



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

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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 February 2009 issue of the *Newsletter of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)* in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe!

The Council of Europe is the largest pan-European institution, bringing together 47 states. Its Parliamentary Assembly meets four times a year, discussing the most important European issues related to democracy, human rights and the 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. PACE is therefore the most important and effective network of European MPs! The ALDE Group currently brings together over 90 MPs. As a group, we endeavour to be the engine of the Assembly defending core European values.

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 provide feedback on our activities. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank Senator Goldstein (Liberal Party, Observer Delegation from Canada) for his active participation in the work of the Group. We are grateful to our colleagues from liberal partner organisations who attended the ALDE meetings this time: Philipp Hansen, Political Advisor, ELDR, and Sabine Nygrund, Intern, IFLRY.



Andrey Illarionov, former economic advisor to the Russian president Vladimir Putin and Senior Fellow of the Cato Institute addressed the Group on 26 January 2009. In his speech, Mr. Illarionov focused on the major challenges which the Russian and the international liberal communities face today.

Russia is a hard authoritarian regime, less free than Belarus: *“I have a question to you: why do you have Russia as a member of the Council of Europe [if you don’t have Belarus]?”*

Mr. Illarionov addressed the state of political development in today’s Russia, focusing on the issues of political freedoms and democracy:

- The detention of up to 78 political prisoners, the refusal to register opposition candidates during elections and the persistence of political assassinations in Russia make its democratic score *“worse than in Belarus. Belarus has lost its long-standing status of the last dictatorship in Europe”*. According to the classification in use by the Cato Institute (involving the states of incomplete democracy, soft authoritarianism, transitional regime, hard authoritarianism and soft totalitarianism), Russia is a hard authoritarian regime since 2006.
- The impact of the world economic crisis will not move Russia towards democracy: *“The probability of democratic changes induced by the impact of crisis in Russia is very low. Such changes can only be expected in democratic and soft authoritarian regimes”*

“The PACE has rightly qualified the past conflict between Georgia and Russia as a war”

Ahead of the joint debate on the Implementation of the Resolution 1633(2008) on the Consequences of the war between Russia and Georgia and the Humanitarian consequences of the war, Mr. Illarionov shared his views on the causes and consequences of the recent conflict:

- The conflict between Russia and Georgia was a full-scale war, satisfying the criteria of the UN definition of “military aggression”, involving the information war and armed confrontation in the airspace and on the ground. *“Nearly every known warfare has been used during the hostilities except nuclear weapons”*.
- Describing the long escalation (starting with the first Russian arms supplies to South Ossetia on February 5th, 2003), Mr. Illarionov underlined that the *“Russian-Georgian war required for Russia the longest process of military preparation in recent history”*.
- The Assembly should now focus its attention on Belarus, which scheduled a parliamentary debate on the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia for April 2nd. Currently, the two Georgian regions are only recognized by Russia and Nicaragua; Belarus may not only become the third one, but can trigger the recognition by many post-soviet allies of Russia. *“It is quite remarkable however that Belarus did not recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia by now despite all the pressure from the Russian side [...] Belarus is a battlefield, and measures should be taken to remove Belarus from Russian political and economic pressure on this issue”*.



Mr BADRÉ (*France*) said that the Council of Europe brought the continent together on the common grounds of human rights and democracy. If the Council of Europe had not already existed, it would have been necessary to create it. Although it was almost 60 years old, it was still not exerting enough influence. He asked what could be done to overcome the hurdle of member states which had signed, but not ratified, the European Convention on Human Rights.



Mr DAVIS. – All our member governments need to ratify the conventions that they have signed. Protocol No. 14, which was signed by the Russian Federation and is still not ratified even though President Putin, as he then was, recommended it to the Duma. His colleagues in the Duma rejected it. But it is not just that. I have a long list of conventions that have been signed by member governments, in some cases years before I became Secretary General. When I make an official visit to a country, I always take the opportunity to remind the people in authority whom I meet about any conventions that they signed some time ago but have not yet ratified. The top of the pops – the ones I always look at – are the Warsaw Three, as I call them. These are three conventions adopted by Heads of State and Government in Warsaw in May 2005. One concerns terrorism, one concerns the financing of terrorism and the third one deals with trafficking.

Sometimes, the people I visit are surprised because they have forgotten what they signed. I remind them and I press them to ratify. That is why I am so pleased that the convention on trafficking has got off the ground. This morning, I was very pleased when the ambassador for the Russian Federation came to see me to sign the Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime, which also deals with terrorist financing. Next time I go to Moscow, I shall remind him that they have signed it and ask them when they are going to ratify it. I shall serve notice on the Russians.

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Monday 26 January 2009

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



Mr EÖRSI (Hungary). – On behalf of all European Liberal Democrats, if not all Liberal Democrats in the world, I join in the words of welcome for the result in the American election. The new president is Barack Obama. You are right, Mr President, to say that almost everything possible has been said about the importance of the election and its historic character. He is the first Afro-American President of the United States. He wants to restore what we all believe in: the idea that we should not sacrifice our values for security. He faces many expectations. His approval rating not only in America but throughout the world is tremendous. [Read more](#)

Access to rights for people with disabilities and their full and active participation in society



Mr HANCOCK (United Kingdom). – The report lays out the guidelines that states ought to follow, but the ability of states to provide the legislative framework is one thing. It is another thing to give a community the spirit to make that a reality. Our legislation in the United Kingdom contains many good things for people with disabilities of whatever form, but there can be hostility towards those individuals from people who are able-bodied who see that legislation as a pain. It is as if they are living in denial of what those people's needs really are. You cannot ask a community to care unless that community is prepared to care. Sharing in a community and allowing people to fulfil their potential is about education. [Read more](#), [voting results](#)

Tuesday 27 January 2009

The implementation by Armenia of Assembly Resolutions 1609 (2008) and 1620 (2008)



Mrs MEMECAN (Turkey). – These are all indications of the shortcomings of the legal system and of the need for major legal reforms in Armenia. The police system, judges, courts and laws need to be reformed according to Council of Europe and Venice Commission principles. [...] The Armenian authorities had responded rather slowly to these concerns until recently, but progress has been made. Some 28 political prisoners have been pardoned so far. [...] imilar improvements are expected in all democratic institutions in Armenia, including the electoral system and the media. The indispensable value of being a member of the Council of Europe once again became apparent in the case of Armenia. [Read more](#), [voting results](#)

The regulation of audiovisual media services



Mr LAUKKANEN (Finland). – Generally, our liberal aim should be less regulation and more innovation, in a market-driven spirit. We need common rules to guide us in our innovation, but the rules need to be focused and balanced, as the report shows. For the ordinary citizen, technology is a tool, which enables free access to all services and data sources. New digital services, particularly Internet, must be seen as part of the realisation of democracy and freedom of expression. The report is therefore an important message to send from the Assembly. [Read more](#), [voting results](#)

Co-operation with the International Criminal Court and its universality



Mr MARTY (Switzerland) said that the Assembly had a long interest in the International Criminal Court. It was an important day for the Court, because it had become operational. The Assembly had always supported an independent, international court and called on all member states and observer states to support the International Criminal Court. It was disappointing that so many states were not part of the ICC. [...] The balance that had to be achieved was a delicate one because justice was not about politics, but it was incumbent on politicians to support justice. The more credible an international court was, the more effective it would be. This in turn would inspire greater confidence of victims and witnesses in the Court. [Read more](#), [voting results](#)

Investigation of crimes allegedly committed by high officials during the Kuchma rule in Ukraine – the Gongadze case as an emblematic example



Mrs TAKTAKISHVILI (Georgia) said that the founders of the Council of Europe had promoted democracy, law, freedom and human rights. These concerns were very topical and everyone was aware that, as well as the tragic events on which the report focused, many other journalists had been victims. The Council of Europe was entering a new phase. [Read more](#), [voting results](#)

Nomination of candidates and election of judges to the European Court of Human Rights



Mrs LEUTHEUSSER-SCHNARRENBERGER (Germany) said that the role of the national authorities in proposing candidates meant that the Assembly could not take full responsibility for the selection procedure. Despite efforts made to improve the procedure and to achieve equality, for example, in terms of gender balance, there were still problems that had to be overcome. Transparency was crucial. She supported open advertisements for potential candidates. Government involvement should be removed. Although very difficult to achieve, that had to be the aim because the Council of Europe needed independent judges. Protocol 14 had to be implemented. She called on the Russian Federation to enable this.

[Read more, voting results](#)

Wednesday 28 January 2009

The consequences of the war between Georgia and Russia



Mr XUCLÀ i COSTA (Spain) said that it was impossible not to approve of [Resolution 1633](#), because it provided a road map that member states of the Council of Europe could adopt if they found themselves at war. The extent to which Georgia and the Russian Federation had complied with the recommendations had to be considered – Georgian compliance was greater than that of the Russian Federation. It was necessary to think about the realism of the report's recommendations. International observers had not been given access to the region, there were no international peacekeeping troops in the area and the Russian Federation presence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia was not conducive to stability. Thirty-five thousand people had been displaced as a result of the recent events while 27 000 had been displaced as a result of other hostilities between the two parties. He hoped that the money needed to help that situation would be made available as soon as possible. [Read more, voting results](#)

Palliative care: a model for innovative health and social policies

Mr HANCOCK (United Kingdom). –I am in favour of the report. As I said, I hope that it brings the debate to life. If we accept the report, however, we must also put in place the mechanisms to ensure care for people who, sadly, are at the worst stage in their life – that just before death. It is not just the pain that needs to be cured but the loneliness and distress that goes with it. [Read more, voting results](#)

Current affairs debate: The situation in Gaza



Mr REIMANN (Switzerland), as a former envoy to Gaza, said that the international community had also made mistakes; there were unenforced United Nations resolutions; there was competition among groups visiting the affected area (such as between the delegations from the EU and the Union for the Mediterranean led by President Sarkozy). Israel should have opened the border to allow the evacuation of the wounded, and of women and children who could have gone to north Sinai. But Egypt had been very passive about that issue. Israel had over-reacted, but no one could deny its right to self-defence and it had been provoked by rocket fire from Hamas. This conflict had spanned 60 years and there had been other wars. That made it easy to be sceptical about the prospect of a peaceful future. If President Obama could not find a solution, the situation was likely to continue for many years. [Read more](#)

The challenge on procedural grounds of the still unratified credentials of the parliamentary delegation of Albania

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

Debate under urgent procedure: the consequences of the global financial crisis

Mrs PAPAĐOPOULOS (Cyprus). – The present crisis was triggered by the sub-prime mortgage market in the United States and has resulted in the near collapse of the international banking system. The problems continue to spread, with serious consequences for the real economy worldwide. The duration and depth of the crisis remain uncertain and will definitely have a negative impact on the whole world, threatening not only the economic well-being of the developed world, but long-term international objectives such as the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. [...]The financial crisis is of global dimensions. In the era of globalisation, what happens in one country has serious repercussions in other parts of the world. We need urgently to bring together European and international policy makers to forge a concerted global economic action plan. [Read more](#), [voting results](#)



Private military and security firms and the erosion of the state monopoly on the use of force

Mr HANCOCK (United Kingdom). – We must recognise that the problem is not a new one. It has been with us for a long time and we need to look at it. However, we must also consider whether we can regulate such companies so as to have an influence on them. [...] Who has overall responsibility for the behaviour of those individuals? Is it the company that employed those mercenaries that commits a crime, or is it the individuals themselves who commit the crime, and if so, how do you take them to court? Would they not just use that token excuse, which is used time and again, and say, “We were just following orders”? I do not think that the companies that operate in our countries are beyond the law, but I think that there are companies in our countries that operate way beyond it, where they go unchallenged, by either national or international laws. We must sign up to addressing that problem. [Read more](#), [voting results](#)

Attitude to memorials exposed to different historical interpretations in Council of Europe member states



Mrs REPS (Estonia). –I would like first to thank Mr Eörsi for a very balanced report. Countries have revised their histories since the collapse of totalitarian regimes and all these changes have raised the question of how to make peace with the past while building a new society. The Council of Europe can help member states in their efforts to come to terms with their controversial pasts, by rejecting and condemning all forms of dictatorial regime, such as National Socialist fascist and totalitarian communist. While revising their history, countries need to decide how to deal with controversial symbols. The most important aim is the depoliticisation of controversial memorials. It is of great concern to us all that some memorials are used for political purposes, sometimes with the clear intention of dividing societies further and provoking hatred among different groups of the population. The rapporteur has rightly pointed out the Parliamentary Assembly’s obligation to pay increasing attention to growing xenophobia and intolerance in Europe. [Read more](#), [voting results](#)

Electronic democracy

Mrs REPS (*Estonia*). – Electronic ways of doing things should not mean the sacrifice of the core principles and values of democracy and the rights of people. In addition, we need to guarantee that traditional means are available to people at the same level of quality, as some people cannot or do not want to follow information and communication technologies at the speed at which they are developing. Estonia is definitely a pioneer of e-democracy. In the parliamentary elections, 6% of the votes were cast electronically [...] via the Internet, using a secure identification system based on the electronic reading of personal identity cards. Today we are working towards launching a new so-called m-voting system in the parliamentary elections of 2009, which involves new secure electronic voting using mobile phones. [Read more, voting results](#)

Femicides

Mrs PAPADOPOULOS (*Cyprus*). – On behalf of ALDE, I remind members that this Assembly has repeatedly stated that there should be zero tolerance of gender violence. For two years, it has been striving to send this message everywhere through the pan-European parliamentary campaign against all types of violence against women. The Assembly has expressed its willingness to offer expertise in human rights and equality issues to the Mexican authorities, which would encourage them to benefit from the pan-European parliamentary campaign against domestic violence. That would tackle the severe problem of femicide, which flourishes in poor, overcrowded areas such as Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua in northern Mexico. [Read more, voting results](#)

Environmentally induced migration and displacement: a 21st century challenge



Mrs NAGHDALYAN (*Armenia*). – I am proud that our Organisation, the Council of Europe, can give birth to such high-quality work on this vital issue. The author is absolutely right: the time has come for us all – politicians, representatives of academic circles and civil society – to combine our efforts at the national and international levels to improve the lives of migrant workers and, in particular, to reduce the risk of creating new migrants. [...] Today it is difficult to single out those reasons that induce people to migrate that are solely environmental. More often, calamities and environmental disasters are caused or accompanied by a whole set of factors, such as injustice, a paucity of resources and the fight to possess them, economic hardship, conflict and poor governance, as well as man-made disaster. [Read more, voting results](#)

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