
EU Attaches Great Importance To Azerbaijan's Energy Field

TREND - 10/9/2007

France, Strasbourg / Trend corr A. Maharramli / Trend's exclusive interview with the head of the European Inter-parliamentary Delegations Department of the Secretariat of the European Parliament (EP), Thomas Gruner, on the threshold of EP delegation's visit to Azerbaijan on 11-15 September.

Question: The delegation of the European Parliament begins its visit to Baku on 11 September and you are a member of the delegation. Which issues will be discussed during the visit?

Answer: First of all, we will discuss the Action Plan of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the mechanisms of its implementation. That is a very important point. The Action Plan was signed with Azerbaijan with some delay and there are a lot of issues waiting for discussion. At the same time within the framework of the Action Plan we will discuss the political situation in Azerbaijan, constitutional reforms, prospects of the presidential elections of 2008, democratic reforms, the situation in protection of human rights and fundamental freedom, including media freedom-related issues. Consequently, we requested to organize a meeting with several jailed journalists. Journalists are jailed in Azerbaijan.

That attracts the attention of the European Parliament. Jural state, the current judicial system situation is among the key issues to be discussed.

I would like to note that the content of the visit program resembles the issues under discussion in other countries. Certainly, other aspects of the visit cover regional conflicts. We understand that a part of Azerbaijan's territory is occupied by Armenia.

Settlement of this conflict is under the attention of the European Parliament. Furthermore, we will hold an exchange of views on energy-related issues. This field is of special importance for EU. We are familiar with historical context and intend to diversify energy supplies. Azerbaijan has a great potential in this field which is important for the EU. We search diverse energy strategy. European Parliament pays great attention to the re-distribution of oil incomes. The major part of these incomes cannot be used for defence. We do not want the conflict to break out again. EU pays great attention to the direction of oil income to the fields indicated in the Action Plan, as well as to the improvement of the social state and living conditions in Azerbaijan. Thus, the Azerbaijani population will be able to use this wealth as much as possible. Continuous development, reduction of poverty, as well as international and regional cooperation, will be discussed within the framework of the visit.

Question: How do you assess the fulfilment of the obligations proceeding from the Action Plan?

Answer: This process requires time. We see advances.

In this stage it is very difficult to give an assessment, for the

Action Plan is new, its implementation requires time. Certainly, we would like to see Azerbaijan fulfilling the obligations proceeding from the plan. It is very difficult to achieve any results at this stage. The European Parliament has asked Azerbaijan to precipitate individual elements of the Action Plan as much as it can. It is much easier to do it for Azerbaijan than for other countries as Azerbaijan's financial opportunities enables that.

Question: How do you assess the general situation in Azerbaijan?

Answer: Everything I have said is my personal opinion resting upon my observations within the framework of the scientific conference on political rights and European policy jointly organized with Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy which has recently taken place in Baku. There are environmental problems. Oil production poses risks for the environment. We would like investments to be put into this field. There is criticism regarding human rights and freedom of speech. The jailing of journalists is a shock for the EU and that negatively affects Azerbaijan's image. I do not know the reasons for the detention of the journalists, but we want the press to be free.

Situation in human rights, freedom of speech can affect Azerbaijan's integration to Europe. Within the framework of Copenhagen criteria EU attaches great importance to these issues in the candidate countries.

Our reply is clear: human rights, freedom of speech make up the key criteria of the strategy on coming close to the EU.

Question: How do you see cooperation between Azerbaijan and EU in the energy field?

Answer: Firstly I will note that there is a large potential and the EU has defined that. EU wants to diverse sources of energy supplies. Cooperation has already commenced. A lot of discussions are being held in this field with Azerbaijan and Central Asia. This cooperation requires further development. I optimistically see the future of this cooperation.

Question: How can EU contribute to the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict?

Answer: That is a very important issue. I think EU can do more. In current situation EU has neither adequate foreign policy nor security policy. I believe EU's diplomatic efforts will be better for the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. There is the OSCE Minsk Group. In my personal opinion, EU should be a side to the negotiations. Most EU countries have political will to take part in the process and they want to do more for the settlement of the conflict. I hope EU will develop a joint strategy and will suggest its mediation in the issue. We act in several crisis regions, for instance, there is a mission on protection of the Trans-Dniester Region's borders. We also cooperate in police and customs systems. This can be applied also to Nagorno-Karabakh. The key point is that EU was acting as a direct mediator. I believe EU's potential is larger than that of the Minsk Group.

The conflict area is much closer to Europe than to the United States. EU has a potential to be an objective mediator.

The Action Plan with Azerbaijan also reflected territorial integrity and this principle should be respected. The Action Plan with Armenia has other elements. It reflects the principle of people's

self-determination. Do not accuse EU of double standards. The Action Plans were agreed with the partner countries and have a different content. EU's political will is to really help in the settlement of the conflict on the basis of the documents adopted by the international community.

We back the settlement of the conflict on the basis of documents adopted by the UN and satisfying the conflicting sides. The conflict should be settled via talks and the sides should be ready for concessions.

Question: Is membership in the EU envisaged in the Action Plan for Azerbaijan as well as other South Caucasus countries',

Answer: I cannot give a positive answer to this question. At present EU is in the digesting stage.

Europe's borders should be clear. For the time being we speak on South Caucasus countries' obligations regarding approaching Europe. They have to wait for full membership in the EU. The EU has become tired of extending. It has to digest the admission of ten countries. At the same time, political persons should respect the public's opinion. The situation can change. In my personal opinion, future entrance to EU of Moldova, Ukraine and South Caucasus countries should be envisaged. We are too far into this. The Copenhagen criteria should be followed by these countries within the framework of the approaching policy.
