



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

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**PACE Session
22 –26
June 2009**

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from the North
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[ALDE Mission Statement](#)

Welcome to the June 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 101 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 like to take this opportunity to thank Alexander Shishlov for his contribution to the ALDE Newsletter. We are also grateful to our colleagues from liberal partner organisations who attended ALDE meetings this time: Emil Kirjas, Secretary General, LI, and Jefrey Van der Straeten, Intern, IFLRY. Finally, we extend our gratitude to the American Committee for Peace in the Caucasus who co-organised the visit of the Human Rights Defenders from the North Caucasus to Strasbourg.

Yabloko: Liberals in Russia*By Alexander Shishlov*

Preparing an official visit of the Yabloko party to Strasbourg, Alexander Shishlov, Member of Yabloko Bureau and Vice-Chairman of the Liberal Group in 1996-2003, addressed the ALDE in April. Long-standing partners of the ALDE, the Yabloko party, represented by the current and former chairmen, Sergei Mitrokhin and Grigory Yavlinsky, and Alexander Shishlov should attend the autumn session of the group. This article, signed by Mr Shishlov, presents an introductory overview of the state of liberal ideas and institutions in today's Russia.

**Elections**

The European Union has just seen another election. However, in Russia elections have been steadily losing their meaning with every new campaign since 1996. Today - in the absence of independent court, independent mass media, and independent campaign fundraising - the very basis of free and fair elections in Russia has been ruined. Often the government has been simply neglecting the law. It has turned into a common practice, for example, to announce that the signatures required for registration in the campaign are fraudulent, thus barring opposition candidates from the election (in spite of the fact that the voters personally confirm the authenticity of their signatures) or even fake election protocols.

The most recent is the case of Boris Vishnevsky, member of the Yabloko party Bureau and a well known columnist from the oppositional Novaya Gazeta, who ran at the municipal election in St. Petersburg in March 2009. The results of the election had been falsified which was confirmed even by the State Prosecutor and the court, however, in this case, like in many other cases, the true results of the voting were not restored. Such bold violations and impunity of their organizers and perpetrators result in public disappointment in elections and growth of extremism.

The Party of Liberals

Despite these circumstances Yabloko continues its activities - protects human rights (also via picketing and rallies), develops political initiatives on the key issues (e.g. Yabloko's programme for overcoming Stalinism and bolshevism as a precondition for political and economic modernization of Russia is one of the most important here). Just a couple of weeks ago Yabloko's leaders met with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and handed him our proposals on anti-crisis measures. As to Russia's foreign policy, Yabloko finds it necessary to correct it encouraging the European orientation of our country. We are certain that it would also be for the benefit of Europe to have a democratic and predictable Russia sharing the same humanistic values as the European Union.

Yabloko maintains its intellectual and organizational potential, having about 60 000 official members and a developed all-Russia network of local organizations. In contrast to loud but not very promising projects that emerge from time to time accompanied by massive PR campaigns, Yabloko since its creation in 1993 has been conducting a real day-to-day work for the sake of political consolidation of Russian democrats. Activists of many NGOs joined Yabloko in the recent years, and today our party has six factions: the Green, Gender, Youth, Social Democratic, Human Rights and Soldiers' Mothers factions.

Standing Together for Liberal Values

My foreign liberal friends often ask me how they can help to Russian liberals and Yabloko. The answer is simple: the fight for spreading liberal values in Russia is our Russian task. Only the Russian citizens can build a law-governed state in Russia based on liberal values. But there are things we may do better together, and many issues from the CE agenda are among them.

Russia's membership in the Council of Europe – the organization based on liberal values - is of special importance for us, Russian liberals. Admission of Russia into the Council of Europe facilitated considerable progress in putting our laws in line with the key European conventions, and thousands of Russian citizens found defence in the European Court. However, our political and law enforcement practices have been demonstrating an obvious backsliding on the Council of Europe principles in the recent years. It should be also noted, that "pragmatism" and double standards sometimes take the lead in the Council of Europe too. We would like PACE to maintain its fidelity to the basic principles of the Council of Europe, and hope that monitoring over implementation of the member states' obligations as well as election observation missions would not turn into a simple formality – all this refers not only to Russia. And here we rely on the energy of the ALDE Group and its adherence to liberal values.

ALDE concerned about the human rights situation in the North Caucasus



The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe in cooperation with the American Committee for Peace in the Caucasus organized a series of meetings aimed at raising awareness within the European community about the alarming deterioration of the security and human rights situation in the North Caucasus. Oleg Orlov, President of the Human Rights Center “Memorial”, Magomed Mutsolgov, Director of the human rights organization “MASHR” (Ingushetia) and Bakanay Guseynova, a human rights lawyer (Dagestan) addressed the ALDE on 22 June 2009.

The assassination attempt on Ingushetia President Yunus-Bek Yevkurov, the latest in a series of high profile murders in the region, underscored the degree to which the situation has deteriorated and the urgent need for renewed international attention. The immediate goal of meetings was to provide the ALDE and the Council of Europe with its Parliamentary Assembly with accurate, objective, and factual information to ensure adequate response to the situation and the human rights violations in the North Caucasus and acquire better understanding of the nature of the crises in this ethnically complex region to help European lawmakers to make educated and informed decisions.

Whereas the notion that the security and human rights situations in the North Caucasus have substantially improved with an end of full scale military operations in Chechnya is largely promoted by the Russian authorities, the reports that were presented by the three experts showed that systematic human rights violations by security services, disregard for rule of law, and suppression of freedom of press and religion, have created separate crises resulting in the radicalization of populations in Chechnya's neighboring republics of Ingushetia and Dagestan.

Furthermore, the situation in Chechnya has also taken an alarming turn with an increase of abductions, torture, and harassment of relatives of alleged militants by the authorities.



Andrea Rigoni (Italy)

Situation in Belarus (Doc. 11939)

Rapporteur of the Political Affairs Committee

[Voting results](#)

Presented: Tuesday 23 June 2009



Serhiy Holovaty (Ukraine)

The state of human rights in Europe and the progress of the Assembly's monitoring procedure (Doc. 11941 and Addendum)

Monitoring Committee

[Voting results](#)

Presented: Tuesday 23 June 2009



Dick Marty (Switzerland)

Reconsideration on substantial grounds of previously ratified credentials of the Ukrainian delegation (Rule 9 of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure)

Rapporteur of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights

[Voting results](#)

Presented: Tuesday 23 June 2009



Markku Laukkanen (Finland)

The funding of public service broadcasting (Doc. 11848)

Rapporteur of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education

[Voting results](#)

Presented: Thursday 25 June 2009



Cecilia Keaveney (Ireland)

History teaching in conflict and post-conflict areas (Doc. 11919)

Rapporteur of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education

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Presented: Friday 26 June 2009

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Miljenko Dorić (Croatia)

Draft Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (Doc. 11935 + Doc. 11950)

Draft Protocol No. 3 to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities concerning Euroregional co-operation groupings (ECGs) (Doc. 11936 + Doc. 11951)

Rapporteur of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional

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Monday 22 June 2009

Progress report of the Bureau of the Assembly and the Standing Committee (Doc. 11954 Parts I and II + Addendum) (continued)



Mr HANCOCK (*United Kingdom*). – The Bureau has a responsibility to organise things properly. There should be no confusion and no rushing to the Venice Commission. We should know what this Assembly's rights are, because they are set out in statute. They are not ambiguous: they have been in place for more than 50 years and they are not open to contradiction.

The same sort of thing applies in respect of how the agenda is put together. Last month, at a meeting in Ljubljana, several reports were referred to the Standing Committee. Many of the rapporteurs were not able to be in Ljubljana and many of them have had their debates, in respect of both their reports and the opinions, put off time and again. [Read more](#)

Tuesday 23 June 2009

Situation in Belarus (Doc. 11939)



Mr EÖRSI (*Hungary*). – The Council of Europe cannot create democracy in Belarus. Only the Belarusian authorities can do that. If they are not willing to do that, only the Belarusian people can create democracy there. We can provide only support and solidarity. If you read into my speech that I am against the report, you are wrong. An attempt can be made. I am sad to say that we are making a geopolitical decision. Many colleagues in this Chamber do not like making geopolitical decisions.

Let us make the attempt that the report suggests, but we should not forget that Belarus is a clever negotiating country. It looks for where it can get the biggest benefit. Let us give special guest status a try. I am very much in favour of the proposals of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights. We should watch developments carefully. If we cannot help Belarusian democracy, at least we should help ourselves to maintain our values. [Read more, voting results](#)

The activities of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) in 2008: reinforcing economic and democratic stability (Doc. 11938)



Mr REIMANN (*Switzerland*) said that, 20 years ago, the purpose of the EBRD had been questioned. In response, the EBRD had established a development bank and revised its objectives.

Today, the objectives of the EBRD were similarly challenged. Some countries of the former Eastern bloc had either joined, or aspired to join, the euro. They were now questioning the need for the EBRD and lobbying to join world financial organisations. Although it was true that all things would be possible in the future, the recent and ongoing financial turmoil had posed a test for the very existence of the EBRD – a test which it had passed. [Read more, voting results](#)

The challenges of the financial crisis to the world economic institutions (Doc. 11944)

Mr HANCOCK (*United Kingdom*). – I congratulate the rapporteur, as others have done, on an excellent report, which attempts to deal with an impossible situation.

When we hear that a bank lost €300 billion we must remember that someone, somewhere profited from it – someone did all right. The one certainty is that the people who suffered were the small savers; the people whose jobs went down the tubes when businesses collapsed; the people who lost their houses; children whose education was interrupted; and the world's poorest people, who found that an already debilitating situation had got worse because the major institutions of the world did not have the right resources to fund them. [Read more, voting results](#)

Reconsideration on substantial grounds of previously ratified credentials of the Ukrainian delegation (Rule 9 of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure)

[Read more, voting results](#)

Wednesday 24 June 2009

The state of human rights in Europe: the need to eradicate impunity (Doc. 11934)



Mrs TAKTAKISHVILI (Georgia) said that there had been some very serious and high profile abuses of human rights against journalists and politicians in recent years. The issue at hand was less about the number of crimes, including murders, which had been committed but rather whether the state had a robust rule of law. Criminal and civil justice systems must be able to investigate, detain and prosecute the perpetrators of human rights abuses. [...] Parliamentarians also had a responsibility to pursue the abolition of immunities from prosecution in their own countries. [...] The excellent report should not be seen as the end of the Assembly's work on this matter, but as its starting point. [Read](#)

[more, voting results](#)

The state of human rights in Europe and the progress of the Assembly's monitoring procedure (Doc. 11941 and Addendum)

[Read more, voting results](#)

Europe's forgotten people: protecting the human rights of long-term displaced persons (Doc. 11942)



Mrs ANIKASHVILI (Georgia) said that long-term displaced persons were Europe's forgotten people. There were 2.5 million displaced people across 11 of the Council of Europe's 47 member states. Many of these were living without access to basic services and these people had to fight for their basic human rights. These people had been forgotten. Action had to be taken at the international level to restore peace in Europe's conflict zones and the international community had to redouble their efforts to achieve this. Political solutions were needed first, in order to find solutions for long-term displaced persons.

[Read more, voting results](#)

The functioning of democratic institutions in Armenia



Mrs LUNDGREN (Sweden). – The severe violations against human rights that took place in Armenia in the aftermath of the presidential elections were unacceptable. The death of people in the streets of Yerevan is a crime that must be fully investigated and condemned. [...] During the 15 months that have passed, there have been a lot of doubts about whether there is really a will on the part of the Armenian authorities to comply with the resolutions made in this Chamber. I guess that there are still some doubts among us. However, we must be fair and recognise the steps that the Armenian authorities have been taking in the right direction to comply with the demands of this Assembly: the

release of political prisoners, the reform of media regulation, the reform of important laws, and the investigation into the events of 1 and 2 March 2008 that has been started. [...] However, the work has only just begun, and there is a long way to go to build confidence in Armenian society among Armenian people. [Read more, voting results](#)

Thursday 25 June 2009

Debate under urgent procedure: The situation in Iran (Doc. 11968)

Mr HANCOCK (*United Kingdom*). – What is happening in Iran is unacceptable in any circumstances – it is not about politics, religion or justice; it is just unacceptable. [...] As has been said, the people in Iran are undoubtedly walking on the wild side of life and are taking enormous risks. [...] We are talking about a systematic destruction of the possibility for people to show any sign of dissent. [...] The report deviates from this subject when it talks about nuclear matters and terrorism, and when it praises the role of the United States. I do not wish to criticise the report for that, but, as others have said, the issues for today relate to what is happening to the democratic structures in Iran. It is hard to understand what the opposition was saying on many of the points about which this report rightly has cause for concern, for example, nuclear power and the development of a nuclear weapon, and it is not certain that any of the opposition leaders would change the policy if they came to power. [Read more, voting results](#)

The funding of public service broadcasting (Doc. 11848)



Ms KEAVENEY (*Ireland*). – I, too, rise to support my colleague, Markku Laukkanen, on his very fine report on the funding of public service broadcasting. I suppose that the first thing for me to say is that I strongly believe in the need for a public service broadcaster and see many roles for it in my own country, where the public service broadcasters are sometimes open to critical comment but also deserve praise. [Read more, voting results](#)

Renewable energies and the environment (Doc. 11918)

[Read more, voting results](#)

Nuclear energy and sustainable development (Doc. 11914)



Mr GIARETTA (*Italy*) congratulated the rapporteurs on their excellent report. He agreed that the use of renewable energy should be increased since such technology was relatively simple without having major environmental impacts. However, there were limits on solar and wind power as they were not constant. [...] Nuclear energy was more controversial: it produced less global warming gases but there were of course serious problems associated with it. [...] There had been significant steps forward in terms of energy-saving, but much more progress was needed. [Read more, voting results](#)

Friday 26 June 2009

Establishment of a "Partner for democracy" status with the Parliamentary Assembly (Doc. 11913)

[Read more, voting results](#)

History teaching in conflict and post-conflict areas (Doc. 11919)

Mrs LUNDGREN (*Sweden*). – The report has a conflict and post-conflict use, and it can also be used to prevent new conflicts. In that regard, we must be aware that attempts have always been made to rewrite history in order to suit the new rulers and impose a new truth on their people. We should be very cautious about such situations. The report states that teaching about "the other" is crucial, and the ALDE Group agrees with that. People have to know their history if they want to learn from it, but they must be careful not to get locked into it. I congratulate the rapporteur, whose report we fully support. [Read more, voting results](#)

The urgent need to combat so-called "honour crimes" (Doc. 11943)



Mr ROWEN (United Kingdom). – The ALDE group is fully supportive, both of the report and of its recommendations. In particular, we call for national and international action to combat the notion of so-called “honour crimes”. [...] It is regrettable, therefore, that the report also records the fact that in some “enlightened” European countries the defence of “honour” is still accepted as an extenuating circumstance. [...] Although honour crimes have occurred among all religions and in patriarchal societies, it is a fact that they occur predominantly in Muslim countries or Muslim communities. Like all other religions, Islam does not support, condone or tolerate honour crimes, but the fact that second or third-generation communities still experience honour crimes underlines just how much work still needs to be done. [Read more](#), [voting results](#)

Draft Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (Doc. 11935 + Doc. 11950)

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

Draft Protocol No. 3 to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities concerning Euroregional co-operation groupings (ECGs) (Doc. 11936 + Doc. 11951)

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