

Official Journal of the European Union

C 193



English edition

Information and Notices

Volume 59

31 May 2016

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I

(Resolutions, recommendations and opinions)

RESOLUTIONS

EURONEST PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

RESOLUTION ⁽¹⁾

by the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly on Common positions and concerns of the EU Member States and Eastern European partner countries over foreign policies and external threats to their security

(2016/C 193/01)

THE EURONEST PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY,

- having regard to the Constituent Act of the EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly of 3 May 2011,
 - having regard to the Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit of 21-22 May 2015, in Riga,
 - having regard to the European Parliament resolution of 9 July 2015 on the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy ⁽²⁾,
 - having regard to the European Parliament resolution of 9 July 2015 on the European Agenda on Security ⁽³⁾,
 - having regard to the European Parliament resolution of 11 June 2015 on the strategic military situation in the Black Sea Basin following the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia ⁽⁴⁾,
 - having regard to the Commission Communication of 28 April 2015 on the European Agenda on Security (COM(2015) 185),
- A. whereas the international security environment in Europe has changed dramatically in recent years, with a significant increase in global disorder and the emergence of new regional and local conflicts in the Middle East, North Africa and Eastern Europe; whereas the persistence of these conflicts, and of human rights violation in regions at war, have resulted in an unprecedented movement of people seeking protection in neighbouring countries and the EU Member States;
- B. whereas, in accordance with the Article 21 of the Treaty of the European Union, the EU is committed to effective multilateralism as a model of global governance; whereas the organisation of the United Nations provides a unique intergovernmental forum where its Member States can debate and take joint actions on global issues, such as peace and security, human rights, conflict prevention, disarmament and terrorism; whereas the EU and its Member States have engaged constructively at the United Nations and other international fora, together with partners and like-minded countries, to shape responses to issues of global and regional concern and of international law;

⁽¹⁾ Adopted on 22 March 2016 in Brussels, Belgium.

⁽²⁾ Texts adopted, P8_TA-PROV(2015)0272.

⁽³⁾ Texts adopted, P8_TA-PROV(2015)0269.

⁽⁴⁾ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2015)0232.

- C. whereas the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was created to strengthen the European Union's partnerships with neighbouring countries in order to develop an area of shared respect for democracy, human rights, rule of law, stability, security and prosperity;
- D. whereas the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe has experience and expert knowledge within the field of constitutional law;
- E. whereas the Eastern Partnership is based on commitments to the principles of international law and to fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- F. whereas, when signing bilateral Association Agreements with the EU, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine committed, along with the EU, to promote, preserve and strengthen peace and stability in the regional and international dimensions, as one of the aims of political association;
- G. whereas, as highlighted in the Commission's fourth and final progress report to the European Parliament and the Council on Georgia's implementation of the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan (VLAP), adopted on 18 December 2015, since June 2012, when the EU-Georgia Visa Liberalisation Dialogue was launched, Georgia has undertaken all required reforms necessary to ensure effective and sustainable achievement of all the benchmarks set out in the four blocks of the second phase of the VLAP; whereas, in accordance with the VLAP, Georgia has carried out a series of legislative and institutional reforms in the following areas: document security, border management, migration management and asylum, public order and security (the fight against organised crime, corruption, trafficking, money laundering and drugs; judicial and law enforcement cooperation; personal data protection; and protection of human rights, including minority rights);
- H. whereas on 18 December 2015 the Commission released its sixth and last progress report on the Ukraine's implementation of VLAP;
- I. whereas on 7 December 2015 the EU and Armenia opened high-level negotiations in view of a new, comprehensive framework agreement that would cover political, economic and sectoral cooperation;
- J. whereas, as highlighted in the Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit on 21-22 May 2015, the acts of aggression by Russia against Ukraine and Georgia have shown that the fundamental principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity, with internationally recognised borders, cannot be taken for granted in the 21st century;
- K. whereas the inflow of ammunition, weaponry and terrorist fighters from Russia into the territories controlled by the illegal armed groups in Ukraine has caused a great number of casualties, more than two million internally displaced persons and refugees, as well as a persisting humanitarian crisis;
- L. whereas Russia continues to occupy the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, and has taken further steps to achieve their factual annexation, in violation of the fundamental norms and principles of international law; whereas ethnic cleansing and forcible demographic changes have taken place in areas under the effective control of the occupying forces, which bear the responsibility for human rights violations in these areas, including violations of the rights to free movement, people-to-people contacts and education in one's native language;
- M. whereas the temporary occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol by Russia, as well as military aggression by Russia in Ukrainian Donbas, have led to significant violations of human rights and of fundamental freedoms on the occupied territories;
- N. whereas Russia and the European Union have imposed reciprocal trade embargoes; whereas Russia has, without any legal basis, implemented arbitrary measures that violate universal standards and lack transparency in order to blacklist several EU politicians by denying them entry to Russian territory;
- O. whereas conflicts in the territories of Eastern European partner countries make them more vulnerable to political destabilisation and seriously endanger their economic and social situation; whereas, furthermore, these conflict-affected areas within and around the European continent pose a serious danger to the security of the EU and its partners;

- P. whereas North Africa and the Middle East have been filled with unrest, violence and civil war; whereas poverty, resource shortages, climate change-related effects, human rights violations and economic stagnation place great stresses on populations in many parts of the African continent and in the Middle East, especially minorities such as Christians and Yazidis, forcing them to flee their homes;
- Q. whereas in September 2014 a broad international coalition was formed with the aim of defeating the terrorist organisation calling itself the 'Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant' (ISIL/Da'esh);
- R. whereas partner countries have engaged in cooperation with the EU in the area of the EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), in particular with regard to CSDP support to Security Sector Reforms (SSR) in partner countries;
- S. whereas Ukraine in 2005, and Georgia and Moldova in 2012, concluded Framework Agreements with the EU on participation in EU-led crisis management operations; whereas in 2014 Ukraine took part in the activity of EU Battlegroups and contributed with a frigate to the EU Naval Force (EU NAVFOR) Somalia — Operation Atalanta, while, also in 2014, Moldova and Georgia participated for the first time in EU-led CSDP missions, namely the EU Training Mission (EUTM) in Mali and the EU military operation in the Central African Republic (EUFOR RCA);
- T. whereas the EU Member States and all partner countries are parties to multilateral disarmament treaties related to weapons of mass destruction (WMD), such as the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and the Biological and Chemical Weapons Conventions; whereas 17 EU Member States, and all partner countries, are also signatories of the Adapted Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty;
- U. whereas the European Security Agenda for 2015-2020, as proposed by the Commission, sets out three priorities, namely tackling terrorism and preventing radicalisation, disrupting organised crime and fighting cybercrime;
- V. whereas some EU Member States, partner and neighbouring countries have faced external aggression, terrorist attacks, cross-border organised crime and cybercrime, which, in some of these countries, are linked to violent political extremism and religious radicalism; whereas ISIL/Da'esh has sponsored attacks on the soil of EU Member States;
- W. whereas the EU and the US have engaged in negotiations for establishing a new trade agreement, namely the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP);
- X. whereas the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) between Ukraine and the EU came into force on 1 January 2016; whereas Russia has since imposed economic sanctions on Ukraine, including restrictions on the transit of goods between Ukraine and Central Asia through Russia;
- Y. whereas most EU Member States and partner countries depend on external energy supplies, wherefore access to energy plays a critical role in shaping the geopolitical situation in Europe; whereas the EU's and its partner countries' energy policies must not undermine the core values of the Eastern Partnership or the coherence of their respective foreign policies;
- Z. whereas the US, Iran, Russia and other actors are directly or indirectly involved in the regional conflicts in Syria and Iraq, and could therefore contribute to finding political solutions to end them;
- AA. whereas the protracted instability and escalating violence in Libya represents a major security risk for Europe as a whole;
- BB. whereas Iran, the EU, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, China, Russia and the US (EU3+3), meeting in Vienna on 14 July 2015, have reached an agreement on the Iranian nuclear issue that allows the progressive lifting of UN Security Council sanctions as well as multilateral and national sanctions pertaining to Iran's nuclear programme;
1. Recalls that the Eastern Partnership was founded on a shared commitment to common values, including democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights, and to the principles of international law and fundamental freedoms, as well as to the stability, security and prosperity of the EU, the Eastern European partner countries and the entire European continent; underlines the responsibility of each Eastern Partnership country to guarantee the introduction and execution of a solid reform process, and to fight against corruption mechanisms; underlines the supporting role of the EU in this regard;

2. Notes that the outcome of the ENP review will provide a basis for a serious discussion in 2016 on how, in the case of the three Eastern European partners that have Association Agreements, a differentiated approach can be translated in practice;
3. Shares the view that the EU and its partner countries face multiple and simultaneous challenges to their security, the nature of which is more and more complex, in an environment characterised by a globalised economy, climate change, international mobility, digitalisation, demographic shifts and migrations, and the threats posed both by traditional state actors and by non-state organisations supporting terrorism or international crime;
4. Calls on the EU and its partner countries to build a closer political relationship, and to seek to converge their respective foreign policies and make them more consistent in order to address common challenges and to safeguard their security; stresses that priority should be given to joint efforts to restore the European security order under international law; underlines that such an order must be based on democratic principles, the rule of law, fundamental values, respect for human rights, the protection of minorities, sovereignty, independence and the inviolability of borders;
5. Recalls that re-engaging in a dialogue with civil society is crucial for ensuring wide support for any law-enforcement reforms;
6. Rejects the perspective of a new division of the European continent into spheres of influence of great powers, as suggested by the policies and actions of Russia; reaffirms the principle of each country's sovereign right to decide freely and democratically its foreign and security policy and its military alliances; emphasises that, in accordance with the principles laid down in Article I of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, each country in Europe has the right to choose for itself whether to join any treaty of alliance, including NATO's founding treaty;
7. Believes that the democratic governance of the United Nations should be strengthened; calls, to this aim, for the UN Member States to reform the UN Security Council, in order that it reflects better the new realities of the world, and to make the UN Security Council more efficient;
8. Values the framework of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) as an inclusive forum for dialogue on security issues and the resolution of conflicts; calls for the revitalisation of the OSCE, and for corresponding political and financial support; underlines the importance of further cooperation among the EU, its Member States, the Eastern European partner countries, the UN and the OSCE, and of joint efforts in managing crisis situations and finding peaceful settlements to conflicts in Europe; regrets, nevertheless, that no substantial progress has been made as regards finding peaceful resolutions and comprehensive settlements of the so-called frozen conflicts affecting most Eastern European partner countries, and calls for more effective and result-oriented action;
9. Takes the view that dealing with refugees, displaced persons and migratory flows requires a common and holistic approach to foreign and migration policies, encompassing development, conflict prevention and settlement, crisis management, burden-sharing, humanitarian aid and joint endeavours to alleviate burdens; stresses the imperative need for the EU to cooperate with its neighbours if it is to manage the refugee crisis effectively while safeguarding the achievements of European integration for the free movement of people; stresses, moreover, the need to develop special procedures for the early identification, registration and documentation of unaccompanied or separated, internally displaced children, and of other vulnerable groups, and to ensure their access to assistance and services;
10. Stresses that free and sustainable international trade is a driver of growth; underlines, therefore, the importance of developing free and fair trade relations, and of fostering foreign investments between the EU and the Eastern European partner countries, with a view to contributing to political convergence and economic integration;
11. Urges the partner countries to implement reforms guaranteeing the independence of the judiciary; urges the partner countries, furthermore, to prevent political forces from exploiting legal systems in order to carry out selective justice;
12. Stresses that media independence from political interests is key to pluralism in the media landscape; believes that independent media are the foremost forces against disinformation and propaganda; calls, therefore, on partner countries to cease actions compromising the integrity of such media; suggests that the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe assist partner countries in this regard;

13. Notes that partner countries have to consider different foreign policy options when developing trade relations with the EU and their other neighbours; underlines that the DCFTAs between the EU, on one hand, and Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, on the other, are aimed at significantly deepening relations, and developing trade and foreign investments, between the signatory partners; stresses that DCFTAs and deepening trade relations with other partners are not mutually exclusive; considers that the DCFTA is not the only option for the EU trade policy towards its Eastern European partners; calls on the EU, in collaboration with its partner countries, to offer alternative trade measures tailored to their respective needs and constraints; denounces the retaliatory trade measures imposed by Russia on Ukraine after the DCFTA came into force; calls on the Commission to put in place temporary countermeasures to minimise the negative effect of Russian trade sanctions on Ukraine;
14. Welcomes the positive assessment by the Commission of the VLAPs for Ukraine and Georgia; calls on the Commission swiftly to present the necessary legislative proposal to the European Parliament, and on the Council to lift visa requirements for Ukrainian citizens;
15. Calls on the EU and the US to open discussions with the Eastern European partner countries, in an open and transparent manner involving all stakeholders and civil societies, about the potential benefits of the TTIP on their economies and how the latter could be granted better access to markets of both sides of the Atlantic;

Policy with regard to Russia, Turkey and Iran

16. Condemns policies of propaganda and disinformation, as well as the policies of confrontation and political or economic pressures; expresses its support for the EU Strategic Communication; calls on the EU to strengthen it and to cooperate with Eastern partner countries in order to counter propaganda and disinformation;
17. Reiterates its firm support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders; expresses concern, in this context, regarding developments in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, including Russia's implementation of the so-called 'treaties' deepening its integration with Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, the ongoing military build-up therein, the illegal installation of barbed wire fences and signposts along the occupation line, and the grave human rights situation on the ground;
18. Calls on Russia to respect fully the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia, as well as the inviolability of the latter's internationally recognised borders, to reverse its recognition of the so called 'independence' of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia and to implement the provisions of the 12 August 2008 Ceasefire Agreement; calls on Russia, in particular, to end the occupation of Georgia's territories, to allow full and unimpeded access of the EU Monitoring Mission, and of human rights monitoring mechanisms, to Georgia's occupied regions, and to engage constructively in the Geneva International Discussions on the key issues set out on the agenda, namely the non-use of force, international security arrangements, and the safe and dignified return of internally displaced persons and refugees;
19. Condemns any military actions and aggression in the Eastern European partner countries that undermine the European security order, and insists on the need for peaceful settlement of disputes, according to the UN Charter, the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, the 1990 Charter of Paris for a New Europe, the Russia-NATO Founding Act, the Budapest Memorandum and the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership between Russia and Ukraine; calls on the parties to the Minsk Agreements, to the ceasefire agreement signed between Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia in May 1994, and to the Russian-Georgian ceasefire agreement of 12 August 2008, to fulfil their commitments and ensure the full implementation of these agreements;
20. Calls on gas supplying countries immediately to cease using energy access and pricing as a political tool for putting EU Member States and its partner countries under pressure; calls on the EU and its partner countries to intensify their efforts to diversify their energy supplies, develop alternative sources of energy, step up energy savings and harness 'reverse flow' gas arrangements, thereby lessening their dependence on energy imports;

21. Stresses that the gas pipeline project Nord Stream 2 conflicts with EU strategic interests, such as security, diversification, liberalisation and the development of a strong energy union; calls, therefore, on the Commission and the Council to adhere to the rules and ambitions spelled out in the Third Energy Package; urges the EU Members States concerned to cease all cooperation with the company Gazprom on the gas pipeline project Nord Stream 2;
22. Is concerned by the risk of military incidents in Europe, where Russia and NATO have recently deployed further military forces and equipment, in particular in Eastern Europe, in the Black Sea Basin, in the countries on the Baltic Sea and in the Arctic Sea region; believes that the cooperative relationship that NATO and Russia have been building since the end of the Cold War is severely affected by the violation of the law-based European peace order exemplified by Russia's illegal occupation and annexation of Crimea; recommends NATO and Russia to maintain open channels of communication and to consider new initiatives for avoiding incidents;
23. Urges Russia, as the occupying state, to ensure respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and in the city of Sevastopol, including the rights and freedoms of persons belonging to national minorities, in particular the Crimean Tatars, Ukrainians and other vulnerable groups residing in Crimea, and to ensure that the relevant international human rights bodies can carry out their monitoring activities free and unimpeded on the peninsula;
24. Stresses that developing an effective relationship, and closer cooperation, between the EU and any given partner country is to the benefit of all; calls, therefore, on the EU, its partner countries and Turkey to sustain high-level dialogue on foreign and security policy issues, with priority given to conflicts and security issues in the Middle East and their impact on migration flows;
25. Recognises the prominent responsibility and the commendable efforts of Turkey to provide humanitarian aid, to ensure the protection of people escaping war and destruction in Syria and Iraq and to implement security measures; welcomes the EU-Turkey joint action plan to tackle together the challenges posed by migration and refugee flows to Europe, and calls on both parties to intensify their cooperation in order to ensure a quicker implementation of that plan;
26. Reiterates that preparing the ground for dialogue between Turkey and Armenia is of utmost importance for the stability and prosperity of the region; calls for the implementation of the agreements in the Protocols on normalisation of the relations between the two countries⁽¹⁾, without preconditions, along the process of Turkish-Armenian societal reconciliation; stresses the unacceptability of the policy of closed borders on the European continent;
27. Calls for further dialogue between Armenia and Azerbaijan, under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Co-Chairs, including at the level of Presidents, with a view to achieving a lasting and peaceful settlement that will bring stability and reconciliation, opening opportunities for regional development and cooperation;
28. Welcomes the agreement reached by the EU3+3 and Iran on the latter's nuclear programme; expects the gradual lifting of nuclear-related sanctions on Iran to begin in 2016, provided that Iran fulfils its commitments; notes that the prospects of sanction relief for Iran bring new economic opportunities for the EU, its Member States and its partner countries; considers that the Caucasus could be the first world region to benefit largely from a new and positive climate for investment as a result of the agreement with, and the sanction relief for, Iran; calls on the EU and its partners to cooperate in expanding economic ties with Iran, and to identify — and possibly initiate — new projects of common interest, especially in the transport and energy fields;

Increasing engagement in the Middle East and North Africa

29. Stresses that there are a number of very serious and interconnected problems of political, economic, social and environmental nature that have destabilised the countries of the Middle East and Africa; notes that as long as these countries suffer from turmoil, human rights violation and political instability, they and neighbouring countries are exposed to serious threats to their security;
30. Is concerned by the deterioration of gender equality and the increasing violence and oppression against women, as well as the intolerance shown ethnic and religious minorities, in certain countries of the Middle East and North Africa; takes the view that this negative trend may lead to tensions in these societies, and may prepare the ground for new conflicts and other negative consequences, such as population displacements or refugee flows;

⁽¹⁾ The Protocol on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations (2009) and the Protocol on the Development of Bilateral Relations between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Armenia.

31. Calls for a new approach to security issues in the region, and for cooperation with the countries concerned, through strategic partnerships covering various policy areas, including development aid, cultural cooperation, climate-change adaptation, conflict prevention and border-control management;
32. Calls on the EU and its partner countries to do their utmost to influence the parties concerned to bring an end to the civil war in Syria and to prepare for a political solution; believes that ISIL/Da'esh and other UN-designated terrorist groups must not have any ruling role in the post-war era or in the political future of Syria; takes the view that the protection of civilians in Syria must be a priority for the international community and calls, therefore, on the conflicting parties to stop disproportionate and indiscriminate attacks, including shelling, targeting civilian areas and preventing humanitarian relief from reaching civilians in conflict zones;
33. Notes that the targeting of civilians, and the human right violations, in Syria have contributed to the rise of terrorist groups, in particular ISIL/Da'esh; considers that ISIL/Da'esh poses a threat to international peace and security, and that it has dramatically undermined stability in Iraq, Syria and the broader Middle East, being responsible for systematic abuses of human rights and violations of international law, including deliberate killings of civilians and the persecution of individuals and entire communities, along with numerous other atrocities; welcomes the commitment of the international coalition partners to pursue their effort to counter ISIL/Da'esh;
34. Takes the view that it is of the utmost importance for the stability of the whole Middle East to relaunch the peace process of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with a view to reaching a lasting comprehensive settlement respectful of international law and based on the two-state principle;

Developing cooperation for security and defence

35. Notes that external and internal threats to security have become more interdependent and complex, and thus more difficult to predict; points in particular to the hybrid threats involving the use of military and non-military means, ranging from intelligence, political subversion and disinformation to cyber-attacks and economic pressures;
36. Calls on the EU and the Eastern European partner countries to reflect on, and take new joint actions to deter and counter, new threats to their security, inter alia, by increasing their cooperation and exchanging relevant information; supports the development of cooperation activities between the EU and its partner countries on security and defence issues, in particular within the framework of the Eastern Partnership Panel on Cooperation in this area; calls on the EU to reinforce the security and conflict sensitivity component within the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership by concentrating more initiative and resources on the areas of security sector reform (SSR), counter-terrorism, cooperation on CSDP matters, organised crime and border management; stresses the important need of judiciary and police cooperation, for instance through Europol and Eurojust;
37. Welcomes the new focus of the reviewed ENP, and welcomes as well the EU's intention to step up cooperation with its partner countries in the fields of conflict prevention, counter-terrorism, anti-radicalisation, organised crime, border management and SSR; takes the view that such cooperation needs to be substantial, to aim at addressing common security threats and to hasten the development of joint efforts to promote viable settlement of conflicts, including through enhanced participation in CSDP missions and training activities, as well as through actions to ensure the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and to combat the illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons;
38. Believes that, in particular, closer cooperation is needed to increase knowledge of the EU concepts on SSR in partner countries; calls on the EU and its Member States to support partner countries further in conducting reforms, building proper state institutions and implementing good practices to deal with security issues, such as crisis management and intelligence; underlines the necessity of a proper parliamentary oversight of state bodies in charge of security and intelligence;
39. Stresses the need to strengthen the resilience of the EU and its partner countries, which is the capacity to withstand and adapt to internal and external stresses and shocks, including hybrid threats; emphasises that, to this aim, it is essential to tackle the root causes of crises, strengthen state institutions, promote the rule of law and an independent judiciary, and implement effective measures to combat corruption; calls on the EU to support partner countries in conducting civilian security sector reforms, as these are crucial for preparing societies to resist sudden shocks of different kinds;

40. Recommends the partner countries to strengthen their cooperation with the EU in the security and defence fields, and to seek common approaches with the EU on military strategies; welcomes the participation of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine in EU-led crisis management operations, and emphasises that this will enhance military interoperability between the EU and its partners in the long term; suggests Georgia and Moldova to consider participating in the activities of the EU Battlegroups; recommends the EU to engage more actively in the process of peaceful settlement of conflicts on the territories of the Eastern European partner countries;
41. Stresses the need to maintain stability in Moldova with regard to the political crisis it is going through, also with regard to the ongoing Transnistrian conflict, which needs to be treated through inclusive and open negotiations;
42. Believes that the 'frozen conflicts' in the European Neighbourhood (Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and Nagorno Karabakh) need to be treated urgently in order to bring stability to the region; believes that there should be closer cooperation among the Eastern European partner countries in order to put in place a strong foundation to ensure regional integration;

Pursuing engagement in disarmament and mitigating risks of weapon proliferation and trafficking

43. Calls on the EU, its Member States and the partner countries to pursue actively their efforts to promote the universality of multilateral disarmament treaties; urges the EU and its Member States to exploit, in a better way, the potential to promote and support joint disarmament operations involving partner countries;
44. Calls for stronger focus on the role of arms control within security policy and on fighting illegal arms trade; welcomes, in this regard, the entry into force on December 2014 of the United Nations' Arms Trade Treaty, which aims at strengthening responsibility and transparency in the arms trade; urges the Eastern European partner countries to join the EU common position on arms exports;
45. Supports the cooperation between the EU its partner countries in mitigating the risks of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and of proliferation and smuggling of WMD components and of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear weapons (CBRN); calls for further development of the skills and project support means of the EU CBRN Centre of Excellence for South-East Europe/Southern Caucasus/Moldova/Ukraine;
46. Urges the EU to consider the intense militarisation by Russia of the illegally occupied Crimea, including the siting of nuclear weapons, as a serious threat to the security of the EU and of the Black Sea and Mediterranean regions; calls on Russia to respect the non-nuclear-weapon status of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders;

Fighting terrorism, organised crime and cybercrime

47. Stresses the importance of multilateral and interstate cooperation at global and regional level to face the challenges posed by terrorism, organised crime and cybercrime, as highlighted by the Commission in its Communication of 28 April 2015 on the European Security Agenda; calls, therefore, on the EU Member States and the partner countries to strengthen cooperation between their national law enforcement bodies in fighting terrorism, transnational and cross-border crime, such as human trafficking — in particular the trafficking of women and children, and of drugs, arms and cultural goods — and economic crime and cybercrime; encourages the partner countries to reinvent cooperation among themselves in these fields, under regional formats;
48. Urges the EU, its Member States and the partner countries to approach their policies on countering terrorism at home and abroad in a streamlined manner; recommends, in particular, that they tackle the underlying roots of home-grown terrorism (such as political and religious extremism), stem recruitment in terrorist organisations and eradicate incitement to terrorists attacks; calls for full use of the EU's foreign and development policies to combat poverty, discrimination and marginalisation, to fight corruption, to promote good governance and to prevent and resolve conflicts — as those elements are indispensable for keeping vulnerable groups of society away from extremist propaganda;
49. Points to the organised crime and corruption prevalent in the region, and to the need to address these in order to avoid the negative consequences that could arise, affecting the process of regional integration, and in order to raise the level of trust in democratic institutions;

50. Calls on the EU Member States and the Commission to strengthen cooperation with, and among, internet companies and social networking platform in order to restrict access to terrorist material available online and to remove terrorist propaganda, whilst ensuring respect for fundamental rights, especially data privacy and data protection rights;
 51. Instructs its Co-Presidents to forward this resolution to the President of the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, the European External Action Service and the governments and parliaments of the EU Member States and the Eastern European partner countries.
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RESOLUTION ⁽¹⁾**by the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly on EU multiannual financial perspectives and their impact on economic cooperation among Eastern Partnership countries**

(2016/C 193/02)

THE EURONEST PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY,

- having regard to the development of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) since 2004, and in particular to the Commission's progress reports on its implementation,
 - having regard to the Joint Communication of the Commission and the Vice-President/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 18 November 2015 entitled 'Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)' and to the Council Conclusions on the Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy of 14 December 2015,
 - having regard to the Joint Declarations of the successive Eastern Partnership Summits, and more specifically to the latest one adopted in Riga on 22 May 2015,
 - having regard to the European Parliament resolution of 9 July 2015 on the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy ⁽²⁾,
 - having regard to the bilateral Association Agreements concluded between the European Union and, respectively, Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova, and to their provisional application,
 - having regard to Regulation (EU) No 232/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014 establishing a European Neighbourhood Instrument,
 - having regard to its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the Eastern Partnership has created a meaningful framework for deepening relations, accelerating political association and furthering economic integration between the EU and the Eastern partners, by supporting political and socioeconomic reforms and facilitating approximation with EU legislation and policies;
- B. whereas the Eastern Partnership also strengthens relations among the partners themselves, contributing to the exchange of information and experience in a whole range of reform areas and to the adoption of common standards;
- C. whereas each partner country has the sovereign right to choose freely the level of ambition and the goals to which it aspires in its relations with the European Union and with other regional and international organisations;
- D. whereas four out of the six Eastern partners are members of the World Trade Organisation (Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine);
- E. whereas large parts of the neighbourhood continue to be affected by armed or frozen conflicts which hamper economic, social and political transformation as well as regional cooperation, stability and security;
- F. whereas, under the European Neighbourhood Instrument 2014-2020, between EUR 741 and 906 million are allocated to regional projects in the Eastern Neighbourhood, out of a total of EUR 15,4 billion for the whole instrument; whereas other funds available under this instrument cover bilateral cooperation between the EU and the neighbourhood countries, as well as regional projects in the Southern Neighbourhood and cross-border cooperation;
- G. whereas the Commission has announced, in its Communication on the ENP review of 18 November 2015, its intention to conduct an in-depth assessment with a view to developing options, including an instrument, that could better and more efficiently address the financial needs of neighbourhood countries;

⁽¹⁾ Adopted on 22 March 2016 in Brussels, Belgium.⁽²⁾ Texts adopted, P8_TA-PROV(2015)0272.

Enhancing intra-regional economic cooperation among the Eastern partners

1. Stresses that the EaP countries are culturally and historically closely linked with each other as well as to the European Union, sharing a European heritage and values;
2. Emphasises that economic integration among the EaP countries is currently at a relatively low level; stresses that deeper market integration between the EaP countries would help stimulate economic growth in this area, but would also bring political benefits and contribute to confidence-building and reconciliation in the region;
3. Considers that, since the major goal of the Eastern partnership is the political and economic integration of partners with the European Union, the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly should step up efforts to encourage the development of ties among the partner countries themselves; welcomes the fact that the joint communication of 18 November 2015 on the review of the ENP highlights the need to strengthen relations between neighbours, but regrets that the multilateral dimension of the Eastern Partnership is barely addressed;
4. Calls on the EU and the Eastern European partners to engage vigorously on working out concrete measures to encourage regional economic cooperation; believes that this should be done on the basis of an analysis of factors preventing the development of intra-regional economic integration, of shared interests and of those areas that could most benefit from this development;
5. Emphasises that the setting-up of bilateral Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTA) with Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova is a crucial tool for modern, transparent and predictable trade and regulatory approximation, as well as for foreign direct investment leading to job creation and long-term growth; believes that the EU and the three associated Eastern partners could envisage the creation of a multilateral dimension among the DCFTA countries themselves, with the ultimate goal of creating an economic area based on WTO rules and sovereign choices, as stated in the ENP review communication of 18 November 2015;
6. Acknowledges that partner countries may follow various paths in order to enhance economic and trade relations with the EU and their neighbours; considers that there is nevertheless room for further cooperation between the EU and those partners which have not sought to enter into Association Agreements and DCFTAs, in full respect of each party's international obligations; stresses that the adoption of international standards, inter alia, on the basis of WTO rules, could be an effective way of overcoming technical barriers; welcomes in this respect the proposal contained in the ENP review communication of 18 November 2015 to sign Agreements on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance (ACAAs), which allow free movement of industrial products in specific sectors;
7. Draws attention to the successful examples of economic integration among countries in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in the Western Balkans, which could to a large extent serve as a good model for deepening economic integration among the Eastern Partnership countries;
8. Stresses that such a scenario requires a shared political will by the Eastern partners; calls therefore on the Eastern partners to reflect on their respective relations with each other with a view to invigorating further cooperation, and on the EU to provide expertise and assistance to help its partners explore new opportunities for joint economic development; considers that increased convergence and cooperation, particularly on sanitary and phytosanitary measures, technical regulations and conformity assessments, mutual administrative assistance on customs matters, digital market harmonisation, procurement, transport, visas and educational exchanges, bears great potential for welfare gains to the benefit of the population in all partner countries and could greatly enhance the business climate, as well as the ability of economic operators to participate in value chains across the whole region;
9. Stresses the importance of free and open roads; highlights the liberalisation of means of transportation for countries without direct access to harbours and to sea terminals;

EU financial tools to enhance intra-regional economic integration

10. Notes that the EU financially supports regional integration through common approximation to EU standards and best practices, particularly through the European Neighbourhood Instrument; draws attention to the fact that most of its budget is dedicated to bilateral relations between the EU and Eastern partners, but some of the instruments support either ENP-wide projects or, specifically, the regional dimension of the EaP;

11. Takes note of the ongoing projects under the 'Regional East programmes'; notes that it is unclear to what extent these programmes contribute to deepening intra-regional integration; calls therefore on the Commission to include this dimension in its reporting;
 12. Welcomes the fact that several EU programmes seek to improve the level of regulatory standards and technical standards in the EaP countries, as this is necessary to create the potential to deepen economic cooperation both among EaP countries and between them and the EU Member States; looks forward to more concrete proposals from the Commission and the EEAS regarding the modernisation and strategic alignment of the EU technical assistance instruments (TAIEX and Twinning), as announced in the joint communication of 18 November 2015; believes that EU technical assistance should be delivered not only on a bilateral, but also on a multilateral, basis in order to ensure coordination and help create common regulatory rules throughout the region;
 13. Welcomes the launch next year by the Commission of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) Facility for Small and Medium Enterprises which will provide around EUR 200 million in grants from the EU budget over the next 10 years; notes that the facility is expected to unlock new investments worth at least EUR 2 billion for SMEs in the three Eastern Partnership countries which have a DCFTA with the EU; stresses that insufficient access to finance is one of the main challenges facing SMEs; calls on the EU to ensure that funds are swiftly received by the SMEs, and to make sure that EU support is clearly visible for its beneficiaries and that SMEs are well aware of this initiative; calls on the Commission to consider grant opportunities on regional cooperation within the facility;
 14. Considers that assistance by the EU alone is not sufficient, as the EU institutions — and notably the European Investment Bank — have to rely on partner banks in local financial markets to disburse the loans; urges the partner countries to accomplish the substantial reforms required in order to provide adequate market conditions for SMEs;
 15. Welcomes the efforts of the EaP Platform 2 on Economic Integration and Convergence with EU Policies coordinated by the Commission, which provides a dialogue forum that aims to contribute to the smart, sustainable and inclusive development of a free market economy in partner countries; calls on the Commission to take the necessary steps to strengthen the platform's mandate and transform it into a more strategic body that defines areas in which the exchange of best practices and approximation of standards would most benefit economic integration not only with the EU but also at intra-regional level;
 16. Welcomes the proposal that the EU should support its partners in modernising their economies to achieve sustainable growth, as announced in the joint communication of 18 November 2015; suggests that effective cooperation should be fostered and maintained in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy in the context of bilateral projects on the implementation of the Association Agreement, with expert assistance from the Member States;
 17. Believes that the Parliaments of the Eastern partners and the European Parliament should be involved in this more strategic approach, and that the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly could provide valuable input into it;
 18. Instructs its Co-Presidents to forward this resolution to the President of the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the EEAS, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and the Eastern Partnership countries.
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RESOLUTION ⁽¹⁾**by the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly on policy development on unconventional gas and potential impact on energy markets in the EU and the Eastern European partner countries**

(2016/C 193/03)

THE EURONEST PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY,

- having regard to the Constituent Act of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly of 3 May 2011,
- having regard to the Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit held in Riga on 21 and 22 May 2015,
- having regard to the European Council conclusions of 24 October 2014 on the 2030 climate and energy policy framework,
- having regard to the decisions of the United Nations Climate Change Conference held in Paris from 30 November to 10 December 2015,
- having regard to the European Parliament resolution of 5 February 2014 on a 2030 framework for climate and energy policies ⁽²⁾,
- having regard to the European Parliament resolution of 14 March 2013 on the 'Energy roadmap 2050, a future with energy' ⁽³⁾,
- having regard to the European Parliament resolution of 12 June 2012 on 'Engaging in energy policy cooperation with partners beyond our borders: A strategic approach to secure, sustainable and competitive energy supply' ⁽⁴⁾,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 22 January 2014 entitled 'A policy framework for climate and energy in the period from 2020 to 2030' (COM(2014)0015),
- having regard to the national strategy papers in respect of energy of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine for the periods up to 2020 and 2030 respectively,
- having regard to the 2014-2017 core objectives and work programme of the Eastern Partnership (Platform 3 — Energy security),
- having regard to the establishment of the Eastern Europe Energy Efficiency and Environment Partnership (E5P) in 2009,
- having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), and in particular Article 194 thereof, which states that the application of its provisions establishing Union measures in the field of energy is, inter alia, without prejudice to the application of other provisions of the Treaties, including Article 192(2) in particular,
- having regard to Directive 94/22/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 1994 on the conditions for granting and using authorisations for the prospection, exploration and production of hydrocarbons ⁽⁵⁾,
- having regard to the 2014 and 2015 Annual Reports to the European Parliament and the national parliaments on the activities of the Energy Community,

⁽¹⁾ Adopted on 22 March 2016 in Brussels, Belgium.⁽²⁾ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2014)0094.⁽³⁾ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2013)0088.⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 332 E, 15.11.2013, p. 28.⁽⁵⁾ OJ L 164, 30.6.1994, p. 3.

- A. whereas the EU Member States and their Eastern European partners are primarily responsible for their energy mixes and for meeting rising energy demand, and the EU Member States have to act in accordance with Article 194 TFEU and thus to ensure the functioning of the energy market and the security of energy supply, and to promote energy efficiency and savings, the development of renewable energy and the interconnection of energy networks;
- B. whereas, in a fast-evolving energy landscape characterised by increasing global competition for resources, rising energy prices and growing price differentials with some of our main competitors, European economies and citizens require energy which is sustainable and affordable, with a secure and reliable supply;
- C. whereas our countries still face a number of energy challenges, including decarbonisation, increasing import dependency on a single monopoly supplier (with related risks for security of supply), the use of energy supplies as a tool for political leverage, the completion of the internal energy market, energy poverty, and the impact of energy prices on competitiveness;
- D. whereas unconventional hydrocarbons have the potential to strengthen indigenous sources of energy and decrease import dependency;
- E. whereas the techniques associated with high-volume hydraulic fracturing, commonly referred to as 'fracking', have triggered concerns about public health and environmental effects;
- F. whereas the Commission wishes to ensure the environmental integrity of the extraction of unconventional hydrocarbons, such as shale gas, and to make sure that the risks that may arise from individual projects and cumulative development are managed adequately in EU Member States wishing to explore or exploit such resources;
- G. whereas on 22 January 2014 the Commission responded to calls for urgent action by adopting a recommendation intended to help provide clarity and predictability for public authorities, market operators and citizens;
- H. whereas that Commission Recommendation 2014/70/EU of 22 January 2014 on minimum principles for the exploration and production of hydrocarbons (such as shale gas) using high-volume hydraulic fracturing ⁽¹⁾ invites EU Member States to follow minimum principles when implementing or adapting their legislation applicable to hydrocarbon exploration or production based on high-volume hydraulic fracturing;
- I. whereas, although the global economic crisis and low oil prices have had a negative impact on investment in the extraction of unconventional fossil fuels, international financial institutions still play a significant role by leveraging national funds and loans for such investment;
- J. whereas the shale gas deposits being found in countries that previously had no exploitable gas reserves bring an opportunity for countries that import natural gas to transform themselves into producers, allowing them to secure long-term natural gas needs from a domestic source and/or become exporters via newly developed liquefied natural gas (LNG);
- K. whereas the EU and its Eastern European partner countries need to take into account the overall competitiveness of their economies, and of their sectors for the extraction of hydrocarbons such as fossil fuels, when shaping appropriate policies for imposing obligations on industrial sectors that are developing new ways of extracting unconventional fossil fuels in the context of the exploration or exploitation of such resources;
1. stresses the importance of EU assistance in connection with the policy recommendations laid out in Recommendation 2014/70/EU;
 2. endorses the minimum principles set out in Recommendation 2014/70/EU, which are intended to ensure that public health, the climate and the environment are safeguarded, that resources are used efficiently, that competition for exploitation, construction and operation is organised transparently, and that the public is informed; asks those EU Member States which intend to pursue hydraulic fracturing to respect these principles;
 3. calls for the creation of the conditions necessary for safe and effective exploration and production of hydrocarbons (such as shale gas) using high-volume hydraulic fracturing;

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 39, 8.2.2014, p. 72.

4. emphasises that Eastern European partners have to address public concerns about all the possible negative consequences of hydraulic fracturing, and to ensure the highest environmental, social, public health, efficiency and safety standards as well as transparent competition for the exploitation, construction and operation of the extraction of unconventional gas; also highlights the need to avoid environmental and public hazards;
5. draws attention to the particular challenges associated with the exploitation of natural gas, which currently accounts for one quarter of the EU's primary energy consumption and could contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the short to medium term, should it replace more carbon-intensive fossil fuels; stresses, in particular, that, at the consumer level, regions relying on oil-based heating could bring their emissions down by encouraging homeowners to convert to natural gas heating; notes that those regions should not be discouraged from increasing energy efficiency in key sectors such as buildings, or from maximising their use of renewable sources;
6. supports the exploration of shale gas in EU Member States, given that it could be a possible substitute for more carbon-intensive fossil fuels, an indigenous source of natural gas (thereby reducing dependency on other energy suppliers) and a possible driver of jobs, economic growth and additional sources of public revenue;
7. underscores both the potential new opportunities and the challenges stemming from shale gas extraction, as highlighted in Recommendation 2014/70/EU;
8. calls for the intensification of fundamental and applied science research and thematic research on scientific prognostication and the establishment of prospecting zones for the development of slate, high organic substances and methane gas from coal deposits, which can be linked to the extraction of gas in all oil, gas and coal basins;
9. stresses the need to prepare normative and technical documentation and bring it into line with international industry standards for effective prospecting, exploration and production in respect of shale gas strata in Eastern Partnership countries;
10. calls for improvements to legislation in the area of subsoil use for oil and gas production, and the assessment, prevention and elimination of negative and potentially negative environmental and social impacts of subsoil use;

Potential impact on energy markets in EU Member States and Eastern Partnership countries

11. considers that shale gas activities also have the potential to bring direct or indirect economic benefits to EU Member States and Eastern Partnership countries, regions, local communities, enterprises and citizens, for instance through regional investments in infrastructure, direct and indirect employment opportunities, and public revenue in the form of taxes, fees and royalties;
12. notes the example of the USA, where unconventional gas currently accounts for 60 % of domestic gas production, with shale gas featuring the highest growth rate; points out that this significant increase in indigenous natural gas production has resulted in lower gas prices in the USA and has temporarily influenced the price of LNG imports into the EU;
13. takes note of the European Council conclusions of 22 May 2013, which stressed the need to diversify Europe's energy supply and develop safe and indigenous energy resources in order to ensure security of supply, reduce the external energy dependency of EU Member States and stimulate economic growth;
14. recalls that the EU's long-term objective, in conjunction with the Eastern Partnership countries, is to become a resource-efficient and sustainable economy; considers that natural gas and the availability of new sources of safe and sustainable indigenous fossil fuels, such as natural gas from shale formations, can play a role in transforming the energy sector, especially if these replace more carbon-intensive fossil fuels; takes the view that, in any case, reducing greenhouse gas emissions from our energy system will require continued improvements in energy efficiency, energy savings and an increased uptake of sustainable technologies, in particular renewable energies;
15. calls on Belarus to halt the construction of its nuclear power plant until a truly independent environmental impact assessment of its construction and operation has been carried out in an open and transparent manner, in full compliance with existing international nuclear and environmental safety standards and requirements, such as the Espoo and Aarhus Conventions and the safety standards laid down by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and with the involvement of all stakeholders, in order to ensure that no compromises are made at the expense of environmental protection and nuclear safety;

16. calls on the governments of Eastern European partner countries to do their utmost to ensure transparency in negotiating energy agreements with third countries, especially those known for using energy resources as a tool of foreign policy.

Background information on cooperation between Ukraine and the EU in the energy sector

Shale gas and methane gas, which together are known as 'unconventional gas', are sparking significant interest in building up hydrocarbon resources and increasing Ukraine's energy independence.

The concept of non-traditional hydrocarbons includes shale gas, tight gas reservoir rocks (or gas of the central-basin type) and deposits of shale oil, coalbed methane and gas hydrates. In Ukraine, there are prospects for opening up unconventional hydrocarbon deposits of all types.

Expected recoverable shale gas resources in Ukraine have previously been estimated by various experts as being in the range of 7-15 trillion m³. Most experts agree that Ukraine ranks fourth in Europe (after Poland, France and Norway) for shale gas resources.

One of the main factors necessary for the effective functioning of the Ukrainian economy is meeting the country's needs for mineral resources, primarily fuel and energy. Alongside a decrease in the level of energy consumption, priority must be given to the development of new search technology and to the production and use of other natural energy sources, including unconventional ones.

In order to develop shale gas, it is necessary to implement modern technologies for disclosure, testing, intensification (in particular the use of powerful multistage fracturing) and the development of deposits, and to attract the significant investments required, which Ukraine does not have.

Cooperation between Ukraine and the EU in the energy sector takes place under the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and Association Agenda, the Memorandum of Understanding on Energy Cooperation between the EU and Ukraine, and the Treaty establishing the Energy Community.

The development of unconventional hydrocarbon production resources, in particular shale gas, is constrained by a number of other factors, including the absence of legislation that would regulate production of this type of raw material.

As a member of the Energy Community, Ukraine has an obligation to implement the Third Energy Package. It is currently reforming its energy sector and harmonising its legislation in accordance with the commitments made. Recent achievements include the adoption of the Law on the Natural Gas Market, which is designed to create an efficient and competitive environment in this sector.

With a view to carrying out sectoral reforms in 2015, Ukraine had the intention of preparing and adopting a number of legislative acts liberalising the gas and electricity markets.

In particular, the Ukrainian Ministry for Energy and the Coal Industry, in conjunction with the Secretariat of the Energy Community, drafted the Law on the Natural Gas Market in accordance with Directive 2009/73/EC concerning common rules for the internal market in natural gas and Regulation (EC) No 715/2009 on conditions for access to the natural gas transmission networks.

The aforementioned law sets out the legislative framework for the reform of the gas sector and a plan for its implementation in accordance with European energy legislation, including the provisions of the Third Energy Package.

RESOLUTION ⁽¹⁾**by the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly on the mutual recognition of professional qualifications, work experience and university diplomas within the Bologna process**

(2016/C 193/04)

THE EURONEST PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY,

- having regard to the Riga Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit (21 and 22 May 2015), which builds upon the Vilnius and Warsaw declarations made in the preceding years in a similar setting,
- having regard to the European Parliament resolution of 23 October 2013 entitled ‘European Neighbourhood Policy, working towards a stronger partnership — European Parliament’s position on the 2012 progress reports’,
- having regard to the Constituent Act of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly of 3 May 2011,
- having regard to the Yerevan ministerial communiqué arising from the Fourth Bologna Policy Forum and Ministerial Conference of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) held on 14 and 15 May 2015,
- having regard to the resolution of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly of 3 April 2012 entitled ‘Strengthening of civil society in the Eastern Partnership Countries, including the question of cooperation between government and civil society, and the question of the reforms aimed at the empowerment of civil society’,
- having regard to the Sorbonne Joint Declaration on harmonisation of the architecture of the European higher education system, signed in Paris on 25 May 1998 by the education ministers of France, Germany, Italy and the UK,
- having regard to the Joint Declaration signed in Bologna on 19 June 1999 by the education ministers of 29 European countries (the Bologna Declaration),
- having regard to the Budapest-Vienna Declaration of 12 March 2010 adopted by the education ministers of 47 countries, which officially launched the EHEA,
- having regard to the communiqué issued by the Ministerial Conference and Third Bologna Policy Forum held in Bucharest on 26 and 27 April 2012,
- having regard to the Mobility Strategy 2020 for the EHEA, adopted by the EHEA Ministerial Conference held in Bucharest on 26 and 27 April 2012,
- having regard to Directive 2013/55/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 November 2013 on the recognition of professional qualifications,
- having regard to the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 September 2005 on facilitating the issue by the Member States of uniform short-stay visas for researchers,
- having regard to the report entitled ‘The European Higher Area for Education in 2015 -Bologna Process Implementation Report’,
- having regard to the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF-LLL),
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (‘ET 2020’),

⁽¹⁾ Adopted on 22 March 2016 in Brussels, Belgium.

- having regard to the Council conclusions of 11 May 2010 on the internationalisation of higher education,
 - having regard to the Council recommendations of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving and to promote the learning mobility of young people,
 - having regard to the report entitled ‘The European Higher Education Area in 2012 — Bologna Process Implementation Report’,
 - having regard to the final report of the International Conference on Funding of Higher Education held in Yerevan (Armenia) on 8 and 9 September 2011,
 - having regard to the European Parliament resolution of 23 September 2008 on the Bologna Process and student mobility,
 - having regard to the European Parliament report of 31 March 2015 on the follow-up on the implementation of the Bologna Process,
 - having regard to the Association Agreements signed between the European Union and the governments of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine,
 - having regard to the Erasmus+ and Erasmus Mundus scholarship schemes,
 - having regard to the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (CETS No 165, Lisbon, 11 April 1997),
- A. whereas the mutual recognition of higher education diplomas between the EU and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries is still a complex and costly process, despite the advances represented by the Bologna Process and the EHEA;
- B. whereas students from EaP countries find it difficult and sometimes impossible to have their qualifications duly recognised in some EU Member States, while at times students from the EU face similar issues in EaP countries;
- C. whereas the stumbling-blocks to the recognition of diplomas and qualifications can prevent the fostering of academic and professional mobility and cultural ties between both parties, as well as impeding the promotion of academic research and overall advancement in numerous fields of science in Europe;
- D. whereas there are no arrangements for equal treatment in terms of recognition of professional qualifications for the nationals of EaP countries/Bologna process-EHEA members, and this prevents many highly qualified professionals in a range of regulated fields, such as healthcare and social work, education, architecture and construction (e.g. construction engineering) and many others, from enhancing their skills by practising them within the EU, and thus both from bringing valuable knowledge back to their home countries and filling gaps in the highly skilled workforce in EU Member States;
- E. whereas there is a strong need for more research-oriented institutions, including doctoral schools, to be developed in the EaP countries, thus offering more research career options to local students;
- F. whereas approaches to the recognition of qualifications vary both within the EU and between the EU and the EaP countries which are members of the Bologna Process/EHEA;
- G. whereas there is no harmonisation of the process for recognition of foreign qualifications, nor is there any cost-effective mechanism for reactive information in countries participating in the Bologna Process/EHEA;
- H. whereas in more than two thirds of participating countries, final decisions on the recognition of foreign qualifications are the responsibility of the higher education institutions themselves;

- I. whereas there are still concerns regarding fairness, transparency, standards and accountability in relation to numerous higher education institutions in many of the EaP countries;
- J. whereas corruption, red tape, conservatism, uncertainty and outdated mentalities can still be encountered within higher education institutions in the Eastern Partnership countries and occasionally also in the EU, and this needs to be addressed and countered;
- K. whereas the National Academic Recognition Information Centre (ENIC/NARIC) network is the leading network that offers exchange of information on recognition and develops tools for recognition of procedures, policies and practices with the potential to inform the public and partners and help member countries and key political bodies understand the recognition process, while also enhancing the alignment of national legislation and procedures with EU practices;
- L. whereas universities are spaces that foster the development of new ideas and rely on freedom of speech and thought for the pursuit of academic development; whereas this can enter into conflict with politically motivated pressures, thus often exposing students to harassment and even human rights abuses;
- M. whereas Erasmus + programmes are crucial tools for modernising both EU and EaP higher education institutions, stimulating international cooperation with EU institutions, and contributing to higher education reform and greater student mobility;

General principles

1. Affirms that mutually recognised quality higher education for students in both the EU and the EaP countries, as well as mutual recognition of professional qualification for key regulated professions and full acknowledgement of work experience acquired on both sides, can be key to increasing and improving cross-cultural socioeconomic ties and fostering peace, development, prosperity and stability;
2. Welcomes the signing of Association Agreements with three countries of the EaP, and looks forward to this development having a positive impact on the mutual recognition of diplomas, qualifications, skills and work experience; considers it a key priority to devise meaningful and lasting means of cooperation with the other EaP countries, ensuring the continuing of cooperation on this and other issues; notes at the same time that the Association Agreements provide enhanced communication and cooperation tools at government and parliamentary level, and could serve as the basis for further cooperation, including by establishing National Recognition Information Centres, implementing a joint EU-EaP European Professional Card (EPC), and developing cost-effective information and alert mechanisms by means of the Internal Market Information System (IMI) between the EU and its Eastern partners;
3. Stresses that the Bologna Process is by no means a one-way system, but that, rather, it has the objective of fostering the development of higher education and academic mobility between the EU and the EaP countries, and that participants on both sides require improved access to higher education institutions, recognition of diplomas, scholarship programmes and full acceptance in different higher education systems provided all necessary academic criteria are met;
4. Underlines that the current situation, in which persistent systemic issues make it difficult for many students and young professionals from the Eastern partners to have their diplomas or professional qualifications automatically recognised in the EU, creates a significant barrier to the free movement of professionals and the development of good relations between the two sides;
5. Notes that the socioeconomic development of the EaP countries can be greatly enhanced by the availability of graduates, professionals and entrepreneurs who have acquired new experiences in foreign environments, which, in turn, allows the emergence of new ideas and processes and contributes to the spread of values and know-how, strengthens local universities, attracts the trust of foreign investors and helps prevent stagnation;
6. Believes there is a strong need to reverse the 'brain-drain' trend of talented youth from the EaP region to leave for the West, thus depriving their countries of much-needed expertise for improvements in their societies and sustainable development;

7. Underlines the need for all parties involved in the Eastern Partnership to ensure, in both legislation and practice, full access to higher education for all, with no discrimination on grounds of gender, religion, ethnicity or political views; notes that universities are universally recognised as places of learning and free speech and that fostering academic excellence is best served by protecting students from all forms of persecution or harassment;
8. Considers that the Commission should, as a matter of priority, work with the relevant academic, administrative and governmental authorities and student organisations or representatives in order to highlight the concerns of students and professionals from the EaP countries so as to identify specific issues affecting the region and find solutions;
9. Stresses that EaP governments need to intensify their efforts to introduce appropriate systems of quality control and assurance, working alongside universities and national authorities responsible for specific regulated professions, in order to offer their nationals suitable opportunities to enrich their studies and experience, also in the EU;
10. Notes with concern that there are still persistent gender imbalances in some fields of training in the EaP countries, and considers that equal access to all levels for both genders, and in particular to tertiary education, needs to be actively promoted and stimulated by targeted scholarships enhancing positive discrimination;
11. Stresses that now that visa liberalisation has been achieved for all EaP countries other than Belarus, more students from the region are now interested in furthering their studies in the EU; urges the EU institutions, therefore, to reinforce negotiations with Belarus on visa liberalisation with a view to fostering student mobility between the EU and all the EaP countries without exception;
12. Stresses that the independence of universities and their complete separation from state and politics are primary and vital conditions for a performing and EU-compatible education system; stresses that financing universities on a fair basis is a necessary step in this direction and should have nothing to do with the state or politics, but, rather, should be linked to performance, number of students and academic results;
13. Calls on universities in the EaP countries to adapt their educational offer to the needs of the labour market;
14. Encourages universities in both the EU and the EaP countries to actively seek mutual collaboration, exchange experience, and set up permanent dialogue mechanisms in order to better generate change in the latter;
15. Acknowledges the important role of the ENIC/NARIC network in the various aspects of academic recognition and recognition for regulated and unregulated professions, and considers it necessary to enhance the further development of this network, including developing the functioning and role of national centres in the EaP countries;

University diplomas in the framework of the Bologna Process

16. Welcomes the fact that all the EaP countries are members of the EHEA and that, despite various differences in implementation of the Bologna Process principles, they are all striving to reach the same standards in higher education as are present in the rest of the EU (the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA-ESG)), and that automatic and immediate recognition for all higher learning diplomas should be the main goal across the whole area;
17. Welcomes the decision of the 2015 Ministerial Conference on the accession of Belarus to the EHEA, seeing in this development a proof of the inclusiveness of the Bologna process; encourages Belarus to make its higher education system and practice compatible with those of other EHEA countries;
18. Considers that the tools of the Bologna Process, in particular the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), are currently being correctly implemented by the EaP countries in terms of their respective National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) and National Credit Transferable System (NCTSs), harmonised with Bologna tools, and that, while there is still room for improvement, the criteria to be recognised by the EU counterpart authorities within the European Area of Recognition (EAR) for the automatic recognition of university diplomas should lead to an accelerated and increased rate of diploma recognition of students from EaP countries;

19. Underlines the need to enhance cooperation between educational institutions in the EU and the EaP countries in order to exchange experience, since in the majority of countries the recognition of foreign diplomas for academic purposes is carried out by those institutions;
20. Acknowledges that levels of state expenditure on higher education vary widely among the EaP countries, as is also the case among EU Member States themselves; nonetheless deplores the fact that in many EaP countries and neighbouring EU Member States the percentage of GDP spent on tertiary education is among the lowest in the EHEA, thus making adequate development in the field difficult or impossible;
21. Notes that the Bologna three-cycle structure for higher education (BA, MA and PhD), while not implemented identically all across the whole of the EHEA, is mostly respected in the EaP countries, but with the problem that there is a distinct lack of adequate numbers of doctoral schools or available funding for students in those countries, which is the main reason why most potential candidates seek to pursue doctoral degrees elsewhere;
22. Stresses that as higher education institutions themselves are largely the main responsible bodies for quality control criteria and diploma issuing procedures respecting the principles of Bologna Process and the Lisbon Recognition Convention, there is a strong need for the development of more autonomous and stronger higher education institutions in the EaP countries, and calls on the Commission and the EEAS to examine means of promoting this development together with national authorities;
23. Urges the governments and parliaments of both the EaP countries and the EU Member States to work to better enforce in national legislation the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention regarding both the quality of diplomas issued in the national context and the facilitation of the automatic recognition of foreign qualifications;
24. Points out that the existence of 'diploma mills' and 'accreditation mills' and the lack of comparable, compatible and coherent national systems as regards the implementation of the Bologna-EHEA tools remain the main reasons preventing many bodies in the EU from being able to automatically recognise qualifications awarded in the EaP countries;
25. Calls on governments on both sides to step up their efforts to ensure trust in the higher education system, in particular by ensuring a level playing field for admissions and examinations and access to resources and facilities, as well as equal rights for scholarships and, most importantly, ensuring that diplomas are issued only to students who comply with all the requirements and EQF learning outcomes necessary for the qualification concerned;
26. Strongly calls on the EU bodies, but also on universities, to examine and identify meaningful ways of supporting EaP students by increasing the number and visibility of academic scholarships targeted on students in the EaP countries, using the various tools of the Union but also encouraging national governments, foundations and NGOs to address the needs of students from EaP countries who may in many cases come from underprivileged economic backgrounds and, despite high academic performance, find it financially difficult to study in the EU;
27. Welcomes the active participation of the Eastern partners in Erasmus+ and the fact that their budget absorption capacity is very good; regrets, therefore, that the funding available for the EaP countries under these programmes for 2014-2020 has remained roughly equivalent to that of the previous financial period;
28. Considers it highly important for the objective of fostering more cooperation to bolster the financial resources available to EU scholarship programmes such as Erasmus+, specifically targeting EaP students and creating a specific chapter within EU financing schemes for this region, which is of the utmost strategic and cultural importance for the Union;

Professional qualifications and work experience

29. Considers that the mutual recognition of professional qualifications is necessary for ensuring several critical steps for the development of both sides in the Eastern Partnership project, including improving temporary mobility for the purpose of job specialisation and thus opening up opportunities for nationals of EaP countries to acquire new skills which can be used for improving their professional output back home but also to fill vital gaps in the workforces on both sides;

30. Notes that while professional qualifications are strongly related to the improvement of recognition of diplomas within the Bologna Process, there is no specific document similar to Directive 2013/55/EU regulating the issue within the EU, the European Economic Area and Switzerland which would currently include the EaP countries; encourages, therefore, new initiatives aiming at giving a truly continental dimension to this priority;
 31. Calls on the Commission and the EEAS to examine, together with the EaP governments, the possibility of creating a new framework for the European Neighbourhood in order to extend the European Professional Card (EPC) system to these partners; would hope that this tool would lead to renewed and more dynamic professional mobility in Europe and its neighbourhood and help fill capability gaps in various professions across the board, with mutually beneficial effects for all sides;
 32. Stresses that all cooperation on the mutual recognition of professional qualifications should be aimed at benefiting the ability of professionals from both sides to enhance their skills, practice and mobility without endangering workforce availability in the EaP countries or creating any imbalances within the EU;
 33. Calls for the development of a united approach in carrying out recognition procedures for professional qualifications for all, and encourages the EaP governments to develop and implement reliable and transparent procedures for the recognition of professional qualifications, first of all for the regulated professions;
 34. Considers the mutual recognition of work experience of skilled workers to be a vital component in the development of a dynamic job market in Europe, and that basic criteria should be established that can be shared between Member States and other partners in order to record and quantify meaningful work experience of workers,
 35. Considers that, besides employing criteria related to quality, transparency and integrity, EU Member States and EaP countries should ensure that national authorities dealing with professional qualifications and any associations and employers' federations dealing with work experience recognition do their utmost to avoid all forms of discrimination on any grounds (gender, religion, ethnicity or country of origin, including any of the EaP states);
 36. Instructs its Co-Presidents to forward this resolution to the President of the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission, the EEAS, and the governments and parliaments of the EU Member States and of the countries of the Eastern Partnership.
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RESOLUTION ⁽¹⁾
of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly on the Nadiya Savchenko case

(2016/C 193/05)

THE EURONEST PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY,

- having regard to the European Parliament resolution of 30 April 2015 on the case of Nadiya Savchenko ⁽²⁾ and the European Parliament's other previous resolutions referring to Nadiya Savchenko,
 - having regard to the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly Resolution of 17 March 2015 on the Russian military aggression against Ukraine and the urgent need for a peaceful resolution of the conflict,
 - having regard to the statement by the President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, of 17 March 2016,
 - having regard to the statements by the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, notably those of 7, 9 and 10 March 2016,
 - having regard to the 'Package of measures for the implementation of the Minsk Agreements' of 12 February 2015,
 - having regard to UN Security Council Resolution 2202 (2015) of 17 February 2015, which endorsed the Minsk Agreements,
 - having regard to the provisions of international humanitarian law, in particular the Third Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War of 12 August 1949,
 - having regard to Resolution 2034 (2015) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE),
- A. whereas Russia-led militants abducted Nadiya Savchenko, a Ukrainian military pilot, on the territory of Ukraine and illegally took her to Russia, where she was held as a 'guest' in a hotel and denied any contact with her family, and later groundlessly charged with murder by the local authorities;
- B. whereas Nadiya Savchenko is a distinguished soldier with the rank of lieutenant, who was the first woman to enter Ukraine's Air Force Academy and the only female soldier in the Iraq peacekeeping forces, and who volunteered to take part in the Anti-Terrorist Operation in the East of Ukraine;
- C. whereas Nadiya Savchenko has been elected a Member of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and appointed as a representative of Ukraine to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) during her imprisonment; whereas PACE Resolution 2034 (2015) called for her immediate release and for her parliamentary immunity to be respected, including by the Russian Federation which is a member of the Council of Europe;
- D. whereas the Russian Federation has no right to detain, arrest, charge or try citizens of Ukraine for alleged crimes committed on the territory of Ukraine;
- E. whereas the state prosecution regularly changed its argumentation regarding the line of accusation and the final verdict was unexpectedly postponed twice;
- F. whereas despite Nadiya Savchenko's poor health, neither doctors nor her mother have been allowed to visit her; whereas doctors from Ukraine and Members of the Ukrainian Parliament have been faced with serious obstacles while attempting to cross the border;
- G. whereas Nadiya Savchenko was invited as a Guest of Honour to the Euronest PA Women's Forum;

⁽¹⁾ Adopted on 22 March 2016 in Brussels, Belgium.

⁽²⁾ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2015)0186.

1. Condemns the Russian Federation for abducting and illegally transferring Nadiya Savchenko from the territory of Ukraine to Russia and keeping her in detention for nearly 2 years in prison;
 2. Demands that the Russian Federation immediately and unconditionally release Nadiya Savchenko;
 3. Calls upon the Russian Federation to fully comply with the Minsk Agreements; recalls that under the Minsk Agreements Russia has taken on an obligation to exchange all illegally detained persons; considers, therefore, that Russia has no legal basis or jurisdiction for taking legal action against a citizen of Ukraine, particularly in the case of Ms Savchenko, who was abducted and imprisoned under fabricated accusations of an alleged crime committed in Ukraine;
 4. Is of the opinion that Nadiya Savchenko's detention as a prisoner of war in a Russian prison is a violation of the Geneva Convention of 1949;
 5. Reminds Russia of its international obligation to respect the immunity of the Members of PACE;
 6. Recalls that the Russian Federation has full responsibility for the health and well-being of Nadiya Savchenko; urges the Russian authorities to allow Ukrainian doctors to visit her;
 7. Urges the Russian Federation to act according to its international obligations and release Nadiya Savchenko, Mr Sentsov, Mr Kolchenko and other Ukrainian citizens, and to immediately guarantee their safe return to Ukraine; urges the Russian judicial and law enforcement authorities to carry out their duties in the future in an impartial and independent manner;
 8. Urges the EU to draw up a list of individuals responsible for the illegal detention of Nadiya Savchenko who would be subject to EU restrictive measures;
 9. Instructs its Co-Presidents to forward this resolution to the President of the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the European External Action Service, and the governments and parliaments of the Member States and of the Eastern Partnership countries.
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ISSN 1977-091X (electronic edition)
ISSN 1725-2423 (paper edition)



Publications Office of the European Union
2985 Luxembourg
LUXEMBOURG

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