



News from the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

16-20 April 2007

Welcome to the ALDE
Newsletter

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“The ALDE Group must make its guardianship of Council of Europe values more effective, through enhanced political action inside and outside the Assembly.”

[ALDE Mission Statement](#)

Welcome to the April issue of the *Newsletter of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe* in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe!

The Council of Europe is the largest pan-European institution, with 46 member states. Its Parliamentary Assembly meets four times a year, discussing most important European issues relating to democracy, human rights and rule of law. Members of the Assembly are – unlike members of the European Parliament – not directly elected, but they are all members of the 46 national parliaments. This is the finest and most effective network of European MPs!

The third largest parliamentary group in the Assembly is the ALDE, uniting currently 99 members from all over Europe. As a group, we endeavour to be the engine of the Assembly defending our core European values based on a mission statement adopted with full consensus in the group.

We issue this newsletter in order to cordially invite you to follow the debates in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and to provide feed back on our activities.

ALDE Guests:

Aliaksandr
Milinkevich
(Belarus)



15-18 April 2007, Aliaksandr Milinkevich, Leader of the Democratic Forces of Belarus, visited the Council of Europe at the invitation of the ALDE Group on the occasion of the April Session of the Parliamentary Assembly in 2007.

On Sunday, Mr. Milinkevich addressed the Bureau of the ALDE Group and presented an overview of the current situation of human rights and political freedoms in Belarus. On Monday, in his ten-minute speech at the sitting of the ALDE Group, Mr. Milinkevich called on the Assembly to look closely at the trial against politically engaged five Belarusian young men and women. He called on the Parliamentarians to be vigilant as to promises of cooperation that could come from the Belarusian authorities. He also said that relations between Russia and Belarus had to be built on fair economic basis. Finally, Mr. Milinkevich answered questions of the ALDE members.

During his visit Belarusian opposition leader participated at the sitting of the Sub-Committee on Belarus and conducted several meetings with officials of the Council of Europe, representatives of NGOs and journalists. He raised Belarusian issues with Thomas Hammarberg, Commissioner for Human Rights of the CoE, René Van der Linden, President of the PACE, and Terry Davis, Secretary General of the CoE.

A. Milinkevich and Matyas Eörsi, President of the ALDE, had a fruitful discussion about possible ways of assisting democratic forces in Belarus. President Eörsi underlined that as a Hungarian MP he understood and looked closely at the problems that Belarusian people had to face currently. [Read more: interview with A. Milinkevich](#)

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ALDE
Rapporteurs



Serhiy Holovaty (Ukraine): *Accession of the Republic of Montenegro to the Council of Europe* ([Doc. 11207](#))

Rapporteur of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (for opinion)



Jonas Cekuolis (Lithuania): *State of democracy in Europe* ([Doc. 11221](#))

Rapporteur of the Committee on Rules of Procedure and Immunities (for opinion)



Bernard Marquet (Monaco): *The quality of medicines in Europe* ([Doc. 11193](#))

Rapporteur of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee

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Monday 16 April 2007

Progress report



Mike HANCOCK (*United Kingdom*). – I want to raise the issue of Belarus again, and particularly the plight of some students in jail awaiting trial on charges relating to their activities in political demonstrations. [...] I should also like to raise with the Bureau the ongoing problem whereby some rapporteurs, when reports are accepted for them to take action, have a favourite country to pick on. Trafficking – whether of organs, children, babies or women – is a classic example. [...] Finally, I ask that the Assembly look seriously at the issue that, sadly, is starting to spread across Europe: the way in which war graves and memorials to people who gave their lives fighting Nazism and fascism are being systematically demolished or subject to plans to be moved... [Read more](#)

Honouring of obligations and commitments by Azerbaijan



Stef GORIS (*Belgium*). – On behalf of the ALDE Group the speaker underlined the necessity of electoral code improvements, of a judicial reform, and of a peaceful solution in the Karabakh conflict: “The Liberal Group explicitly call for a solution to the Karabakh conflict, and particularly for a solution to the problem of the 760 000 displaced persons.”

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Tuesday 17 April 2007

Accession of the Republic of Montenegro to the Council of Europe



Jonas ČEKUOLIS (*Lithuania*). – The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe wishes to share six messages about Montenegro and the Council of Europe today. The first message is simple. We say to the Montenegrin people and to Montenegrin politicians, our colleagues, welcome back. Welcome back to the Council of Europe, this time as fully independent and, we hope, solid, transparent and predictable partners...

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Code of good practice for political parties

Mike HANCOCK (*United Kingdom*). – The biggest enemy to the democracies that we are trying to protect is apathy. That apathy is born out of the fact that political parties do not excite or encourage people to join them. [...] I would prefer that the report be referred back, so that we can meet the challenge of making politics exciting...

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Candidates for the European Court of Human Rights

Considering divergent opinions brought about in the group discussion, the ALDE chose to abstain from presenting a Group speaker in this debate.

[Debate](#), [voting results](#)

Wednesday 18 April 2007

State of human rights in Europe



Matyas EÖRSI (*Hungary*). – The Council of Europe is losing its impact – not because human rights and democracy are perfect all over Europe but because CoE is not as good at implementing its mission as it once was. In this we should hold a mirror to ourselves and ask what we do right and what we do not. The incapability to e.g. condemn the crimes of communism and running away from topics like euthanasia. This brings me to the conclusion that those of us who represent and fight for certain values at home start to become diplomats here in

Strasbourg. Before criticizing member states or other institutions, this assembly should think over how we ourselves could perform our duties much better.

[Read more](#), [voting results](#)

State of democracy in Europe

Mike HANCOCK (*United Kingdom*). – What has been sadly missing from both the reports and booklets produced is a sense of how we have systematically allowed many of our supposed democracies simply to drift into being managed democracies. They are not political democracies in the true sense of the word. They are about politicians who are elected and then want to manage. It is because they like to manage that they trust themselves with more and more power, and that makes it very difficult for the process of democracy to work...

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Monitoring of states' performance: progress of the Assembly's monitoring procedure



Hanne SEVERINSEN (*Denmark*). – On behalf of the liberal group, I would like to say that the monitoring procedure that we have developed over ten years is very important. We might make comparisons with other organisations, such as the United Nations, which have already been mentioned. What is the difference? I think that the monitoring procedure is one difference, as we can take up matters in every country and make reports, and colleagues can discuss issues with one another in a political way...

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Thursday 19 April 2007

Debate under urgent procedure: functioning of democratic institutions in Ukraine

Matyas EÖRSI (*Hungary*). – We from emerging democracies have a full understanding of the situation in Ukraine and of the frequently bitter struggle in the development towards democracy.

The constitution is the basics of a country; a political community on which there should be a common consensus. Constitution is not a piece of law like e.g. tax law but it is the moral glue of a society.

During dictatorship the dream is that democracy is perfect, but it is not. However, real democracy offers the opportunity for correction and is as such a never ending learning process. In democracy nobody has the absolute power but power is shared and controlled due to the rule of law.

In a democracy political parties are competitive and fight without creating hate in society.

We hope Ukrainian politicians will bare all this in mind when finding a solution.

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Current affairs debate: Sudan and Darfur: Europe's responsibility



Dick MARTY (*Switzerland*) – *Opening Speaker* – Many people had pointed out that Darfur was not in Europe; others that it was far away. However, he thought that the Assembly of the Council of Europe should not remain silent on this matter. Action was necessary. Questions needed to be asked such as where the arms were coming from, who was supplying them and who was responsible for the tragedy.

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Mike HANCOCK (*United Kingdom*). – In the hour that we are debating the issue, several hundred people will join the refugee caravan and possibly tens or even 100 people will die; a number of children will die. If people do not believe that, they should just look at the photographs in the supplement in *The Independent*. The issue cannot be ignored, but the problem is that everything that is said by those outside Sudan is ignored by the very people who could do something about it – the Sudanese Government... [Read more](#)

Situation in the Middle East

[Debate](#), [voting results](#)

Fair trial issues in criminal cases concerning espionage or divulging state secrets

[Debate](#), [voting results](#)

Draft memorandum of understanding between the Council of Europe and the European Union

[Debate](#), [voting results](#)

Friday 20 April 2007

Joint debate on counterfeit goods and quality of medicines



Walter SCHMIÉD (*Switzerland*) said that he was grateful to the rapporteurs and the Secretariat for the report. The problem of counterfeit medicines was increasing all over the world and was posing risks to public health. Although the matter was not likely to be reported on the front pages of newspapers, this did not detract from the topic's importance. The market in counterfeiting was larger than that of illegal drugs. It was time to take action and to go back to member states and call for governments to add their voices to that of the Council of Europe.

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Debate under urgent procedure: draft convention on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse

Walter SCHMIÉD (*Switzerland*) thanked the rapporteurs for their reports under the urgent procedure. He noted that this was a serious subject which affected all states, politicians and citizens. Shocking accounts were reported in the media on a regular basis of terrible acts of abuse of children. It was important that the law kept pace with changes in society. Abused children were often stunted in their development. Action needed to be taken to strengthen the law to punish perpetrators. It was often no longer possible for states to act alone in bringing absconding perpetrators to justice. Europe needed to work together to improve protection afforded to children.

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