



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

N°1, 2008

*PACE Session
21-25 January 2008*

Welcome to the ALDE
Newsletter

PACE Elections:
Mátyás Eörsi
congratulates new
PACE President...

ALDE Rapporteurs

ALDE Questions PACE
Guest-Speakers

Group Speakers

ALDE Bureau
and
members

“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 January 2008 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 47 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 47 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 92 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 during its sessions in Strasbourg and to provide feedback on our activities. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank all ALDE members and the Liberal Party of the Observer Delegation from Canada (Lorna Milne, Yoine Goldstein, Derek Lee and Scott Simms) for their active participation in the work of the Assembly. And we are grateful to our colleagues from liberal partner organisations: Emil Kirjas (LI) and Ahissata Camara (IFLRY), who attended the ALDE meetings this time.



M. Eörsi

L.M. de Puig

ALDE's majority supported Lluís Maria de Puig to become President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

At its Group meeting Monday, 21 January 2008, ALDE's majority pledged support to Lluís Maria de Puig to become new president of the Parliamentary Assembly. Later that day ALDE's leader Matyas Eörsi congratulated the newly elected President of PACE on behalf of the ALDE Group.

"On behalf of myself, and even more important, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, I would like to congratulate you on your election. Having heard your inauguration speech, we believe that your election conveys the proper message about the Council of Europe. I wanted to take this opportunity to reaffirm our friendship, and to recognise the co-operation between you and our group that took place when you were in your former capacity as leader of the Socialist Group. Let us work together".



ALDE members elected Presidents and Vice-Presidents of the Assembly's Committees

The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe congratulates members of the Group elected Presidents and Vice-Presidents in six Committees of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Vice-Presidents of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee will be elected during the next sitting of the Committee.

Anne Brasseur (Luxembourg): *President, Committee on Culture, Science and Education;*

Serhiy Holovaty (Ukraine): *President, Monitoring Committee*

Juha Korkeaoja (Finland): *Second Vice-President, Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs*

Nino Nakashidze (Georgia): *Third Vice-President, Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights*

Kristiina Ojulang (Estonia): *Third Vice-President, Political Affairs Committee*

Antigoni Papadopoulos (Cyprus): *Third Vice-President, Committee on Economic Affairs and Development*



Four ALDE members elected Vice-Presidents of the Parliamentary Assembly

ALDE members: Paul Wille (Belgium), Serhiy Holovaty (Ukraine), Andrea Rigoni (Italy) and Joan Farré Santuré (Andorra) were elected Vice-Presidents of the Parliamentary Assembly under Rule 14.4 of the Rules of Procedure on Monday, January 21.



Mátyás Eörsi (Hungary): *Observation of the presidential election in Georgia (5 January 2008) (Doc. 11496)*

Rapporteur of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Bureau
Presented on 21 January 2008

[Read more](#)



Lord Russell-Johnston (UK): *Developments as regards the future status of Kosovo (Doc. 11472)*

Rapporteur of the Political Affairs Committee
Presented on 22 January 2008

[Voting results](#)



Dick Marty (Switzerland): *United Nations Security Council and European Union blacklists (Doc. 11454)*

Rapporteur of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights
Presented on 23 January 2008

[Voting results](#)



Mátyás Eörsi (Hungary): *Honouring of obligations and commitments by Georgia (Doc. 11502)*

Co-rapporteurs of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)

Presented on 24 January 2008

[Voting results](#)



Dick Marty (Switzerland): *Draft additional protocol to the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine concerning genetic testing for health purposes*

Rapporteur of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights (for opinion)

Presented on 24 January 2008

[Voting results](#)

ALDE Puts a Question to Frans Timmermans, Minister for European Affairs of the Netherlands



Mrs MEMECAN (Turkey). – Minister, you said that Europe is becoming more intercultural, and we acknowledge that. Many policies are being introduced to integrate new Europeans in order to achieve continued harmony in Europe. However, I strongly believe that integration should be mutual. What programmes or incentives are being developed for indigenous Europeans so as to better integrate the new Europeans?

Mr TIMMERMANS. – It is only relatively recently that Dutch society and Dutch politics woke up to the fact that we have many new fellow countrymen. For many years, we failed to devise the right policies to achieve successful integration of newcomers in our society for the simple reason that we thought that people would stay a couple of years and then go back. This has been a struggle. We try and fail, and sometimes we go too far and have to correct the situation. We have now struck a balance between rights and obligations. There always has to be a balance between those two.

It is fair and right to ask all new citizens that they learn the language, that they learn to function fully in society. This is what we do today. On the other hand, if we ask that of our new citizens we should also be in a position to offer them a fair chance to develop themselves, to create a future for themselves and their children. So we have to fight very hard against discrimination in the workplace and against illiteracy. We must ensure that the second generation children finish their education and their professional training so that they can fully profit from the society they are now living in. There are rights and obligations.

[Read more](#)

ALDE Questions Mikheil Saakashvili, President of Georgia



Mr EÖRSI (Hungary). – During our international press conference in Tbilisi, I was asked by someone in the media whether I thought that Mr Saakashvili had made a mistake. In answer, I said that it was not for me to decide, but for the Georgian people to decide. It is also up to President Saakashvili to decide that. What is even more important is: what lesson have you drawn from the events of last November? This is a brilliant opportunity for me to put the question to you.

Mr SAAKASHVILI. – As you said, people who do nothing do not make mistakes. It is important to understand what happened not only last November but later. Law enforcement officers have presented clearly documented evidence about the people behind some of the street clashes last November; it cannot be denied. Those people were plotting to kill others, bribing state officials and trying to overthrow the government. That is no longer merely speculation; it is a legal fact.

There should be no double standards. Rubber bullets fired by the police do not amount to the same as real bullets fired at them. They are still rubber bullets. There is no popularity contest. The government must sometimes take unpopular decisions, and sometimes it must impose law and order. We should always exercise self-restraint, but we can argue about reactions and over-reactions. We are still an emerging democracy, and we are dealing with a vulnerable system and an absence of tradition. Despite everything, we managed to avoid violence. We had no casualties. The state of emergency in Georgia lasted for nine days, and after that we had a long and tiring election process. There were hundreds of street rallies with no violence and with zero police presence. There were many discussions, and there was political fighting. What that showed us is that Georgian democracy is alive and well.

I, as President of Georgia, took this gamble. I resigned from my office, whereas people usually act to keep power. The report said that the elections were the most competitive in our country's history. I resigned to show clearly that the government was acting to protect institutions and not its own place in those institutions. We were willing to take that huge political gamble, to resign and to submit our fate to the people of Georgia. That is the ultimate answer to your question. Did we make mistakes? We asked the Georgian people. How did they respond? With their votes. Most of them considered that we were right to do what we did. Some of them believe that we made mistakes, but that is democracy. Of course we will listen to both sides of Georgian society. That is how a real democracy should resolve conflicts.

The issue is not that a democracy should not have crises – any democracy will have crises – but how it overcomes those crises and how stable it is afterward. We emerged from those events more stable and with more investment. People had more faith in the future of the country, and we emerged with more wisdom. We have learned from whatever mistakes we made.

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Monday 21 January 2008

Progress report of the Bureau of the Assembly and the Standing Committee



Mike HANCOCK (United Kingdom). – If we are to talk about values, this report should be asking why it is that so many people in Europe do not know what the Council of Europe stands for and whether there seems to be conflict between the Secretary General, the President of the Assembly and the Committee of Ministers. [...] Why is it that there is not more exercising of the issues that really affect the people of Europe? I do not want to see this place turned into an assembly of interfaith reunion and rejoicing. I do not like the tone of some of the religious leaders with their xenophobia and bigoted attitude to some of the practices that we in this Assembly have defended. I do not want this to become just a talking shop. [Read more](#)

Tuesday 22 January 2008

Developments as regards the future status of Kosovo



Morten ØSTERGAARD (Denmark). – The report and the recommendations are a clear consequence of earlier debates and resolutions. My group supports both the draft resolution and the draft recommendations. Kosovo is not to the Balkans what Quebec is to Canada. Kosovo is a regional, post-war puzzle that we are trying to solve. We are trying to put the pieces together to make an everlasting solution so that people can live in peaceful co-existence. Therefore, this is a special issue and it needs to be solved to end the post-war era and usher in an era of prosperity and integration in Europe. [Read more](#), [voting results](#)

Global Warming: Joint Debate



Gediminas JAKAVONIS (Lithuania) thanked the rapporteurs for their professional work and excellent reports. Global warming and issues affecting the Arctic needed to be tackled at the highest level and the Council of Europe could only enhance its authority by tackling these issues. The reports clearly explained the problems and suggested solutions. [Read more](#); [voting results](#) Global warming and ecological disasters (Doc. 11476); [voting results](#) Protection of the environment in the Arctic Region (Doc. 11477)

Wednesday 23 January 2008

United Nations Security Council and European Union blacklists



Sabine LEUTHEUSSER-SCHNARRENBARGER (Germany) congratulated Mr Marty on the content of his report, and said that she was proud that the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Group supported the report. The Parliamentary Assembly was the only parliamentary body which had spoken out about the downsides to blacklisting. These downsides were no second-tier issue: those blacklisted were human beings. [Read more](#), [voting results](#)

External relations of the Parliamentary Assembly: Joint Debate



Mike HANCOCK (United Kingdom). – It is a great pity that three such important issues have been condensed in such a way, and that members should have only four minutes to cover what I consider to be three very good reports. The reports embark on issues vital to the Council, if for no other reason than that of the resources that would be incurred if we developed some of the initiatives that have been mentioned. [Read more](#); [voting results](#) Strengthening co-operation with the Maghreb countries (Doc. 11474); [voting results](#) The situation in the Republics of Central Asia (Doc. 11460); [voting results](#) The Council of Europe and its observer states - the current situation and a way forward (Doc. 11471)

Procedural guidelines on the rights and responsibilities of the opposition in a democratic parliament

Mike HANCOCK (United Kingdom). – This report is excellent and the opening presentation was in keeping. Such a report is long overdue. For any democracy to have a chance of survival, it must have as a key ingredient a proactive, positive opposition that will do a job rather than simply seek election. [...] My experience over the years is that when oppositions move into power, they do exactly the same as those whom they were previously criticising – and in some instances far worse. [...] There needs to be far more of a coherent and direct approach when it comes to governments and oppositions working together so that they realise that they have a responsibility between elections. [Read more](#), [voting results](#)

Thursday 24 January 2008

Disappearance of newborn babies for illegal adoption in Europe



Antigoni PAPADOPOULOS (Cyprus). – We strongly believe that every child has the undeniable right to have a mother and father; that a child is not a product to be sold at any price to satisfy the increasing demand for adoption in some western countries; that the poorest countries should not become baby-producing factories serving the needs of the west – in other words, that adoption should not be considered a profitable business for the few; that strict rules for birth registration should be enforced in all national legislation; that special protection measures safeguarding the rights of infants and children must be bolstered and legal sanctions enforced in respect of parents who abandon their children; and finally that a child must have access to his or her parents' identity.

[voting results](#)
[read more](#)

The need to preserve the European sport model

Mike HANCOCK (United Kingdom). – My group was very supportive of the report, although one or two members had some reservations about whether the European model needed to be changed in some way. [...] It is important that we get the European model right. Mr Platini was right to expose the difficulties, which include drugs and the trafficking of young people across the world to play sport. [...] Sport is important to people's health and well-being, and it can provide a sense of belonging. Too many people in Europe are alone and never have the chance to belong. Sport and watching sport can provide that sense of belonging, and we should do all that we can to support the European model. [Read more](#), [voting results](#)

Honouring of obligations and commitments by Georgia, Document 11502 rev.



Nursuna MEMECAN (Turkey). – I thank the rapporteurs for their detailed research and objective report on the progress achieved by Georgia on its obligations and commitments resulting from its Council of Europe membership. [...] It is clear from the report that the Georgian leadership and people are well aware of the path to take towards improving democracy. [...] The only area that was not included in the report was the reform of education. I strongly believe in preparing the younger generation for life in a sustainable, permanent and improving democracy. [Read more](#), [voting results](#)

Draft additional protocol to the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine concerning genetic testing for health purposes

[Read more](#)

Friday 25 January 2008

Transfrontier co-operation (Doc. 11475)



Avet ADONTS (Armenia). – I thank Mr Popsecu for doing an excellent job. Transfrontier co-operation is an issue of great importance, especially in terms of integrating Europe. Territories that are located on the borders of two or more countries face many challenges because of their location. From this perspective, transfrontier co-operation projects are crucial, as they provide a more efficient infrastructure and enable better environmental, transport, health and labour policies. [...] My group and I welcome the report and greatly appreciate Mr Popescu's efforts. [Read more](#), [voting results](#)

Video surveillance of public areas (Doc. 11478)



Doris FIALA (Switzerland) shared the views of the rapporteur. Video surveillance touched on the question of the state's role in ensuring the security of its citizens. It was not however a question of more security versus less freedom: more security and more freedom were possible. [...] There was no need to approach this issue with haste: authorities should have the right to use surveillance video in specific areas, but according to well-thought-through and uniform guidelines. [Read more](#), [voting results](#)

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