Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 1865 (2012)[1]
Final version

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

Parliamentary Assembly

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 in so far 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 populations.

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 criteria 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;

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1. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 9 March 2012 (see Doc. 12871, report of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, rapporteur: Mr von Sydow).

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 citizens" 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 roles are 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 Eastern Partnership Summit in Warsaw.

7. As regards the implementation of the Eastern Partnership, the Assembly welcomes the contribution of the Council of Europe to both bilateral and multilateral work carried out 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. It further welcomes the agreement between the Council of Europe and the European Commission on the €4 million financial facility instrument to enable the Organisation 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 populations, 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 within 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 as well as to avoid overlap 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. 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 through 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 that take part 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 in 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 roles 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), also with a view to its possible future involvement in Euronest.