

Doc. 11362
30 July 2007

The establishment of a Stability Pact for the South Caucasus

Recommendation 1771 (2006)

Reply from the Committee of Ministers
adopted at the 1002nd meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (12 July 2007)

1. The Committee of Ministers informs the Parliamentary Assembly that the following reply was adopted by a majority as provided by Article 20 (d) of the Statute.
2. The Committee of Ministers has taken note with great interest of the texts adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly concerning the establishment of a stability pact for the South Caucasus.
3. As noted by the Assembly, the Council of Europe has played a very active role in the region since the accession of Georgia, and subsequently of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Thanks to its convention mechanisms and its reform support programmes it has helped to promote good governance and to strengthen democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the rights of national minorities. Moreover, by inviting these states to become members, the Organisation also aimed to create a climate conducive to overcoming the impediments to regional co-operation.
4. The Committee of Ministers shares the Assembly's concerns about the continued lack of a political solution to the various "frozen" conflicts in the South Caucasus. These conflicts have negative repercussions on political, social and economic progress in the region. They have impeded the emergence of regional co-operation covering the whole South Caucasus. The Committee of Ministers would point out at this juncture that, upon their accession, the countries concerned undertook to solve these conflicts through peaceful means and according to the principles of international law, rejecting any threat to resort to force.
5. The Committee of Ministers concurs with the idea of establishing reinforced regional co-operation which would help create a positive climate across the region, foster its economic development, reduce tensions and facilitate mutual understanding.
6. The Council of Europe has moreover already taken a number of initiatives in this direction, not necessarily confined to the three countries concerned. The Kyiv Initiative launched in September 2005 following the STAGE project is intended to encourage democratic development through culture in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. A proposal for a Black Sea Euro region has also been launched by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. Other projects involving several countries in the region relate to history teaching or support for civil society operators.
7. These initiatives are not isolated. Other forms of international co-operation concern the region, such as the Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM), the Organisation for Black Sea Economic Co-operation, the Community of Independent States or the Euro-Asian Economic Community. In this connection, mention must be made of the relevance of the European Union's European Neighbourhood Policy. In 2006, the three states signed agreements with the European Union on the implementation of action plans under this policy. These action plans concern pursuit of the reform process, an area in which the Council of Europe and the European Commission are intensifying their collaboration. They also have a strong regional dimension. The Committee of Ministers recalls the conclusions of the 22nd Quadripartite meeting between the Council of Europe and the European Union, which, in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), considered that regular consultations involving the countries concerned,

representatives of the Council of Europe and the European Union could take stock of progress achieved and look forward. Furthermore, the Memorandum of Understanding between the Council of Europe and the European Union signed in May 2007 notes that consultations between the European Commission, the Secretariat of the Council of Europe and as a general rule the Council of Europe member countries concerned will continue to be organised to discuss priorities of co-operation in the framework of the joint programmes. The above-mentioned action plans offer increased possibilities for co-operation in foreign and security policy matters, in particular regarding issues of regional stability and crisis management or the development of multilateral co-operation in the Black Sea region. The ENP should also enhance the participation of the countries concerned in regional co-operation initiatives in areas such as the environment, water management, energy, education, border management, transport and communications.

8. While appreciating the arguments advanced in Recommendation 1771 (2006) in favour of a stability pact for the South Caucasus, drawing upon the Balkans precedent but adapted to the region's particularities, the Committee of Ministers is not convinced at this stage that the current efforts can and should be supplemented with an initiative of this kind.

9. As the Assembly points out, the possible establishment of a stability pact for the South Caucasus would in any case require the active, unreserved support of all the potential participants in shaping such an initiative. The Committee of Ministers, however, considers, and here it shares the Assembly's concerns, that the idea of a stability pact in the region has not yet gained sufficient, active, unreserved support from all the parties concerned, who are not yet ready to involve themselves in such a project. The time does not seem ripe to hold an international conference on the subject.

10. The Committee of Ministers nonetheless strongly encourages the authorities of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia to launch a constructive debate on overcoming the impediments to regional co-operation and to seize, through the international community, every opportunity to settle frozen conflicts and to establish forums conducive to the emergence of solid, sustainable political, economic and cultural regional co-operation on issues of common concern.