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# Press Statement

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Please allow me to start by briefly providing some information regarding my political beliefs and work.

At the beginning of the 18th legislative period, the German Federal Parliament (Bundestag) conferred me with the leadership of the German – South Caucasian Parliamentary Friendship Group. This involves maintaining and further developing close contacts with parliamentarians in the countries of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. I was aware from the start that this would be a considerable challenge, since all of the aforementioned countries, with their different systems and mentalities, are developing at their own speed and not in accordance with a defined set of plans, such as we set out for ourselves following the reunification of Germany. Further adding to the difficulties is the fact that a so-called “frozen conflict” continues to exist between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which is the result of Armenia’s attack on Khojaly in the night of 26.2.1992, in the course of which it annexed approximately 20 percent of the total land area of Azerbaijan. This incident was associated with a bloody massacre of men, women and children, and has since resulted in around one million internally displaced persons who can only look on at their homeland of Nagorno-Karabakh and a further seven surrounding provinces and are unable to return home. Four UN Resolutions (822, 853, 874, 884), one from the Council of Europe, one from the OSCE and one of the German Federal Parliament have unequivocally requested the return of the territories. The Armenian administration has ignored these demands, and in so doing, ignores international law. For me, this is not a question of sympathy or empathy, but a question of compliance with international law and territorial integrity. I do not waver from my belief that votes should follow one’s conscience, and that they shouldn’t be made “on message”. We fought a democratic battle for this principle and it is codified in our constitution.

To make a small step in the direction of conflict resolution, my Co-chair of of the German – South Caucasian Parliamentary Friendship Group., Johannes Kahrs (SPD), my colleague Doris Barnett (SPD), who is leader of the German Delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE, and I considered whether it would be a good idea to establish a working group which would be able to reconcile the different interests and overcome hurdles on the basis of a diplomatic approach. This group would have three members of parliament from Germany (as mentioned above) as well as three from Azerbaijan, three from Armenia and three from Russia. Russia was chosen because it has a decisive influence on what happens in Armenia. The group would also include three colleagues from Austria, as this year Austria holds the chair of the OSCE, which was held by Germany in 2016. For our goal of creating such a task force,



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we consulted the experts on the South Caucasus in the German Federal Chancellery and the German Federal Foreign Office. We were subsequently informed in writing that both the Chancellery Minister Peter Altmaier and the then Foreign Minister and current President of Germany, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, generally supported our idea. We also received approval from Azerbaijan and Austria. Despite a discussion with the Russian Ambassador and the Armenian Ambassador, however, we have not as yet received any approval for their cooperation. This is all I have to say regarding my political engagement in this area.

As a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, I have had the opportunity to register for and participate in the election observations during parliamentary and presidential elections which are held by the member states of the Council of Europe. I assisted in observing the elections that took place in 2013 and 2015 in Azerbaijan, and those that were held in Kazakhstan and Georgia in 2016.

I was subsequently accused that possible personal business interests influenced my assessment of the outcome of the election. I can only confirm that these allegations are completely untrue. There are two possible ways of observing an election: either on the election day itself or a long-term observation during the weeks prior to the election day. Therefore, if – like me – you only observe the election on the election day itself and do not determine any irregularities such as the manipulation of the votes, too many or too few ballot papers, or incorrect registrations, I take the view that it would be dishonest to maintain their occurrence. If long-term election observers determine cases of unequal treatment with radio or poster election advertisements, or that a candidate is possibly prevented from standing for election for unjustifiable reasons, however, this will be recorded in the reports and ultimately included in the final summary. My assessment of the elections, however, was only based on what I was able to see on the election day itself.

I also partook in an election observation in Azerbaijan in 2010. That year was when I met Mr. Eduard Lintner in the EPP/CD grouping of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe for the first time. At that time, he asked his colleagues whether anyone would be interested in observing an election in Azerbaijan. I expressed my interest, and towards the end of 2010, I travelled to Azerbaijan. At the time, I was not aware of who had financed or organised this trip. Mr. Lintner was the Director of the Association for German-Azerbaijan Relations (*Gesellschaft für Deutsch Aserbaidshische Beziehungen* / GEFDAB) and familiar with the region. On the election evening, I was interviewed on TV and reported that ACCORDING TO



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MY OBSERVATIONS, I had not been aware of any irregularities or shortcomings. Mr. Schwabe continues to use these comments as the basis of his allegations of my supposed wrongdoing to this day.

Furthermore, the media enquiries directed towards me suggest that in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, I voted against the release of political prisoners. This was not the case either. I completely reject these allegations. On 22nd June 2015, in a plenary session, the resolution proposal on “The functioning of democratic institutions in Azerbaijan” was put to a vote of the members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. In the form in which it was presented at the beginning of the day's agenda, there can be no doubt that I agreed with the proposal. Yet over the course of the debate, some 32 requests for amendment arose on the individual points. These had the goal of harshening the tone of the motion to a degree that I, as well as many other members of my group in the Council of Europe, were ultimately unable to support. Point 11.4.6 of the submitted draft requested the following: “use all available legal tools to release those prisoners whose detention gives rise to justified doubts and concerns.” There is no doubt whatsoever that I would have voted in favour of this passage. This is because it is the duty of a nation state to dispel all doubts surrounding imprisoned individuals. Following numerous requested amendments, however, the harshening of its tone meant that I did not vote in favour of the overall motion. I believe that if something better is to be achieved, the tone should not be so harsh, and that it is necessary to build bridges and to enter into talks.

However, Mr. Schwabe (Chair of the SPD delegation and Deputy Leader of the German delegation in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe) and the press have alleged that I lied when I signed the “declaration on conflict of interest of candidates for election observation missions of the Parliament Assembly” in June 2015, because in late 2014/early 2015, I was paid money from Azerbaijan for work that I did for the company Line M-Trade GmbH, and that these payments had influenced my voting. I also completely reject these allegations as being untrue.

I did not lie to the Council of Europe when I signed the declaration for the election observation in Azerbaijan, nor was I influenced or bribed by third parties with regard to my voting in the Council of Europe. My consulting work for the company Line M-Trade GmbH of Nuremberg entailed forging contacts between German companies that were interested in building business relationships in the post-Soviet bloc, and Line M-Trade GmbH. This work involved all



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of the post-Soviet republics and not just Azerbaijan. In this respect, I spoke with a variety of businesses and organisations in my constituency and discussed whether they would be interested in or willing to become involved in business engagements in the post-Soviet republics. It is naturally the case that the principal goal was creating new jobs and maintaining existing jobs. The discussions took place with companies and organisations from a variety of sectors. They involved topics including education, dual training formats, agriculture, renewable energy, the construction of biogas plants, horse-rearing, the protection of buildings and food refinement. On the basis of mutual agreement, I then passed on the appropriate contacts to the company Line M-Trade GmbH. Above and beyond the forging of the contacts on my part, the subsequent development and exploitation of the contacts who had expressed an interest, the details of which I passed on to Line M-Trade, did not form part of my work and therefore escapes my knowledge. The work that I completed for Line M-Trade GmbH lasted for 3 months (November 2014 – January 2015). At the end of the contract, I declared my work to the president of the German Federal Parliament and naturally made sure that the taxes were duly paid. Subsequent to this, Line M-Trade GmbH had no further need for my services.

I was not and am not aware that the company Line M-Trade GmbH was financed by Azerbaijan, not did I have occasion to make such an assumption, and according to the appropriate checks that I made, the payments originated from the company's German bank account. That means that I did not receive any payments from Azerbaijan, nor did I have any knowledge of or cause to assume that the payments made to me by the company Line M-Trade GmbH, which is based in Nuremberg, originated from Azerbaijan. The owner of Line M-Trade GmbH did not mention any such information to me at any time either. I do not see any reason, nor do I have any inclination, to enquire about the personal or financial circumstances of a business partner. It is obviously the case that the financing of Line M-Trade GmbH has recently become known following research by the Süddeutsche Zeitung newspaper.

As I have already stated, my work only involved forging contacts between German companies who were interested in entering into business engagements throughout the post-Soviet region and the company Line M-Trade GmbH. I did not know that the company Line M-Trade GmbH was financed from Azerbaijan, and this was particularly the case because at no point did or was my work supposed to refer to Azerbaijan alone.



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This was one of the reasons why I signed the “Declaration on conflict of interest of candidates for election observation missions of the Parliament Assembly” in June 2015 without any misgivings.

In summary, I would like to emphasize the fact that the allegations made against me are untenable. There was no conflict of interest, neither during the voting in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on 22nd June 2015, nor during the election observation trip. My points of contact with Azerbaijan were exclusively limited to my work as chairwoman of the German – South Caucasian Parliamentary Friendship Group and as member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. I therefore expressly reject the allegations of “lying” and “corruption”.

Contrary to the allegations, I have never worked as a lobbyist for Azerbaijan, neither before nor afterwards. The work that I did as a consultant of Line-M Trade GmbH and my brief period at Extent GmbH only had one goal: creating new and/or maintaining existing jobs. I believe that the promotion of economic ties between different countries forms an important part of the development of individual countries.

In recent weeks, many media sources have reported that I had particularly close relations with Azerbaijan and that I even worked as a lobbyist. To be able to give you a detailed picture of my work as chairwoman of the German – South Caucasian Parliamentary Friendship Group, I would like to provide a chronological list of the activities of the parliamentary group (PG) that were possible, the ones that weren't, and the reasons why.

- On 3rd July 2014, the PG executive team held a meeting during which it discussed the timetabling and the current situation in the partner countries.
- On 6th October 2014 a discussion took place with the Ambassador of Georgia, Prof. Dr. Lado Chanturia, regarding relations between Germany and Georgia.
- On 13th November, the initial trips to the South Caucasus by the PG were discussed.
- On 2nd December 2014, I held a meeting with the Minister of Justice of Georgia, Ms. Tea Tsulukiani, in my office.
- On 4th February 2015, I held a meeting with the German Ambassador in Azerbaijan, Ms. Heidrun Tempel, in my office.. We discussed the current situation in Azerbaijan in view of the pending trip by the delegation.



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- On 18th March 2015, I held a meeting with Ms. Agnieszka Czenszak of the *Bildungswerk der Wirtschaft Mecklenburg-Vorpommern e.V.* (Institute of Education and Training for the Economy of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania), and discussed project work in the South Caucasus.
- On 4th May 2015, I welcomed the Foreign Minister of Georgia, Ms. Tamar Beruchashvili.
- On 4th May 2015, a “getting to know you meeting”, with a particular focus on bilateral relations, was held for the PG at the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The concept of the ASAN centre was presented.
- On 7th May 2015, another meeting regarding the delegation trips to Georgia and Azerbaijan took place. This trip took place from 10th - 18th May 2015.
- On 20th May 2015, a discussion with Vugar Gojayev, a human rights campaigner from Azerbaijan and representative of Human Rights Watch, took place.
- On 1st July 2015, a discussion took place with representatives of the German Olympic Sports Association regarding the first European Games in Baku.
- On 10th September 2015, we met with Ms. Rachel Denver, Deputy Director of the Europe/Central Asia department of Human Rights Watch, and discussed the human rights situation in Armenia.
- On 17th February 2016, a discussion took place with the German Ambassador in Azerbaijan.
- On 23rd February 2016, I welcomed a delegation from Georgia on the topic of the “Strategic European Commission”.
- On 12th April 2016, the PG held a discussion with the Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia, Mr. Ashot Smbatyan. ☐ 27th April 2016, executive team meeting.
- On 12th May 2016, I welcomed a delegation from Azerbaijan that was led by the Chair of the friendship group, Roshan Rzayev.
- On 9th June, I held a discussion with the President of the Parliament of Georgia, S.E. David Usupashvili on the topic of visa-free travel.
- From 21st-24th November, I welcomed and accompanied a delegation from the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia.
- On 17th January 2016, I held an informative discussion with the Ambassador of Georgia about the German-Georgian year of 2017/2018.
- On 6th-10th March I welcomed a Georgian delegation from the Georgian parliament.



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- On 29th March 2017, I held a discussion with high-ranking representatives of the Georgian parliament, the State Audit Office and the Ministry of Finance on the topic of “bringing systems closer to European standards.”

If you consider the information listed above, it is clear that intensive exchanges took place with Azerbaijan and Georgia. Armenia did not accept a cooperation in this form, please allow me to explain this as follows:

- A meeting with the German – South Caucasian Parliamentary Friendship Group. was planned to take place on 2nd July 2015 at the Armenian Embassy. In the form of an email, the secretariat of the Parliamentary Group then sent out the following information: “Due to the lack of interest of the members of the Parliamentary Group in attending the reception at the Embassy of Armenia at 7:30pm on 2nd July, the Embassy has decided to cancel the meeting.”
- On 12th November 2015, the secretariat of the Parliamentary Group informed the members of my PG that “due to the roll-call vote [...] today’s meeting at the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia [...] has been cancelled”.
- In another email from the secretariat of the PG, in the context of a planned delegation trip to Georgia/Armenia (18th-24th April 2017) we received a recommendation from the Embassy in Yerevan to organise the trip for the end of May/June 2017.
- From 11th – 14th June 2017, I led the delegation trip to Georgia. A visit to Armenia had also been planned and organised. An official verbal note from the Armenian foreign ministry provided us with notification that the visit by the German parliamentarians would not be possible because of the high workload of the newly elected parliament.

With this listing you can see that close contact on the part of the Armenian administration was unwanted. This disproves the fact that I am a lobbyist working for Azerbaijan. I would have gladly taken the opportunity to better get to know the people and the country.

I have always tried to build bridges. This is supported by both my approach regarding the harsh tone of the aforementioned resolution proposals as well as my initiative for the founding of a task force for Karabakh. I have invested a tremendous amount of energy in intensifying the political, cultural and economic rapprochement between the regions of Europe and the South Caucasus. Achieving peace in the South Caucasus has been one of the key goals of my international work.



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At the economic level, a rapprochement has the advantage of strengthening ties in both the South Caucasus and Europe as a whole.

Achieving stability in the South Caucasus is of considerable interest to both Germany and Europe. The three countries of the South Caucasus form an important link between Europe and Central and South West Asia. As a development and transit area for fossil fuels from the Caspian region, the region is able to play an important role in securing the supply of energy to Germany and Europe.

Prosperity and the increasing sense of satisfaction, which on the one hand depend on the economic development, and on the other hand on the awareness of being able to coexist as friendly neighbours, provide an opportunity for the cultural and political stability and further development of South Caucasus region. In the several reports that have appeared in the media, I have been accused of ignoring the human rights situation during my work – this allegation is absurd. Please allow me to explain why: It is naturally the case that we addressed this topic at the meetings of the parliamentary group. On location in Baku, I also met representatives of NGOs for discussions. These took place on discretion, in view of the fact that public reporting and loudly expressed demands from foreign countries generally prevent them from working effectively. I held both discussions in the German Embassy in Baku in the presence of the then Ambassador, Dr. Heidrun Tempel and the aide of the current Ambassador. A third meeting did not take place because of the public holiday in Azerbaijan. The representatives of the NGOs provided assurance that they are well on their way to becoming an exemplary constitutional nation state, but they also needed people to give them time.

The current developments show that this is not, apparently, the case. I therefore feel forced to consider very carefully the question of my continued participation in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. I have not been able to achieve my political goals in this area – on the contrary, my belief in doing good things appears to have been fatal. I will be pleased to inform you of my decision. I refuse to give up on my ideals.

Berlin, 7th November 2017