Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 1409 (2004)[1]

Parliamentary contribution to the implementation of the Stability Pact in South-East Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly recognises that during the five years of its activities the Stability Pact has proven itself to be an important and useful instrument in the process of stabilisation and democratisation in South-Eastern Europe. Since its creation, all countries of the region have become members of the Council of Europe and are considering becoming part of the European Union.

2. The region of South-Eastern Europe is composed of states at different stages of development, with differing levels of compliance with European standards. Some of them are already members of the European Union, Bulgaria and Romania are committed to becoming full members of the EU on 1 January 2007 and the other states are participants in the Stabilisation and Association Process of the EU or are on the point of joining.

3. The Assembly notes that the Stability Pact is unable to meet the high expectations of the countries from the region, which expected that the pact would be a new Marshall Plan, whereas it is a process based on the goodwill and solidarity of its participants.

4. Since the creation of the Stability Pact, the region has undergone crises – in Kosovo and in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" – but since then the overall security situation, with the exception of Kosovo, has improved considerably. The Assembly condemns the violence which took place in Kosovo in March 2004. Those regrettable events constituted a serious setback to development in Kosovo and to the entire region from an international perspective.

5. The notion of regional co-operation is firmly enshrined and it encompasses numerous areas, including the process of the creation of a regional single market, liberalisation of electricity markets, the combat against organised crime and corruption, the implementation of regional arms control mechanisms and many other fields.

6. One of the examples of co-operation is the return of over 2 million refugees to several countries of the region, despite strong initial hesitation on behalf of the governments concerned.

7. The Stability Pact, which plays a matchmaking role between donors and beneficiary countries, has been instrumental in setting priorities, avoiding duplications and consequently laying down economic foundations in the region.

8. However, despite these unquestionable achievements, the overall economic situation in South-Eastern Europe still remains precarious. In particular, the sustainability of economic growth, massive unemployment, especially in the Western Balkans, and poor development give much cause for concern. The Assembly appreciates the support provided by the Stability Pact to the infrastructural projects which could facilitate human relations in the region. In this context, the accomplishment of the work on pan-European Corridor 8 is of special importance.

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1. (see Doc.10349, report of the Political Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mr Toshev). Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 23 November 2004

9. Furthermore, the Assembly believes that it is of the utmost urgency to focus on the concept of social and economic cohesion and reconciliation between the groups involved in the conflicts, which has unfortunately been neglected over the last five years in the countries concerned.

10. The state of public administration presents another problem: public governance is weak and people do not trust in it. There are examples where it has been influenced by narrow nationalistic and populist interests. Its efficiency must be improved significantly.

11. Insufficient respect for the rule of law in some countries in the region is also worrying, despite efforts undertaken at the regional level. The fight against organised crime and corruption are among key issues which must be addressed.

12. The Assembly regrets that, despite the recognition that parliaments are an essential component in the democratic process, they have played a limited role in scrutinising the assistance given by the international community to the governments of South-Eastern Europe. The parliaments of the region have not been involved enough in the process and the participation of parliamentarians was often just a formality. In order to increase the efficiency and transparency of the governing structures in the region, more attention should be paid to building legislative capacity and to enhancing parliamentary co-operation between countries.

13. In this context, the role of the Stability Pact should be considered in a different perspective. The Stability Pact is constantly adapting to the changing situation in South-Eastern Europe and the Assembly recognises that the pact's role has now changed. As the basis for further co-operation and development has been laid down, its main task today is to ensure the implementation of many important processes for which an agreement has already been secured.

14. The activities facilitating co-operation between states and activities inside countries aimed at promoting political and ethnic tolerance are still one of the mainstreams of the Stability Pact, especially in the Western Balkans.

15. The Parliamentary Assembly is of the opinion that along with the ongoing normalisation and stabilisation process in the region, the task of the Parliamentary Troïka has been fulfilled to a large extent. Now it should play a complementary role rather than a leading role, with the aim of promoting and supporting national initiatives to foster bilateral and multilateral regional co-operation and the creation of joint bilateral or multilateral committees, working groups or other bodies for co-operation at parliamentary level between the states of the region.

16. The Assembly's Chairmanship of the Parliamentary Troïka, which starts on 1 January 2005, should provide an adequate platform for making contacts and be focused on encouraging and supporting national parliamentary initiatives.

17. The Assembly's committees should be instrumental in inspiring and promoting regional parliamentary initiatives and co-operation by organising, in their respective fields of competence, conferences, seminars and round tables on co-operation with relevant committees in national parliaments of the region.

18. It is highly desirable that the local and regional authorities of the region co-operate through the activities of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, and interaction with the national parliaments and the Assembly, encouraging trans-border co-operation, especially through the establishment of trans-border Euroregions.

19. The Assembly underlines and supports the role of the Stability Pact Gender Task Force (GTF), where remarkable initiatives have been realised in recent years regarding parliamentary activities in promoting equality and better representation of women in political life.

20. The Assembly resolves to work towards increasing the role of national parliaments in the region to:

20.1. assume full responsibility for the parliamentary scrutiny of the Stability Pact activities in their respective countries;

20.2. elaborate and promote concrete projects and initiatives which could subsequently be developed and financed in the framework of the Stability Pact;

20.3. organise conferences, seminars and round tables which contribute to the setting of priorities and proposal of solutions;

20.4. elaborate projects aimed at reinforcing the capacity of national parliaments concerned, which would facilitate the carrying out of their obligations linked to the Stability Pact activities;

20.5. step up co-operation with other parliaments in the region with a view to contributing to Stability Pact action;

20.6. establish links between counterpart committees in different parliaments in the region and organise, between parliaments, exchanges, internships and twinning initiatives and the creation of joint committees and working groups on a bilateral or multilateral basis.

21. Furthermore, the Assembly calls on the Stability Pact co-ordinators to:

21.1. pay more attention to the role of national parliaments in the process of further stabilisation and democratisation in the region;

21.2. introduce parliamentary discussion in all Stability Pact Task Forces to ensure that they examine substantive issues.

22. The Assembly invites its relevant committees to:

22.1. consider the possibility of taking stock and assessing the achievements and planned activities of the Stability Pact on a country-by-country approach within the area of their respective competence, in close co-operation with the competent committees of the parliaments concerned;

22.2. promote regional parliamentary co-operation in their respective fields of competence by organising meetings, conferences and seminars jointly with national parliaments;

22.3. develop an assessment system for the results of the implementation of specific projects of the Stability Pact.

23. The Assembly resolves to work towards increasing the role of national parliaments in the region by:

23.1. supporting local initiatives in this respect;

23.2. stepping up its assistance in the area of reinforcing the capacity of national parliaments concerned, in particular in the following areas:

a. assistance to committees in preparing and reviewing legislation;

b. approximation of the legal systems and competences of local authorities in order to eliminate legal obstacles to the implementation of decentralised trans-border co-operation;

c. assistance with drafting, adopting, ratifying and controlling the implementation of legislation;

d. effective use of parliamentary procedures;

e. developing relations between parliaments and civil society.