



Foreign Affairs Committee

Sixth Report

Session 1998–99

South Caucasus and Central Asia

Response of the Secretary of State for
Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

*Presented to Parliament
by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
by Command of Her Majesty
October 1999*

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
SIXTH REPORT
SESSION 1998–99
SOUTH CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA
RESPONSE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR
FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

1. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs welcomes the Foreign Affairs Committee's Report on the South Caucasus and Central Asia (HC 349) as an expression of the growing and positive Parliamentary interest in Britain's relations with this key region. The Report is particularly timely given the current significant expansion of British representation in the region under the Caspian Enhancement Programme.

2. The Government agrees with the conclusions of the Report in Paragraph 187 about the importance of the stability of the region to Western interests, and agrees on the actual and potential importance of the role of the United Kingdom. It notes the Committee's welcome for the efforts of the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and undertakes to maintain and, where UK interests justify it, expand those efforts taking account of the resources available. The Report contains many detailed recommendations, on which the Government responds below.

Regional Security

Regional conflicts (recommendations 1–3)

(1) Given that the British Government believes that it is regarded by both Armenia and Azerbaijan as neutral and friendly, we recommend that it consider how it may best take forward the Minsk Group's work and contribute to a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute. (Paragraph 32)

3. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is working to increase its contribution to resolving the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh in the light of its good relations with both Armenia and Azerbaijan, looking to build on some of the meetings mentioned in paragraph 29 of the Report. The Government will continue to support the work of the Minsk Group and will maintain contact with the co-chairs and the parties with a view to providing assistance where possible. It is also discussing with EU partners whether there is more the EU could be doing through its Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Partnership and Co-operation Agreements with both Armenia and Azerbaijan, which entered into force on 1 July 1999, and Community programmes, such as TACIS and the interstate TRACECA and INOGATE programmes.

(2) We welcome the British Government's involvement in resolving the conflict in Abkhazia and, while we recognise the great difficulties involved, we recommend that work towards a solution of a problem which threatens the security and integrity of the Georgian state should be a regional priority for British diplomacy. (Paragraph 40)

4. The Government agrees with the Committee's conclusion (Paragraph 35) that there is little the United Kingdom can do to help resolve the conflict in South Ossetia beyond encouraging the sides to meet. The Government appreciates the sustained efforts of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to encourage a political settlement. The Government will continue to support projects promoting mutual confidence and co-operation to prepare the ground for an eventual settlement. The Government also agrees that seeking a solution to the problem of Abkhazia should be a regional priority for British diplomacy. The Report notes British activity in the Geneva process and on the ground. The United Kingdom, in co-ordination with the other members of the group of Friends of the Secretary General (France, Germany, the Russian

Federation and the United States), is also active within the United Nations Security Council on the problem of Abkhazia. It maintains a dialogue with the interested parties in the region and outside it. The Government will continue its efforts to identify opportunities to make further contributions.

5. The Government intends to increase its support for NGOs active in confidence building and conflict reduction work across the South Caucasus: the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Department for International Development and Ministry of Defence are working together to identify and support the most promising projects.

(3) In view of the continued threat to regional stability posed by the situation in Tajikistan, we recommend that the Government maintain its efforts to support the peace process in Tajikistan through the UN Security Council. (Paragraph 42)

6. The Government is committed to working through the UN Security Council to support the resolution of the civil war in Tajikistan and will continue to support reconstruction projects where feasible, given the security constraints, which are kept under regular review. The Government hopes that circumstances will change to allow it to consider a more direct role in rebuilding Tajikistan.

Weapons proliferation (recommendation 4)

(4) We recommend that the Government, working within the framework of the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports, make as its foremost arms sales policy consideration in the region the need to reduce the risk of armed conflicts between, or within, the states of the South Caucasus and Central Asia. (Paragraph 48)

7. The Government will continue to assess all applications for licences to export arms and military equipment to the region against the criteria in the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports and the national criteria announced in July 1997. The Government is committed not to issue an export licence if there is a clear risk that the goods might be used for internal repression or aggressively against another country, or if the proposed export would provoke, prolong or aggravate armed conflicts in the country of final destination. The Government also considers carefully the effect of the proposed export on regional stability. The UK will continue to observe strictly the arms embargo agreed by OSCE Participating States in relation to Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Drugs (recommendations 5 and 6)

(5) We recommend that in view of an actual threat to the United Kingdom from the trafficking of heroin and other opiates through Central Asia, the Government should reverse its decision not to post a full-time Drugs Liaison Officer to Tashkent, and work to strengthen its co-operation with the multilateral and national drugs control agencies operating in the region. (Paragraph 51)

8. As part of the UK's overseas anti-drugs strategy, the threat assessment levels assigned to major drug producer and transit countries are regularly reviewed with the relevant Whitehall Departments and law enforcement agencies. The Government recognises that drugs trafficking may pose a threat to regional stability in Central Asia. It is also aware of the potential drugs threat to the UK which the Central Asian Republics pose. But there is no hard evidence that the Central Asian Republics yet present a current danger to the UK, either as producer or as transit countries. The Government will continue to provide assistance and to monitor developments closely: if evidence of a growing threat to the UK emerges, the Government will respond accordingly, including considering posting a Drugs Liaison Officer to the region.

(6) We urge the Government to ensure that EU programmes in the field of drug control in Central Asia are implemented in a timely and effective fashion. In particular, such programmes should not waste resources in duplicating efforts undertaken by other national or multilateral organisations. (Paragraph 53)

9. The Government welcomes the Committee's recommendation on co-ordinated and effective implementation of EU drugs programmes. The UK, with EU partners, continues to press the European Commission to implement projects under the existing Central Asia Drugs Initiative. The Government will also continue to work closely with the Commission to ensure that the Initiative complements existing and planned assistance, and avoids overlap with other bilateral or multilateral projects.

Management of natural resources (recommendation 7)

(7) We recommend that the Government use its best efforts to work with the governments of Central Asia to alleviate the severe difficulties of water management in the region, both in resolving disputes over resource allocation and in promoting the necessary technical assistance from British companies with expertise in the field. (Paragraph 56)

10. The Government fully recognises the severity of water management problems in the Central Asia region. The UK has been active for a number of years, through the Department for International Development's (DfID) Know How Fund, in trying to help the countries of the region improve their water management systems. DfID is in the final stages of negotiating a £0.75 million programme on water resource management with Kazakhstan, and is exploring possible assistance on water issues in Kyrgyzstan. British companies with expertise in the field are likely to be involved in these projects. British Trade International has been discussing with the British water industry the possibility of an outward mission to the region. It has also recently agreed with British Water that key individuals from the Central Asian states should be invited to visit the UK to discuss water management issues in late 1999 or early 2000.

11. The Government is especially sensitive to the problems of water allocation between the Central Asian states, and of the need for assistance in resolving disputes. The Government has encouraged the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe to play a more active role in providing early warning of the potential for environmental problems of this kind to lead to increased tension, and in facilitating dialogue between all those concerned to resolve the issue. The OSCE offices in Central Asia should have a particular role to play in this.

Weakness of civil society (recommendation 8)

(8) We conclude that the Government's stated objective of supporting the independence, security and territorial integrity of the states of the region is well-founded. (Paragraph 59)

12. The Government welcomes the Committee's conclusion.

Influence Through Multilateral Organisations

Council of Europe (recommendation 9)

(9) We recommend that the British Government work within the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to achieve a suitable status within the Council for the countries of Central Asia which have undertaken to subscribe to its core values and which have made material progress in that direction. (Paragraph 72)

13. The Government will support applications for membership of the Council of Europe from countries in the region which are eligible and properly prepared. It will also give serious consideration to applications for Observer Status from countries which meet the relevant criteria: this could in due course include the states of Central Asia. The Government will continue to encourage countries which are members of the Council of Europe (in this region only Georgia at present) to comply with their commitments.

Economic Prospects and British Commercial Interests

Relations with the international financial institutions and the EU: economic conditionality (recommendations 10 and 22)

(10) We believe that conditionality is most effective when donors co-ordinate policies. We recommend that the Government should use its position within the EBRD to ensure that the EBRD does not spend money in countries which do not have programmes agreed with the IMF and World Bank. (Paragraph 84)

14. The Government takes note of the Committee's recommendations at Paragraphs 84 and 142 on conditionality and the role of multilateral organisations respectively, and has drawn them to the attention of the EBRD. Article 1 of the Agreement Establishing the EBRD sets out the purpose of the Bank as fostering the transition towards open market-oriented economies of Central and Eastern European countries committed to and applying the principles of multiparty democracy, pluralism and market economics. While the EBRD does not set country allocations, the level and nature of its activities in a given country are influenced by the commitment to reform and the investment climate, as well as by the availability of viable projects. The EBRD regularly assesses a country's progress with both economic and political reform. These assessments are taken into account when country strategies are set by the Board of Directors, and contribute to the Bank's policy dialogue with country authorities. The Bank is committed to intensifying this dialogue, as shown earlier this year in Bank President Kohler's visit to the region for high-level talks.

15. The Government agrees that the leverage donors can apply through conditionality is more effective when policies and activities are co-ordinated, and has consistently encouraged such co-ordination by the international financial institutions, including the EBRD. Article 2 of the Agreement Establishing the EBRD commits the Bank to working in close co-operation with other bodies concerned with the economic development of Central and Eastern European countries. The EBRD's medium-term operational priorities, which the Government joined other shareholders in endorsing at the 1999 Annual Meeting, reinforce the commitment to work closely with other international financial institutions and the European Union. In determining its country strategies the EBRD takes account of IMF and World Bank programmes.

(22) It is unacceptable for the EBRD to disregard its commitment to promoting development only in those countries which apply the principles of multiparty democracy and pluralism. As the United Kingdom is a major shareholder in the EBRD, and given the Government's commitment to introducing an ethical dimension into foreign policy, we recommend that the Government should ensure that the EBRD lives up to its commitment. The release of further funds by the EBRD should be made conditional upon improvements in the respect shown by governments of the region to multiparty democracy and pluralism. (Paragraph 142)

16. The Government believes that the nature of conditionality must reflect the mandate of each institution. The core business of the EBRD is to finance *projects*, primarily in the private sector, rather than concentrating on the type of macro-level and structural assistance given by the IMF and IBRD. It applies conditionality at the project level to achieve specific reforms within the overall goal of promoting transition. For example, the Turkmenbashi port project, to which the Committee refers in Paragraph 84, was approved only after some four years of negotiations with the Turkmen authorities on policy and institutional reforms.

17. The EBRD has made clear that there is a direct link between expansion of its activities and progress on political and economic reforms. It has shown that where there is backtracking rather than movement towards democratic transition, it is fully prepared to act in response to non-compliance with Article 1. For its part the Government would discuss with the Bank any adverse developments in a country which it felt should prompt reconsideration of the Bank's activities between the Bank's regular strategy reviews.

Corrupt business practices (recommendation 11)

(11) We welcome the steps that have been taken within the OECD to mirror the US Corrupt Practices Act, and recommend that the Government should continue to take all possible steps to end corrupt practices in business, in order to create a level playing field internationally. (Paragraph 95)

18. The Government fully supports the OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions. The Government attaches considerable importance to combating bribery in business. The UK played a leading role in negotiating the Convention and is determined to see it effectively implemented, and will encourage non-OECD members to adhere to it in order to create a level playing field internationally.

Pipeline policy (recommendation 12)

(12) We support the Government's policy of multiple pipelines. We recommend that the Government should continue to use its best efforts to discourage the US Government from promoting particular pipeline routes, for purely political reasons, to the detriment of other more economic routes. (Paragraph 101)

19. The Government welcomes the Committee's endorsement of its policy of supporting multiple pipeline routes determined by commercial considerations. The Government will maintain active dialogue with the United States and others, defending the interests of British oil and gas companies, and the broader economic interests of the countries of the region.

Human Rights and Good Governance

The role of the United Kingdom in promoting human rights and good governance (recommendations 13, 14 and 18)

(13) We recommend that the Government, working on its own, and in co-ordination with its EU partners and with the United States, should act to give a fresh impetus to the monitoring and promotion of human rights in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. (Paragraph 118)

20. The EU's Partnership and Cooperation Agreements with states in the region provide one means of pursuing this. The United Kingdom has already been instrumental in initiating human rights dialogues between the EU and both Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. The Government welcomes the strengthened focus of the OSCE on promoting human rights and democratisation in the region, and is providing financial support to its programmes there. Monitoring the human rights situation on the ground and taking forward working-level dialogue with the local authorities and with NGOs will continue to be a core responsibility of our Embassies in the region.

(14) We recommend that the Government continue to emphasise that the achievement of high human rights standards is an essential element of any true partnership between the United Kingdom and the countries of the region. (Paragraph 119)

21. The Government agrees with the Committee that the achievement of high human rights standards is an essential element of any true partnership between the United Kingdom and the countries of the region. The technical assistance and humanitarian programmes delivered by the Department for International Development reflect this. While it does not apply a formal conditionality, its programmes are focused on the countries which have made the most progress towards democracy and a market economy. It agrees with the Committee's assessment that these are Armenia, Georgia and the Kyrgyz Republic (Paragraph 104).

(18) We recommend that the Government press the states of the region to comply fully with their obligations under those UN and ILO human rights instruments to which they are party. The monitoring of governments' compliance with these obligations should be a core responsibility of embassies in the region. (Paragraph 130)

22. The Government is strongly committed to support for democratic and other rights and freedoms in the countries of the former Soviet Union. Across the range of contacts with the authorities in the region, the Government regularly emphasises the importance of concrete progress on human rights. The Government will continue, bilaterally and with others, to press governments in the region to respect international human rights standards, and to implement effectively their commitments under ILO and UN conventions and OSCE norms.

Practical assistance from the United Kingdom (recommendation 15)

(15) We believe that urgent consideration should be given to the establishment and development of ASSIST programmes with states of the region wherever practicable. (Paragraph 123)

23. The Government welcomes the Committee's endorsement of the ASSIST programme, and agrees on the importance of its role in helping to promote respect for human rights among police and security forces (Paragraph 122), and on the scope to develop such programmes. In line with the Committee's recommendation, our Embassies will increase their efforts to identify suitable projects which qualify for funding under the ASSIST programme.

British contribution to development of civil society (recommendations 16 and 17)

(16) We recommend that the Government review its funding and assistance to all organisations seeking to promote a properly-functioning civil society, where there is freedom of expression and freedom of the media, in the states of the region. (Paragraph 126)

(17) We expect that the Government's contacts with civil society in the region should include the fullest support possible for the activities of free trades unions and their work in the process of transition. (Paragraph 128)

24. The Government welcomes the Committee's emphasis on civil society organisations, free trades unions, and freedom of expression including free media. Department for International Development and FCO funds support civil society development. The use of resources is under constant review.

The role of multilateral organisations (recommendations 19–21)

(19) We applaud the work of the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the OSCE in its promotion of standards of democracy throughout the region. We expect that the Government will continue to give ODIHR its fullest support. (Paragraph 132)

25. The Government, like the Committee, is pleased with the work of OSCE's ODIHR, and confirms that it will continue to give ODIHR full and active support. The Government supports the recommendation for increased OSCE engagement in Central Asia in the recent report by the special representative of the OSCE's Chairman-in-Office, Ambassador Hoeynck.

(20) We recommend that the Government should not seek to ratify any Partnership and Co-operation Agreement with the Republic of Turkmenistan without clear evidence of improvement in the observance of human rights. (Paragraph 135)

26. The Government notes the Committee's concerns about human rights in Turkmenistan and confirms that there is no immediate prospect of the EU Partnership and Co-operation Agreement with Turkmenistan entering into force. The Government will keep the human rights situation there under regular review and will encourage other EU member states to do the same.

(21) We recommend that the Government work both bilaterally and with its European partners to ensure that the human rights elements of the EU's Partnership and Co-operation Agreements (PCAs) are fully respected, and that pressure on those countries in the region with poor human rights records is maintained through the mechanisms established by the PCAs, to the extent that states which consistently fail to meet their obligations should have their PCAs suspended. We also recommend that the Government should ask its European partners to take a stronger position in future on securing actual progress on human rights before EU Partnership and Co-operation Agreements are entered into. (Paragraph 140)

27. The Government welcomes and endorses the Committee's recommendation on upholding the human rights provisions of the EU Partnership and Co-operation Agreements (PCAs). The Government notes that the PCA with Uzbekistan only entered into force on 1 July 1999. The UK worked with the Commission and other EU countries to ensure that concerns about the human rights situation in Uzbekistan were addressed at the first EU-Uzbekistan Co-operation Council in Brussels on 13 September, and intends to see the PCA used as effectively as possible to apply leverage on human rights. It notes that PCAs can be suspended if commitment to the fundamental values underpinning them, including human rights as defined in OSCE and UN documents, is in serious doubt.

Similarly, human rights concerns will be on the agenda of the Co-operation Councils with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in October. The UK will also seek to ensure the EU takes full account of progress in other countries before entering into new Partnership and Co-operation Agreements.

Parliamentary contacts (recommendations 23 and 24)

(23) We recommend that the FCO consider how to provide a programme of assistance to the parliaments of the region. (Paragraph 143)

28. The Government agrees with the Committee's comments on the importance of developing stronger contacts between the UK Parliament and parliamentary institutions in the region, and encourages the relevant All-Party Parliamentary Groups to establish closer links with parliamentarians across the South Caucasus and Central Asia. The role of the Westminster Foundation is certainly important in assisting the development of political parties and democratic pluralism in the region. The Government also welcomes the Committee's recommendation for greater co-ordination between Government and NGOs in this area. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is assessing proposals for further assistance to parliamentary institutions across the region, and will ensure that other Departments and organisations are adequately consulted before any specific projects are taken forward.

(24) We believe the Government should take steps to encourage the OSCE to monitor the democratic functioning of parliamentary institutions in the states of the South Caucasus and Central Asia. (Paragraph 144)

29. The Government agrees that it is important to monitor the democratic functioning of parliamentary institutions as well as elections to them. The existing OSCE offices in Central Asia and Georgia already monitor and support the development of democratic institutions, with the Government's encouragement. New offices are due to open shortly in Armenia and Azerbaijan which should carry out the same tasks. The Government also supports the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's wish to play a greater role in monitoring and assisting the development of the parliamentary institutions in the newly democratic OSCE states.

Delivering the Government's Objectives

Level of representation (recommendations 25–31)

(25) We recommend that the United Kingdom open an Embassy to the Kyrgyz Republic in Bishkek. (Paragraph 152)

30. The Government takes note of the Committee's recommendation that the United Kingdom should open an Embassy in Bishkek, and will continue to review on a regular basis the scope for establishing a mission in Kyrgyzstan. Resources are, however, limited, and the advantages of opening a post in Bishkek need to be balanced against priorities elsewhere.

(26) We recommend as a first step that the FCO approach the German government about the possibility of creating a permanent British diplomatic presence in the German Embassy in Dushanbe. (Paragraph 153)

31. The Government agrees that, in the present circumstances, it should not open an Embassy in Tajikistan. Current FCO travel advice recommends against all travel there by UK nationals. But the Government will keep in view the Committee's recommendation that the FCO approach the German government about the possibility of creating a British diplomatic presence at the German Embassy in Dushanbe. Such an arrangement would necessarily depend on the security situation in Tajikistan, and current UK commercial and other interests there. In the meantime, the Government would welcome any decision by the government of Tajikistan to open an Embassy in London.

(27) We believe that for the present there is no need further to enhance representation in Turkmenistan. (Paragraph 154)

32. The Government notes the Committee's recommendation.

(28) We recommend that the FCO should ensure that the demands placed upon posts of the size of those in the region are regularly reviewed, and that they are no more than are absolutely necessary. (Paragraph 156)

33. The Government notes the Committee's recommendation on reviewing the demands placed on small posts. The FCO regularly reviews administrative burdens on such posts, with a view to minimise burdens to the extent consistent with effective financial control.

(29) While we welcome the creation of new posts in the Embassies in the South Caucasus and Central Asia, we recommend that the FCO continue to monitor closely staffing levels in the region and the demands made upon staff. (Paragraph 158)

34. The Government notes the Committee's recommendation that it should monitor staffing levels in the region and the demands made upon staff. The Caspian Enhancement Programme was undertaken in response to the higher priority accorded by Ministers to work in the region, recognising the need for more resources to manage the increasing demands made on posts. Staffing levels are kept under constant review as part of the annual resource allocation round. Health and welfare considerations are important factors in deciding which posts need reinforcement or where work needs re-prioritising to reduce demands on staff.

(30) The Committee recommends that the FCO review its Embassy buildings in the region and satisfy itself that each is an appropriate base both for its staff and for the United Kingdom's public diplomacy. (Paragraph 162)

35. The Government welcomes the Committee's helpful comments on regional estate issues. The FCO has kept and will continue to keep under review the suitability of our Embassy buildings in the region. The Committee noted our proposals for improvements in Yerevan, Baku and Ashgabat. Extra accommodation for new staff is also being added to the Embassy offices in Almaty and Tbilisi.

(31) We recommend a more extensive programme of co-ordinated ministerial visits to the region. (Paragraph 164)

36. The Government notes the Report's remarks on the importance of high-level attention to the region and the need for a more extensive programme of Ministerial visits. Every effort is made, and will continue to be made, to maximise opportunities to pursue the United Kingdom's commercial and other interests, including through visits in both directions. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office stands ready to facilitate visits to the region by members of the devolved administrations.

The British Council (recommendation 32)

(32) We recommend that the British Council open offices in Yerevan, Bishkek and Astana, and give consideration to enhancing the work of the English Language Centre in Turkmenistan. In our earlier Report on FCO Resources we recommended an increase in British Council funding. We now recommend that increased funding should include the revenue and capital funding necessary to enable the Council to establish a properly-resourced and permanent presence in Armenia, the Kyrgyz Republic and Turkmenistan. (Paragraph 178)

37. The Government is glad that the Committee recognise the quality of the Council's work in the region, as well as the important role it plays in public diplomacy. The Government welcomes the Committee's recommendation that the Council should establish permanent representation in Kyrgyzstan, Armenia and Turkmenistan and notes its comments on funding. The British Council plans to enhance relevant programmes in these countries, and review the case for opening permanent offices there and in the new capital of Kazakhstan, Astana, in the light of any increase in the Council's annual budget (including revenue and capital funding). The Council is currently reviewing its operations in the region. Following this review, which is due to be concluded in October, the Council will seek to enhance the outreach and effectiveness of existing programmes, particularly in those countries where it is not represented. In doing so, the Council will give greater priority

to initiatives on civil society and governance (both areas in which it is already active). The Council will build on programmes in English language development and education that are a natural starting point and vehicle for governance work, and which create an effective environment for the development of bilateral business links.

The BBC World Service (recommendations 33–35)

(33) We believe that in principle the BBC World Service should seek to ensure that World Service programming reaches as wide an audience as possible. To that end we recommend that the World Service establish services in Georgian and Armenian. (Paragraph 182)

38. The Government notes the Committee's recommendation that the BBC World Service should establish services in Georgian and Armenian and has drawn this to the attention of the BBC. When the World Service introduced its programming for the Caucasus and Central Asia, the portfolio of languages was designed to take into account such factors as information need, population size, and the possibility that audiences would listen to the World Service's programming in Russian. The BBC World Service is constantly exploring ways of improving its service. Neither a Georgian nor an Armenian service is at present a priority, but the World Service is keeping language services under review. The World Service broadcasts special Russian language services for the region, which include regular reporting of local affairs.

(34) We recommend that the Government continue to press the Government of Uzbekistan to reinstate BBC World Service access to medium wave transmitting facilities. (Paragraph 183)

39. In line with the Committee's recommendation, the Government will continue to press the authorities in Uzbekistan to allow the BBC World Service access to domestic Medium Wave transmission facilities.

(35) We believe that it is important that World Service programming be as widely received as possible. We recommend that the Government work with the World Service to seek to lift broadcasting restrictions where they exist. We also recommend that the World Service seek to work as closely as possible with Embassies throughout the region in order to secure adequate rebroadcasting facilities. (Paragraph 185)

40. The Government agrees that World Service programming should be as widely received as possible, and will work with the BBC (including through its Embassies in the region) for the removal of broadcasting restrictions and for adequate rebroadcasting facilities.

Conclusion

(36) The countries covered by our report have been facing traumatic change, which has amounted to nothing less than a revolution in their civil, political and economic structures. As we argue, it is a major Western interest to help to establish regional stability and to resolve some of the long outstanding conflicts. We found in a number of the countries visited a particular wish to develop stronger bilateral relations with the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom is looked upon as a nation with strongly rooted traditions in democracy and in a civil society upholding human rights, the rule of law and individual liberty. We have a clear role to promote such values and practices within the region. We have identified diplomatic, commercial and cultural opportunities which would give a greater meaning to our relations with the countries of the region. They are opportunities we would be foolish to spurn. We welcome the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's efforts to date, but conclude that more could and should be done to promote Britain's interests, good governance and stability in a region that will be of increasing significance in the years ahead. (Paragraph 187)

41. The Government reiterates that it is in full agreement with the Committee's assessment of the importance of this region, and the potential for a stronger role for the UK in it. The Government considers the Committee's report as a valuable contribution to its efforts to build even more meaningful relations with the countries of the region.



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