establish a stability pact and to promote greater regional co-operation in the South Caucasus. This is not only desirable for the Council of Europe, but also it is first and foremost in the interest of the people of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

38. During an exchange of views on this issue, held in Turin on 14 December 2012, the leader of the Armenian delegation, Mr Davit Harutyunyan, stated that, in the meantime, co-operation would be acceptable for Armenia in non-controversial areas such as:

- environment;

2. See the press releases:

http://assembly.coe.int/ASP/NewsManager/EMB_NewsManagerView.asp?ID=7905; www.coe.int/t/secretarygeneral/sg/default_EN.asp; www.coe.int/t/commissioner/News/2012/120904Azerbaijan_en.asp.

- trans-boundary water problems;
- radio-frequencies;
- cross-border co-operation to promote economic development; ensure secure and efficient borders; promote people-to-people co-operation through land border programmes between two or more countries sharing a common border; and multilateral programmes covering a sea basin;
- transnational co-operation against cybercrime.

39. On 21 January 2013, the Azeri delegation sent me its position on this information report, further to which I made some corrections. The positive point is the fact that “the Azerbaijani delegation shares the view that there is a need to eliminate hate and establish trust in the region”, even if it feels that the differences between the two regions make it impossible to apply, in the South Caucasus, the example of the Security Pact for South Eastern Europe. It should also be noted as positive that the delegation believes “that public discussions on the issue should continue with a view to establishing common ground among the South Caucasian States. In this regard, the Azerbaijani delegation is of the opinion that contacts and interactions among the delegations of the South Caucasian States to the Parliamentary Assembly can contribute to this process, once these discussions are based on a concrete agenda.

40. The Azeri delegation “supports the idea of organising an international conference for security and co-operation in the South Caucasus, with its main goal being to assess the specific needs and to establish the practical conditions for launching such a Stability Pact”. It also “shares the necessity for the creation of a permanent dialogue between the States from the Caucasus region”, while regretting “that the conditions present on the ground are not conducive for that and, for the time being, these measures are not feasible in the region”.

41. As for the instruments for co-operation between the three South Caucasian States, the Azerbaijani delegation would like to “focus on current interactions among the parliamentary delegations to the PACE, which could contribute to the promotion of the idea of the stability pact at this stage of affairs”. However, it feels that “while Armenia continues to question the territorial integrity and internationally recognised borders of the Republic of Azerbaijan, there simply cannot be any ‘non-controversial’ issue between the two countries. Co-operation across the occupied territories is impossible both politically and practically”.

42. Provided that the three delegations concerned agree, the committee could organise a round table on these issues as a follow-up to this information report.

Appendix – Relevant Assembly texts

Resolution 1525 (2006) on the establishment of a Stability Pact for the South Caucasus

Recommendation 1771 (2006) on the establishment of a Stability Pact for the South Caucasus

Opinion 221 (2000) on Armenia's application for membership of the Council of Europe

Resolution 1532 (2007) on the honouring of obligations and commitments by Armenia

Resolution 1837 (2011) on the functioning of democratic institutions in Armenia

Opinion 222 (2000) on Azerbaijan's application for membership of the Council of Europe

Resolution 1750 (2010) on the functioning of democratic institutions in Azerbaijan

Resolution 1917 (2013) on the honouring of obligations and commitments by Azerbaijan

Opinion 209 (1999) on Georgia's application for membership of the Council of Europe

Resolution 1363 (2004) on the functioning of democratic institutions in Georgia

Resolution 1801 (2011) on the honouring of obligations and commitments by Georgia