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The Council of Europe and the Eastern Partnership of the European Union

Report[1]
Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy
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Summary

The Eastern Partnership of the European Union aims to build a comprehensive relationship between the European Union and five member States of the Council of Europe – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine – as well as Belarus, on the basis of mutual interests and joint commitments to the fundamental values of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms. These are the core values to which all Council of Europe member States, including the five countries participating in the Partnership, have committed themselves upon their accession to the Organisation.

Although the Council of Europe actively contributes to the implementation of the Partnership, its role is not appropriately reflected in the basic political documents and in public statements on the Partnership. The report therefore calls on all the stakeholders of the Eastern Partnership to make the Council of Europe's standard-setting, advisory and monitoring role – including the findings of the Council of Europe monitoring mechanisms and the monitoring procedure of the Parliamentary Assembly – and its contribution to this process, more visible and duly acknowledged.

The report also expresses disappointment that, despite numerous initiatives, the Assembly has not so far been associated with the work of Euronest, the parliamentary structure of the Eastern Partnership. It insists on the need to seek synergies and complementarity at the parliamentary level and avoid overlaps and conflicting messages.

1. Reference to committee: Doc. 11843, Reference 3539 of 29 May 2009

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A. Draft resolution[2]

1. The Parliamentary Assembly takes note of the recent developments in the Eastern Partnership, a political initiative by the European Union aimed at building a comprehensive partnership with six post-Soviet States (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine) based on mutual interests and joint commitments to the fundamental values of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as the principles of market economy, sustainable development and good governance.

2. The Assembly refers to its Resolution 1812 (2011) and Recommendation 1971 (2011) on the impact of the Eastern Partnership of the European Union on governance and economic development in eastern Europe, and reiterates that five of the six partner countries are fully fledged members of the Council of Europe and are therefore bound by general obligations and specific commitments as regards the fundamental principles of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law entered into upon their accession to the Council of Europe.

3. As the degree of the European Union's partnership with the partner countries is conditional upon their progress on the path of democratic reform, the Assembly believes that the Eastern Partnership is a welcome co-operation framework insofar as it may encourage and contribute to political, institutional and legal reforms in the partner countries, thus helping them to meet their statutory obligations and commitments stemming from their Council of Europe membership, for the benefit of their peoples.

4. The Assembly shares the view of the Committee of Ministers, expressed in its reply to Recommendation 1971 (2011), that "the Council of Europe's role in the implementation of the Eastern Partnership … should be seen in the wider framework of the ongoing strengthening of the partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Union, which is built on the Memorandum of Understanding of 2007 between the two organisations and on the relevant provisions of the European Union Lisbon Treaty".

5. Recalling its Resolution 1836 (2011) on the impact of the Lisbon Treaty on the Council of Europe, the Assembly stresses once more that the role of the Council of Europe, as defined in the 2007 Memorandum of Understanding, as "the benchmark for human rights, the rule of law and democracy in Europe" should be further enhanced, fully reaffirmed and effectively recognised by all European Union institutions, including in the Eastern Partnership framework. In this respect, the Assembly:

5.1. firmly believes that the best way for the Eastern Partnership countries to make progress in the fields of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, thus achieving the political goals of the Eastern Partnership, is to comply fully with their statutory obligations and specific commitments undertaken in the framework of their Council of Europe membership;

5.2. welcomes the understanding, which seems to prevail at the working level of the Eastern Partnership process, that the benchmarks to assess progress of the partner countries in these areas are those of the Council of Europe, and that no new additional benchmarks are needed;

5.3. deems it essential that the findings and recommendations of the Council of Europe monitoring mechanisms, including the monitoring procedure of the Assembly, form the basis of the assessment of the progress achieved by the partner countries in the field of reforms regarding democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law;

5.4. recalls in this context that "The Stockholm Programme – An open and secure Europe serving and protecting the citizen" of the European Union provides that "duplication with other evaluation mechanisms should be avoided, but synergies and co-operation should be sought, in particular with the work of the Council of Europe".

6. Against this background, the Assembly can only regret that the Council of Europe standard-setting, advisory and monitoring role is not appropriately reflected in the basic political documents of the Eastern Partnership and in public statements on the Partnership. It deems it necessary to make the Council of Europe contribution to the Eastern Partnership more visible and duly acknowledged. It further regrets that the Council of Europe was not associated in any form with the recent Warsaw Summit of the Eastern Partnership.

7. As regards the implementation of the Eastern Partnership, the Assembly welcomes the contribution of the Council of Europe to the work carried out in both bilateral and multilateral tracks, in particular in the framework of Platform 1 on democracy, good governance and stability, where four areas of co-operation (electoral standards, support to the judiciary, the fight against corruption and the fight against cybercrime) are

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 14 December 2011

defined as priorities. It further welcomes the agreement between the Council of Europe and the European Commission on a 4 million euro financial Facility instrument to enable the former to implement concrete activities in these priority areas.

8. The Assembly welcomes the fact that the Eastern Partnership seeks to develop broader links between societies and peoples, including at parliamentary, local and civil society levels, and calls for effective synergies between these initiatives and similar activities carried out in the Council of Europe. It welcomes the ongoing co-operation between the Council of Europe Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) and the Civil Society Forum established in the framework of the Eastern Partnership.

9. In particular, the Assembly takes note of the establishment of the EU-Neighbourhood East Parliamentary Assembly (Euronest) aimed at supporting, promoting and consolidating the Eastern Partnership process at parliamentary level. It stands ready to develop contacts with Euronest so as to seek synergies and complementarity and avoid overlaps and conflicting messages.

10. The Assembly takes note that Belarus participates in a limited manner in the Eastern Partnership process, and that its Parliament has not been allowed to sit in the Euronest Assembly. It refers to its previous resolutions on Belarus and reiterates its demands to the authorities of that country to engage in a democratisation process and ensure the respect of human rights and the rule of law in accordance with Belarus' political commitments as a participating State of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

11. The Assembly calls on the Council of Europe member States participating in the Eastern Partnership to:

11.1. make full use, in the framework of the Eastern Partnership and other bilateral and multilateral co-operation projects, of their capacity as members of the Council of Europe, and of all the instruments and tools at their disposal in our Organisation in order to make progress on reforms;

11.2. consider their co-operation with the European Union under the Eastern Partnership as an additional tool to ensure compliance with their commitments and obligations undertaken in the framework of their Council of Europe membership.

12. The Assembly calls on the parliaments of the Council of Europe member States participating in the Eastern Partnership, when participating in Euronest, to ensure synergy, co-ordination and continuity with the work carried out at the Assembly, including by appointing to their delegations members of parliament who sit at the Assembly, or who have previously been members of it.

13. The Assembly calls on the European Union, its member States and the organs of the Eastern Partnership to:

13.1. make systematically an explicit reference to the Council of Europe membership of five of the six partner countries, as well as to their ensuing obligations;

13.2. acknowledge and make more visible, in political documents and public statements on the Eastern Partnership, the standard-setting, advisory and monitoring role of the Council of Europe, as well as its operational capabilities involved in the implementation of the Partnership;

13.3. refer explicitly to, and to take fully into account, the findings of the Council of Europe monitoring mechanisms, including the monitoring procedure of the Assembly.

14. The Assembly resolves to step up its contacts with the European Parliament in line with its Resolution 1836 (2011) on the impact of the Lisbon Treaty on the Council of Europe, also with a view to its possible future involvement in Euronest.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Mr von Sydow, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. A motion for a recommendation entitled "The Council of Europe and the Eastern Partnership of the European Union" was tabled with the Parliamentary Assembly in February 2009. The motion was in response to the European Commission's communication on the "Eastern Partnership", aimed at substantially upgrading the level of political engagement of the European Union in its relations with six ex-Soviet States: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

2. According to the European Commission's communication, the Eastern Partnership would be based, *inter alia*, on mutual commitments to the rule of law, good governance, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities.

3. The motion for a recommendation notes that five of the six countries concerned are full members of the Council of Europe and have commitments and obligations deriving from their accession to our Organisation. It is therefore essential that the Council of Europe be fully involved in the implementation of this initiative in the areas of its core activities. It is also essential that the projects carried out in the framework of the Eastern Partnership, such as the establishment of a new Parliamentary Assembly, do not undermine existing institutions and mechanisms of co-operation.

4. My predecessor, Mr Dariusz Lipiński, was appointed rapporteur in June 2009. However, following the general elections in Poland in September 2011, Mr Dariusz Lipiński lost his parliamentary seat and was unable to complete the work on the report. At the meeting on 14 November 2011, the Political Affairs Committee took note of his request to step down as rapporteur. Due to the fact that the validity of the motion would expire on 31 December 2011, I was asked to finalise the report with a view to its adoption in committee on 14 December 2011.

5. I recall that, in May 2011, the Assembly adopted Resolution 1812 (2011) and Recommendation 1971 (2011) on the impact of the Eastern Partnership of the European Union on governance and economic development in eastern Europe, on the basis of a report prepared by our colleague Mr Andrea Rigoni for the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development. Mr Rigoni's report contains general information and a thorough analysis of the Eastern Partnership process.[3]

6. For this reason, and also due to the very short time at my disposal, I will limit myself to the latest developments in the Eastern Partnership, including the second Eastern Partnership summit in Warsaw (29-30 September 2011), the inauguration and the first session of the Euronest Assembly (May and September 2011), and the joint Communication of the European Commission and the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy "A new response to a changing Neighbourhood" (May 2011), with a focus on the aspects concerning the Council of Europe. For the rest, I refer colleagues to Mr Rigoni's comprehensive report.

2. From European Neighbourhood Policy towards Eastern Partnership

7. Following the enlargement of the European Union in 2004 and the accession of most of the countries of central and eastern Europe, the European Union focused on strengthening its relations and its co-operation with the countries on the eastern and southern borders of the European Union, which had no immediate prospects of becoming members of the Union.

8. With this in mind, in 2004, it introduced the European Neighbourhood Policy to avoid the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged European Union and its neighbours and to reinforce prosperity, stability and the security of all.

9. To strengthen this policy on its eastern borders and give it a multilateral framework, the European Union presented a new initiative: the Eastern Partnership, which was officially launched at a summit in Prague in May 2009.

3. See Doc. 12521

10. This initiative concerns six former Soviet States: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, and proposes that they build a comprehensive partnership with the European Union, based on mutual interests and joint commitments to the fundamental values of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as the principles of the market economy, sustainable development and good governance.

11. The Eastern Partnership seeks to create the necessary conditions to accelerate political association and further economic integration between the European Union and interested partner countries. It is expected to provide the European Union's support for political and socio-economic reforms in the partner countries and thereby improve the stability, security and prosperity of the European Union, the partner countries and the entire European continent.

12. Political dialogue between the European Union and the partner countries will be stepped up. With this in mind, meetings of heads of State or government of the Eastern Partnership will be held every two years. The second summit was held in Warsaw in September 2011, under the Polish presidency of the European Union. For their part, the ministers of foreign affairs will meet once a year.

13. The Eastern Partnership process combines two tracks which are intended to complement one another: bilateral and multilateral co-operation.

14. The bilateral track provides for enhanced co-operation between the European Union and each of the countries involved. It is central to the entire project. The main objectives of the Eastern Partnership, namely political association and economic integration between the participating countries and the European Union, are to be achieved with the aid of bilateral instruments such as association agreements, free trade agreements, assistance with institution building and visa liberalisation. However, the closeness of the relations with each country depends on the progress it makes with reforms.

15. The multilateral track is intended to supplement co-operation between the European Union and the participating countries with projects and initiatives common to all the partners, that is 27+6, and thereby promote regional co-operation between the partners. At the same time, it is possible that third countries may be invited to take part in such projects if that seems useful and is accepted by all the partners.

16. The practical work at multilateral level is arranged through four thematic platforms which meet at least twice a year and cover the main areas of co-operation, namely:

– democracy, good governance and stability;

– economic integration and convergence with European Union sectoral policies;

– energy security;

– contacts between people.

17. In addition to inter-government co-operation, the Partnership aims at building broader links between societies and peoples, including at parliamentary, local and civil society levels. An "EU-Neighbourhood East Parliamentary Assembly" ("Euronest") was launched in May 2011 and held its first ordinary meeting in September. An assembly of local and regional authorities should also be established, in addition to the Civil Society Forum which has been active since November 2009.

18. For the European Union, the launch of the Eastern Partnership was intended to recognise and highlight more clearly that the six countries concerned are much more than neighbours: they are part of Europe. However, the European Union made it clear from the outset that the countries concerned should not regard the Eastern Partnership as a step towards membership, even though it does not rule out that option.

19. The partners' views of the Eastern Partnership vary significantly from one country to another, depending on their attitudes and expectations regarding the European Union. Countries which have clearly indicated their desire to move closer to the European Union or, indeed, to join it (such as Ukraine) hoped the Eastern Partnership would bring tangible results in areas such as free trade and visa liberalisation. Insofar as the expected and promised results are proving slow to materialise, the initial interest is giving way to disappointment. Azerbaijan, which does not seek to move closer to the European Union, uses the Eastern Partnership as an additional framework for expanding co-operation with it in areas of interest to it. Belarus, which has only very limited contacts with the European Union, uses the partnership to establish contacts within a multilateral framework (it does not take part in the bilateral part of the Eastern Partnership).

3. The Council of Europe and the Eastern Partnership: the need to co-ordinate the new initiatives with existing co-operation

3.1. Overlapping between Eastern Partnership and Council of Europe activities

20. When the European Union announced the launching of the Eastern Partnership, there were a number of concerns and questions as to the usefulness of the initiative. Many of the activities in the political sphere of the Eastern Partnership – those relating to the promotion of democracy, the rule of law and human rights – appeared to overlap with the Council of Europe's activities. The Council of Europe's statutory aim is precisely to protect and promote these values and principles.

21. In this connection, it should be pointed out that five of the six countries taking part in the Eastern Partnership are Council of Europe member States and therefore have specific commitments and general obligations regarding certain fundamental principles (democracy, human rights and the rule of law).

3.2. Competing or mutually reinforcing initiatives? The need to fully involve the Council of Europe in the process

22. In the course of my predecessor's contacts with officials of the European Union and of the Council of Europe, he observed that there was some understanding of the advantages of Council of Europe participation in the Eastern Partnership for both the European Union and the partner countries.

23. Indeed, in the case of the multilateral aspects, representatives of the Council of Europe Secretariat are already taking part in and are actively contributing to the work of platform 1 (democracy, good governance and stability) and platform 4 (contacts between people). By way of example, reference should be made to the Council of Europe's contribution to the work of platform 1 in terms of combating corruption and improving the operation of judicial systems and to the work of platform 4 in the area of youth policies.

24. On a bilateral level, the documents defining the priorities of the co-operation between the European Union and the partner countries (for instance, the list of priorities of the EU-Ukraine Association Agenda for 2010) also refer to Council of Europe instruments and activities.

25. There seems to be general agreement both within the European Union and among the partner countries that the Eastern Partnership should not aim to establish new criteria for member States in the field of democracy, the rule of law and human rights, other than those laid down by the Council of Europe, and that the best way to ensure progress in these fields is for the States concerned to honour their commitments and obligations as members of the Council of Europe.

26. The above augurs well for co-operation between the Council of Europe, the European Union and the States concerned in implementing the priorities of the Eastern Partnership. We must maintain this positive momentum throughout the process and ensure that full use is made of the Council of Europe's potential, experience and expertise in bringing about the necessary changes in the countries concerned in order to achieve practical results. The Council of Europe also stands to gain, given that the promotion of democracy, the rule of law and human rights are at the heart of its work.

27. In this context, it is obvious that those Council of Europe's activities aimed at assisting Eastern Partnership participating countries with the implementation of standards should be enhanced, as should the mechanisms for monitoring compliance with commitments and obligations.

28. It is also important that the partner countries feel that they are fully in control of the process, in particular regarding the choice of priorities.

29. On this point, the new arrangements for financing co-operation between the European Union and the Council of Europe in the form of an overall "facility" (package of €4 million), which became operational in March 2011, offer greater flexibility and could meet the practical needs of the countries concerned more effectively – naturally, while taking account of the Council of Europe's remit and fields of activity.

30. We must also ensure a higher profile and greater recognition for the Council of Europe's role and contribution to the realisation of the Eastern Partnership. To this end, the Council of Europe's role as the standard-setting organisation, which seems to be recognised by the Eastern Partnership stakeholders, should be highlighted more clearly and systematically reasserted in European Union documents and declarations concerning the Eastern Partnership.

31. In this context, it is to be regretted that the Council of Europe was not associated in the second Eastern Partnership summit held in Warsaw in September 2011, despite a call by the Assembly to the Committee of Ministers to prepare a set of proposals on our Organisation's contribution to the implementation of the Eastern Partnership and to present it at the summit.[4] Furthermore, in the final declaration of the summit, there is not a single reference to the Council of Europe. In my view, the Ukrainian chairmanship of the Council of Europe missed an opportunity to highlight the role that our Organisation already plays in the process, and to make it even more prominent.

32. I should also refer to the joint Communication of the European Commission and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy "A new response to a changing Neighbourhood",[5] issued in May 2011. The paper reviews the EU policies in its neighbourhood (European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)) with a particular focus on the Eastern Partnership process, and concludes that "EU support to political reforms in neighbouring countries has met with limited results". It further states that "co-ordination between the EU, its Member States and main international partners is essential and can be improved".

33. Taking into account the fact that, in the 2007 Memorandum of Understanding between the Council of Europe and the European Union, the role of the former is defined as "the benchmark for human rights, the rule of law and democracy in Europe", one cannot help but come to the legitimate conclusion that the Council of Europe should be the main European Union partner when it comes to implementing reform policies in the Union's neighbours which are members of our Organisation. However, the joint communication, which is meant to define the strategy of the European Union for the years to come, contains only one single reference to the Council of Europe: "Boosting co-operation with the Council of Europe could also help in promoting compliance".

34. I therefore regret that the Council of Europe's standard-setting, advisory and monitoring role is not appropriately reflected in the basic political documents of the Eastern Partnership and in public statements on the Partnership. I deem it necessary to make the Council of Europe contribution to the Eastern Partnership more visible and duly acknowledged.

3.3. Special case: Belarus

35. Belarus is obviously a special case compared to the five other countries taking part in the Eastern Partnership.

36. First of all, its democracy and human rights record is extremely disappointing and continues to be a source of serious concern. The authorities of Belarus have failed, so far, to put the fundamental provisions of the Partnership, namely a commitment to democracy, the rule of law and human rights and fundamental freedoms, into practice. The developments in the country following the presidential election in December 2010 and, in particular, the repression of political opponents of the regime, do not bode well for the country's political development.

37. Moreover, Belarus, unlike the five other States, is not a member of the Council of Europe and has no commitments or obligations in the context of our Organisation.

38. Lastly, unlike the five other partner States, Belarus is not involved in the bilateral track of the Eastern Partnership. This makes it all the more difficult for the European Union to exert real influence over the political processes in the country through the Eastern Partnership instruments.

39. Nevertheless, the implementation of the multilateral track of the Eastern Partnership might encourage Belarus to undertake political reforms and to start bringing its legislation into line with our standards, which would in the long run facilitate its future accession to the Council of Europe.

40. In this context, it should be noted that, as a country participating in the multilateral track of the Eastern Partnership, Belarus has been invited to take part in all the multilateral activities for which the Council of Europe is responsible under platform 1 (democracy, good governance and stability) – even though it is not a member of the Council of Europe. More specifically, these activities cover four main areas: electoral standards, support to the judiciary, measures to combat cybercrime and the fight against corruption.

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4. See Recommendation 1971 (2011), paragraph 2.1
5. COM(2011)303, 25 May 2011, http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com_11_303_en.pdf

4. Parliamentary dimension: the need to avoid duplication

4.1. Establishment of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, its composition, aims and activities

41. The European Parliament proposed to set up an EU-Neighbourhood East Parliamentary Assembly (Euronest) to give the Eastern Partnership a parliamentary dimension – on the same principle as the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (EuroLAT) and the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA). This proposal was welcomed by the heads of State and government at the Prague summit at which the Eastern Partnership was officially launched in May 2009.

42. The European Parliament therefore decided to establish the Euronest Assembly, comprising 120 members: 60 members of the European Parliament and 60 members representing the parliaments of the partner countries (10 per country). The question is whether this formula ensures a balanced representation, given that the population of Ukraine (48 million inhabitants) is 16 times that of Armenia (3 million).

43. The assembly's launch, which was initially scheduled for March 2010, had to be deferred several times because of disagreement between the European Parliament and the Belarusian authorities on how the latter should be represented. The European Parliament does not recognise the legitimacy of the Belarusian Parliament and insisted on a mixed form of representation including leading opposition figures who are not members of parliament, which Belarus did not accept.

44. The speakers of parliaments of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia declared their common opinion on the necessity to include Belarusian MPs in Euronest. However, the events in Belarus after the presidential election of 19 December 2010 forced them to relinquish their position. Following the harassment of the opposition by the Belarusian authorities, it was decided that the Belarusian delegation would not be invited to join Euronest until such time as the OSCE recognises parliamentary elections in that country as democratic.

45. On 20 April 2011, the European Parliament finally agreed to launch Euronest without the official participation of the Belarusian Parliament. On 3 May 2011, Euronest was finally inaugurated in Brussels by 50 members of the European Parliament and 50 representatives of parliaments of the partner States (10 from each country, except for Belarus). The assembly adopted the constituent act and rules of procedure.

46. Euronest elected its two co-presidents, Kristian Vigenin (Bulgaria) and Borys Tarasyuk (Ukraine), as well as eight vice-presidents, to form a bureau: Vahan Hovhannisyan (Armenia), Elkhan Suleymanov (Azerbaijan), David Darchiashvili (Georgia), Igor Corman (Republic of Moldova), Traian Ungureanu (Romania), Ryszard Czarnecki (Poland), Gerben-Jan Gerbrandy (Netherlands) and Jacek Saryusz-Wolski (Poland). It is worth mentioning that Mr Elkhan Suleymanov and Mr David Darchiashvili are respectively members of the national delegations of Azerbaijan and Georgia to the Parliamentary Assembly. The delegations of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Ukraine include two Assembly members, while the delegation of Georgia includes four. Several delegations also comprise former members of our Assembly.

47. Euronest has established four standing committees: Committee on Political Affairs, Human Rights and Democracy; Committee on Economic Integration, Legal Approximation and Convergence with European Union Policies; Committee on Energy Security; and the Committee on Social Affairs, Education, Culture and Civil Society. Each of the committees is composed of 30 members: 15 from the European Parliament and 15 from the parliaments of the partner States.

48. Euronest has also set up two working groups, the first one on Belarus and the second one on working procedures.

49. Euronest meets, in principle, once a year, alternately in an Eastern Partnership country and on the premises of the European Parliament in one of its places of work (Brussels, Luxembourg or Strasbourg). The first regular meeting of Euronest was held in Strasbourg in September 2011.

4.2. Possible synergy and complementarity, and the need for co-ordination, with the Parliamentary Assembly

50. The establishment of the Euronest Assembly raises a number of questions, including among the parliamentarians from the partner countries taking part in it. Some believe that it would have been better to involve delegations from these countries in the work of the European Parliament, with observer status, rather than establishing a new bureaucratic and expensive institution with uncertain prospects.

51. The work of the Euronest Assembly is organised in four committees (see above) to ensure parliamentary monitoring and scrutiny of the four thematic platforms of the multilateral co-operation. If Euronest is called on to evaluate the progress made in achieving the objectives of the Eastern Partnership in the field of political reforms to consolidate democracy, the rule of law and the protection of human rights, the result will be a duplication of the activities of our Assembly – and even the risk of differences of evaluation and contradictions between the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and Euronest.

52. It will therefore be necessary to be very careful to avoid contradictions and possible conflicts and to ensure that the work of the two assemblies is co-ordinated and complementary.

53. One of the practical ways of making sure that the work is complementary would be to appoint as members of the Euronest Assembly representing partner States' parliaments, members of these States' delegations to the Parliamentary Assembly. This is already the case, at least in part, as regards some delegations, as mentioned above. However, it should become, if not the rule, at least regular practice.

54. In addition, in order to avoid any overlapping, we should think of arrangements and methods which allow the Parliamentary Assembly to participate in the work of the Euronest Assembly.

55. This topic was raised by Mr Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, the President of our Assembly, at his meetings with Mr Jerzy Buzek, the President of the European Parliament, and the chairs of the European Parliament's main political groups in early March 2010. Our president stressed the need for the two institutions to co-ordinate their policies and messages concerning countries that were the subject of Assembly monitoring and made it clear that the Assembly should be an active participant in Euronest.

56. The President of the Assembly also wrote to the President of the European Parliament on 15 March 2010 to stress once more the need for close Assembly involvement from the outset in the activities of the Euronest Assembly.

57. These steps were not, however, followed by any reaction on the European Parliament side. Our Assembly received no invitation to the inaugural sitting of Euronest, nor to its first regular meeting.

58. Nonetheless, I believe that our Assembly should continue to raise the point in our contacts with the European Parliament at various levels, including at joint meetings of political groups of the Assembly and the Parliament.

5. Conclusions

59. The Eastern Partnership aims at building a comprehensive partnership between the European Union and six post-Soviet States (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine) on the basis of mutual interests and joint commitments to the fundamental values of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as the principles of market economy, sustainable development and good governance.

60. Five of these six countries, with the exception of Belarus, are fully-fledged members of the Council of Europe and are therefore bound by general obligations and specific commitments as regards the fundamental principles of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law entered into upon their accession to our Organisation.

61. As the degree of the European Union's partnership with the partner countries is conditional upon their progress on the path of democratic reforms, the Eastern Partnership is a welcome co-operation framework insofar as it may encourage and contribute to political, institutional and legal reforms in the partner countries, thus helping them to meet their statutory obligations and commitments stemming from their Council of Europe membership, for the benefit of their peoples.

62. The Council of Europe contributes to the implementation of the Eastern Partnership at both bilateral and multilateral level, in particular in the framework of platform 1 on democracy, good governance and stability, where four areas of co-operation (electoral standards, support to the judiciary, the fight against corruption and the fight against cybercrime) are defined as priorities. We should welcome the agreement between the Council of Europe and the European Commission on a €4 million financial facility instrument to enable our Organisation to implement concrete activities in these priority areas.

63. However, it is regrettable that the Council of Europe's role is not appropriately reflected in the basic political documents of the Eastern Partnership and in public statements on the Partnership. The Council of Europe contribution to the Eastern Partnership must be made more visible and duly acknowledged.

64. In order to achieve this goal, we should call on all the stakeholders of the Eastern Partnership to make systematically an explicit reference to the Council of Europe membership of five out of the six partner countries, as well as to their ensuing obligations, to make more visible the standard-setting, advisory and monitoring role of the Council of Europe, as well as its operational capabilities involved in the implementation of the Partnership, and to refer explicitly to, and to take fully into account, the findings of the Council of Europe monitoring mechanisms, including the monitoring procedure of the Assembly.

65. While taking note of the establishment of an EU-Neighbourhood East Parliamentary Assembly (Euronest) aimed at supporting, promoting and consolidating the Eastern Partnership process at parliamentary level, we should insist on the need to seek synergies and complementarity and avoid overlaps and conflicting messages.

66. The parliaments of the Council of Europe member States participating in the Eastern Partnership should be invited, when participating in Euronest, to ensure synergy, co-ordination and continuity with the work carried out at the Assembly, including by appointing to their delegations members of parliament who sit in the Assembly, or who have previously been members of it.