

Meeting of the SI Committee for the CIS, the Caucasus and the Black Sea
Yerevan, 8-9 June 2015

DECLARATION

The Socialist International Committee for the CIS, the Caucasus and the Black Sea, meeting in Yerevan on 8-9 June 2015, discussed the regional priorities of strengthening and extending democracy, securing peace and the resolution of conflicts and advancing the social democratic agenda.

Strengthening democracy

In many countries of the region, the democratic process and its institutions need to be strengthened, and social democratic parties can be at the forefront of these efforts.

The committee condemns the anti-democratic practices prevalent in countries of the region, where a lack of free and fair elections give no prospect of a democratic change in government. Opposition parties are too frequently being denied their voice, with the incumbent ruling elite able to suppress opposition by manipulating their access to power. The free expression of political will and its translation into representation is the foundation of any true democracy and the development of multi-party democracies is crucial.

The committee supports the proposal of its member party for the transition to a fully proportional election system in Armenia, with a corresponding move towards constitutional changes aimed at adopting a parliamentary form of governance. The country also needs legal measures to strengthen the opposition in its role of controlling and counterbalancing the authorities, and full independence of the judiciary.

The committee noted that presidential elections will once again be held in Belarus, despite the many unresolved issues arising from the previous election in 2010. The arbitrary jailing of political opponents is unacceptable and we reiterate the support of the SI for Mikalai Statkevich, who remains imprisoned despite repeated calls from the SI and other international actors for his release.

The committee expresses its solidarity with the SI member party in Kazakhstan, the OSDP, in building a broad coalition of the National Civic Assembly in preparation for upcoming parliamentary elections. It supports all efforts by the party to provide real an alternative to authoritarianism in the form of a democratic and socially responsible state.

The committee welcomes the profound democratic changes in the spheres of freedom of speech, media and political pluralism, which have taken place in Georgia since 2012. We further encourage the ruling coalition to prioritise development-oriented policies, to enable Georgia to achieve a more inclusive and just economy and fight extreme poverty and inequality.

The committee considers that the establishment of genuine democracy can also help advance the cause of conflict resolution, by eliminating the deficit in rights and freedoms that is a cause of conflict.

Conflict resolution

The committee recognises that the region's unresolved conflicts are a matter of urgent concern, and emphasises the need for peace and protection of life as an utmost priority. Peace comes before all else, as without it there can be no prosperity or development. Conflict also brings additional challenges to democracy when it is used as a pretext for restricting opposition and consolidating power.

The work of the committee underlines the fundamental importance of dialogue to the process of conflict resolution, and bringing together delegates from Armenia and Azerbaijan in Yerevan demonstrates the unique character of the Socialist International in this regard. Resolving such a long-standing dispute, with many intersecting claims on the different sides will require great patience and commitment. The SI will continue to prioritise this spirit of dialogue and mutual understanding through the work of its committee and use the opportunity created by this meeting to reach out to the leadership of both countries in the interests of peace.

The committee reiterates its declaration on overcoming conflicts and securing peace in the region issued in Astana in September 2014, and regrets the lack of progress made in securing a genuine ceasefire in Ukraine. We urge the parties to the conflict to uphold international law and implement the ceasefire as outlined in the Minsk II agreement, along with all the other provisions therein.

The social democratic agenda

The committee considers that social democracy is greatly needed in the region to develop and strengthen as the alternative to nationalism and neo-liberalism. The challenge for social democratic parties in the region is to communicate their vision for the country in a way that resonates with ordinary citizens. In light of the deficiency of democracy in the region, it is important that social democratic parties enhance cooperation with like-minded partners in other countries to build a coherent message.

Social democracy has a vital role to play in the battle against inequality, which is of utmost importance to the long-term development of countries of the region and prosperity of its citizens. The role of social democracy is to constructively oppose policies that focus merely on serving narrow interests, and instead prioritise the promotion of equality, social justice and sustainable development in the interest of all citizens.

Social democratic parties are committed to the fight against corruption, which is a means by which power becomes entrenched and public funds are diverted away from their intended purpose. Corruption is a scourge and must be tackled in all its forms, with the help of reinforced institutions, a strong and independent judiciary and a clear and transparent framework for the pursuit and eradication of financial misconduct.
