



Euronest records progress despite tensions on Nagorno Karabakh

General

Energy and security, a stronger role for parliamentary democracy and civil society as well as economic reform assistance to the EU's Eastern neighbours were the key topics of the second Euronest meeting concluded on Wednesday in Baku, Azerbaijan. Resolutions were adopted on all these issues as well as one calling for proper healthcare for Yulia Tymoshenko.

Nagorno Karabakh was unsurprisingly the elephant in the room, proving to be, "one of the most dividing issues in this parliamentary assembly", as admitted by Co-President MEP Kristian Vigenin (S&D, BG).

"This session was proof that we have been drawing lessons from our experience and was a sign of common effort of all partners to make the session a success", said Co-President of Euronest and Ukraine's former foreign minister and MP Boris Tarasyuk.

Mr Vigenin commended the ability of Armenia and Azerbaijan to sit at the same table despite their difficulties. "What we have seen in this session is a very European approach, and I am proud of it", he said.

The issue of Nagorno Karabakh

While expressing hope that the conflict will "not last forever", Mr Vigenin pointed out that Euronest was not the "format" intended to solve bilateral conflicts, and placing this issue high on the agenda would only split members. "We can only strive to provide more trust, understanding, channels of dialogue", said Mr Vigenin.

Mr Tarasyuk stressed that even though he understood and respected the feelings of Azerbaijan, which was hosting the session, a multilateral assembly could not afford to concentrate on issues that are not equally important for all sides. He mentioned that other countries also had issues they could insist on bringing up, such as Transnistria for Moldova, and Abkhazia and South Ossetia for Georgia.

"Unfortunately the Soviet Union has left us this very sad heritage and the problems in the Eastern neighbourhood are the direct consequences of this", added Tarasyuk.

The reached agreements

The Euronest interparliamentary adopted five resolutions where MEPs and MPs of Eastern partners:

1. warn about **common energy security threats**. The environmental aspect should play a more important role in energy production East of Europe, and threats to the energy generating facilities (nuclear power plants, dams, oil platforms, pipelines and terminals, oil refineries and chemical plants) in the partner countries should be considered also against the interests of the EU;

Press release

2. call to **strengthen the role and place of parliaments** to resist more robustly future challenges to democracy. The resolution particularly notes that forthcoming parliamentary and presidential elections in partner countries need to be free, fair, democratic and conducted according to the OSCE standards. It urges the Member States and the Eastern European Partners to ensure the fundamental right of citizens to information, respecting the principle of media independence and deplors the fact that many journalists have been subjected to acts of intimidation and harassment because of their work. The better promotion of a freely accessible internet was also welcomed;

3. call for **more support for economic approximation of Eastern partners**. The structural economic and public administration reforms that Eastern partner countries must undergo to conclude deep and comprehensive free trade agreements (DCFTA) with the EU are expected to be "painful" in the short term, as they require substantial changes both in the legal and economic cultures. The resolution calls on the EU to provide financial and technical assistance to implement those reforms.

4. urge the **empowerment of civil society**. As in many Eastern Partnership countries rights and freedoms of civil society are restricted, especially rights of association and assembly, the resolution stresses the importance of freedom of speech and media access, as well as avoiding the spread of disinformation and hate among groups.

5. An urgent resolution calling for Ukraine's former Prime-minister **Yulia Tymoshenko** to be provided proper healthcare.

What next?

The Euronest parliamentary assembly will meet for its third ordinary session in Brussels, on 28-29 May 2013. One of the most important reports to be adopted in next session is expected to be the one on security challenges in the region.

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