



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

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## **April session: ALDE's highlights**

- On the background of the PACE urgent and current affairs debates on recent developments in Northern Africa, the ALDE exchanged views on the concept of the **Responsibility to Protect** and discussed the role of parliaments in the development of international legal frames for humanitarian intervention. How to avoid abuses? How to ensure that democratic processes are duly respected?
- Following the hearing in the Political Affairs Committee, the ALDE held an extraordinary debate on the **human rights situation in Belarus**. The Group exchanged views with prominent Belarusian human rights defenders, Mrs Elena Tonkacheva and Mr Ales Bialiatski.
- ALDE prepared and discussed its vision of the forthcoming **reform of the Parliamentary Assembly**.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank those who took active part in plenary debates on behalf of the ALDE, presented reports and attended group meetings. The Group is particularly thankful to Manuel Lezertua who contributed to the debate on "Responsibility to Protect: the role of parliamentarians". Finally, the Group is grateful to our young trainees Marco Nijweide (IFLRY) and Anna Bazilo (Ukraine) for their interest and active participation.

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Mr Lazertua, Mrs Brasseur, Ms Bigday

What should be the role of national parliaments in the mechanisms of prevention of grave human rights violations? On 11 April, the ALDE exchanged views with Mr Manuel Lezertua, Director of Legal Advice and Public International Law of the Council of Europe.

The international community and the PACE have reacted with much enthusiasm to the popular uprising against the authoritarian rule in the Arab world. On 17 March, the UN Security Council adopted the Resolution 1973 authorising "all necessary measures" to protect civilian population in Libya, raising once again the debate on the issues of humanitarian intervention, right to intervene and responsibility to protect.

How to assure democratic control over the realisation of these principles? How can national parliaments contribute to the mechanisms of prevention of grave human rights abuses and support to democratic processes in and outside Europe?

There are no easy answers to these questions. Responsibility to Protect is a relatively recent concept, and there will always be risks of its misuse or political manipulation, which makes the role of parliamentary control even more important. But the risks should not become a justification for passivity of the international community in cases of serious human rights abuses - since human rights reach beyond national boundaries. "As for the institutional framework, which some have considered to be lagging behind the conceptual developments, it will hopefully follow; we all should keep on working", Mr Lezertua concluded. [Back](#)

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## ALDE held an urgent debate on the human rights situation in Belarus



- Members of the Council of Europe
- Founding Members of the Council of Europe
- Belarus

"Although in Belarus there is no glimmer of positive change and we did not see any steps towards the standards of freedom recently, the worst thing to do would be to resign. We have the firm conviction to help Belarus and the ALDE will continue to follow very closely the situation in this country", said Mrs Anne Brasseur, President of the ALDE.

The Group stood for a minute of silence in memory of the victims of the April 11 explosion in the Minsk subway. The ALDE strongly condemned the terrorist attack. Meanwhile the human rights situation in the country continues to raise serious concerns: 40 opponents of the authoritarian rule of Lukashenko are awaiting trials for having participated in a political protest rally on the night of the presidential election on 19 December 2010. 10 protesters have already been convicted receiving up to 4 years of imprisonment.

The ALDE exchanged views with Mrs Tonkacheva, Agency for Legal Technologies and Mr Bialiatski, Human Rights Centre Viasna, International Board of FIDH.

The December protest rally has become a pretext for an unprecedented wave of pressure against civil society, NGOs and media in Belarus. The recent bomb attack - human rights defenders fear - may justify further crackdown on civil society.

"The authorities pretend that we are just an insignificant minority which does not represent the will of the people. But in reality a very big part of the population is backing the work of the civil society and want changes," human rights defenders said.

Political pressure, support to civil society and constant attention are probably the only instruments that the international community may use in order to improve the human rights situation in Belarus. In these conditions the European liberals should not remain passive and must make use of all available leverages to prevent further repressions.



**Ms Anne Brasseur (Luxembourg)**

**The religious dimension of intercultural dialogue (Doc. 12553) –**  
Committee on Culture, Science and Education - 12 April 2011

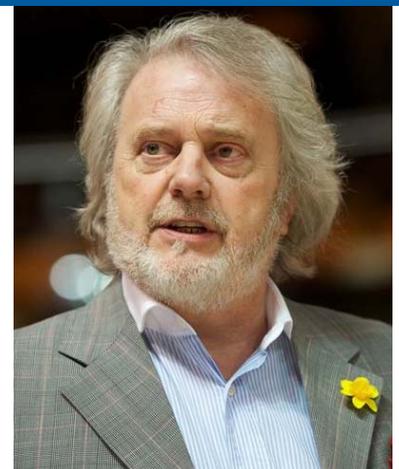
*“We are facing an outbreak of intolerance, rejection and violence. Social cohesion is at risk. Therefore in my report I urged to establish a new paradigm of living together. Not only should everyone accept the existence of diverse sensibilities, either religious or not, but also respect this diversity...”*



**Mr Michael Aastrup Jensen (Denmark), co-rapporteur**

**The honouring of obligations and commitments by Georgia (Doc. 12554) –** Monitoring Committee – 13 April 2011

*“The local elections held in May 2010 were an important landmark for Georgian democracy. The next step will be the forthcoming presidential and parliamentary elections, which will indicate whether democracy in Georgia has become mature, more inclusive and robust...”*



**Mr Mike Hancock (United Kingdom)**

**Safeguarding children and young people from obesity and type 2 diabetes (Doc. 12559) -** Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee - 13 April 2011

*“Many people will tell us of good practice around Europe in many different countries and about what they are doing. The problem is that we do not share good practice enough so that it becomes the norm rather than the unusual...”*



**Mr Bernard Marquet (Monaco)**

**Water – a source of conflict (Doc. 12538) -** Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs – 15 April 2011

*“Water can save lives but it can also kill. It is a source of life but can also be a source of pollution. An average of 8 million people are killed every year by water, with one dying every 15 seconds...”*

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**Ms Mailis Reps (Estonia)**

**Unaccompanied children in Europe: issues of arrival, stay and return (Doc. 12539) – Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population – 15 April 2011**

*“Today, unaccompanied minors are not a question for European Union countries only. Different countries build different institutions for migrants, including children, to send them back to transit countries. This applies more and more often in all 47 member states of the Council of Europe. That is why I propose that the Council of Europe adopt 15 common principles that would be applicable in all 47 member states.”*

**ALDE  
questions**

**Communication from Mr Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe**



Mr BADRÉ (*France*) said that the success of the political reforms that Mr Jagland had been attempting would rest on the degree of co-operation with the European Union. Had

Mr Jagland’s meeting with Baroness Catherine Ashton resulted in the appropriate level of co-operation?



Mr JAGLAND – Yes, absolutely. I have had very constructive meetings with High Representative Catherine Ashton, as well as with President Barroso and other Commissioners. We are working very well together, and it is understood, at least at the top level of the European Union, that we have an expertise that the European Union does not have, for instance with regard to lawmaking, which is very much needed now in Tunisia for the writing of constitutions. The Venice Commission is also about to train about 200 electoral officials in Tunisia, so we can do things that the European Union cannot do. That is very well understood at the top level of the European Union, but as you know, in every bureaucracy there are people lower down in the organisation who have an inclination to expand, and we probably also have that problem in our own organisations.

**Communication from the Committee of Ministers to the Parliamentary Assembly, presented by Mr Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers**



Mr BADRÉ (*France*) said that the accession of the European Union to the European Convention on Human Rights would be important for the protection of human

rights. He asked Mr Davutoğlu to give an account of the negotiating process between the European Union and the Council of Europe.



Mr DAVUTOĞLU – Another important priority for us was to have this link and achieve accession to the European Convention on Human Rights. We had a meeting on 4 March in Brussels with Baroness Ashton, First Vice-President and High Representative, and her team. Our team included the Secretary General. It was a very fruitful meeting. We went through all the files of the negotiations. Our joint committees are still working very hard. We hope that this will be concluded by Istanbul, but if more time is needed we will follow up after the Istanbul meeting. However, it is going quite well. It will be a historic development, as you mentioned, and we are sure that we will achieve this goal.

## ALDE questions

### Address by Mr Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Prime Minister of Turkey



Mrs BRASSEUR (Luxembourg) said that the Prime Minister had just referred to a women's organisation in his country but she had not seen a single female member of his delegation. He had also stressed the importance of the freedom of the press and yet a book had recently been censored and a journalist was in custody. How could the Prime Minister explain this?



Mr ERDOĞAN said that, although the only two Ministers with him were male, there were women in his delegation. There were also female members of the Turkish Parliament. He recognised that it was important to overcome prejudice and discrimination.

The book referred to by Mrs Brasseur was not in print but was available on the Internet. He did not know who had given the order to withdraw it from circulation. The judicial investigation had uncovered documentary evidence relating to the journalists who had been detained in custody and this was, presumably, the basis for the continuing judicial inquiries. Making bombs and gathering the materials necessary to make bombs were both crimes and were a sufficient basis for the involvement of the security forces in an investigation. As part of such an investigation, the judiciary had the power to require the confiscation of bomb-making materials. It was important to note that the executive was not involved in this investigation: the judiciary was independent and was entitled to conduct its investigations as it saw fit. [Back](#)

## ALDE questions

### Statement by Mr Thomas Hammarberg, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights



Mrs GUȚU (Moldova) asked whether Mr Hammarberg had observed the human rights situation in the breakaway territory of Transnistria, which was not under the control of the Moldovan Government.



Mr HAMMARBERG – I have not been to Transnistria. I made an attempt a couple of years ago, but it did not work out. There is a need to observe the situation there. We have followed developments on some arrests that were made recently. As far as we understand, the reasons for them are unacceptable and those arrested should not have been arrested and imprisoned. There are also problems with schooling and with language in schools. We are looking into the matter and I hope it will be possible to visit Transnistria to establish the facts more clearly before we take any action. [Back](#)

**Monday 11 April 2011**

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

Mr HANCOCK (*United Kingdom*) – I want to concentrate on election monitoring. I am sure that every member of the Assembly agrees that it is time for us to review our practices and their effectiveness. It simply is not good enough to be invited to monitor just what happens on the day. The Council of Europe should not be giving elections a clean bill of health simply because the process on the day was deemed okay, when the fundamental rights of the individuals behind the democratic process have been seriously eroded. If we are to have credibility in regard to monitoring, we must surely look again at the practices that we adopt.



[Read more](#)

**Over-indebtedness of states: a danger for democracy and human rights ([Doc. 12556](#))**



Mr GIARETTA (*Italy*) said that there was no doubt that excessive debt could undermine fundamental human rights. Indebtedness had led to distortions in the distribution of wealth, both between people and between countries. Public finances would have to cope with the rescue of the banking sector but the risk now was that state socialism would operate in favour of the richest in society while an unbridled free market operated to the detriment of the poorest. [...] Speculation should be discouraged through targeted taxation while productive investment should be encouraged by issuing supra-national bonds through the European Union and the World Bank. [Read more, voting results](#)

**Tuesday 12 April 2011**

**The religious dimension of intercultural dialogue ([Doc. 12553](#))**



Mrs MEMECAN (*Turkey*) – Therefore, the most important value we need to instil is a respect for difference, pluralism and diversity, especially in our children. Unity in diversity should always be kept alive and embraced by everyone. We should share experiences of good models of pluralist teaching and promote programmes of exchange, especially among young people, as the rapporteur very rightly recommends. With the new demographic scene in Europe and as the whole world in fact becomes closer we need mutual respect more than ever to live good lives [Read more, voting results](#)

**Combating poverty ([Doc. 12555](#))**



Mrs REPS (*Estonia*) – As the rapporteur said, if we are considering extreme poverty or so-called absolute poverty, we are not talking about civil, economic, cultural or social rights, but the inability to exercise the most fundamental rights. What can we do? There are many aspects that we could discuss, but let me consider just a few on behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe: education, preventing very early pregnancy, children in poverty. Another aspect of poverty, which should perhaps be discussed on another day, involves illegal arrivals. [Read more, voting results](#)

**The honouring of obligations and commitments by Georgia ([Doc. 12554](#))**



Mrs LUNDGREN (*Sweden*) – The road to democracy, human rights and the rule of law is there. Georgia has set out on that road and is obviously moving forwards, not backwards. [...] However, there is more to be done. For example, Georgia needs to implement the recommendations of the Venice Commission, especially on the judiciary and the effective and fair administration of justice. That is especially important for the rule of law in Georgia. [Read more, voting results](#)

**The need to assess progress in the implementation of the Bern Convention ([Doc. 12459](#))**



Mr MARQUET (*Monaco*) said that the Bern Convention was an inspiring instrument of the Council of Europe, as pertinent now as it was when it had been signed. It was deplorable that adverse effects on biodiversity were not limited to extinction of species, but also concerned humans in their natural environment, which was unique. Recent events in Japan had unfortunately shown the influence of man on his environment, including the reduction of biodiversity. This was linked to human rights, health and food, amongst other things. [Read more, voting results](#)

**Education against violence at school ([Doc. 12513](#))**



Mr HANCOCK (*United Kingdom*) – How much effort is really made to try to explain to children the dangers that they pose to themselves if they engage in violence? ... Unfortunately society has failed young people because we have allowed so much violence to be part of everyday life. Violence in the news is one thing but violence on our televisions, in our cinemas and in the games that children play is unforgiveable. If nothing else, we should stand up against it. [Read more, voting results](#)

**Safeguarding children and young people from obesity and type 2 diabetes ([Doc. 12559](#))**



Mrs GUȚU (*Moldova*) The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe supported the draft resolution and recommendation, which were very detailed and covered all of the necessary ground, such as education, health, consumer culture and scientific research.[...] There was a European charter on counteracting obesity, but the international legislative framework was inadequate to achieve quantifiable results. Ensuring an active lifestyle was feasible for developed states, but not everyone was on an equal footing. [...] Members needed to ensure that the resolution was debated in national parliaments and that legislation was enacted in their respective countries. [Read more, voting results](#)

**Urgent debate: the large-scale arrival of irregular migrants, asylum seekers and refugees on Europe's southern shores(Doc .12581)**



Mrs MEMECAN (*Turkey*) Tunisians and Libyans whose lives are in danger for political or economic reasons are fleeing their countries, but they risk not being able to make it. Their trips must be a nightmare. We cannot ignore those people's suffering and tell them to go back home just as they arrive on our shores. We should and can give them a break. There are many means of hosting these people temporarily until it is safer for them to return. Their accommodation will cost us time, money and energy, but in this day and age, we cannot escape from this basic responsibility and turn our backs on these people. We can all afford to share our bread and provide them with their basic needs. [Read more, voting results](#)

**Current affairs debate: the situation in northern Africa**



Mrs SCHUSTER (*Germany*) said that she had been very impressed by the great courage of the demonstrators who had taken to the streets to defend their views despite threats of violence. The changes in Egypt and Tunisia were a tremendous opportunity but at the same time there was increased violence in Bahrain and other countries. The outcome of events in Libya was not yet known. European civil society and the Parliamentary Assembly should send a strong signal. As democrats, they could give genuine support. [Read more](#)

**Rural women in Europe ([Doc. 12460](#))**



Mr MÜRI (*Switzerland*) said that women fed the world, not just in the home but also from the fields. In Africa, 80% of food was produced by women, in Asia, they produced 90% of rice and globally, over 50% of agricultural work was done by women. Women were not just involved in food production, but also in harvesting, storing and selling food. In Europe, the number of women working in agriculture was lower but it was still the case that every third person working in agriculture was a woman. Only 10% of agricultural assets belonged to women, who were further disadvantaged in the distribution of land, with only 2% of land belonging to women, according to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations. [Read more, voting results](#)

**The death penalty in Council of Europe member and observer states – a violation of human rights ([Doc. 12456](#))**



Mr BADRÉ (*France*) quoted Camus, who had said in 1957 that the death penalty was no less revolting than the crime that led to it and that it added a new stain to the stain of that crime. Two thirds of the countries of the world had abolished the death penalty, France among them, but three countries closely linked to the Council of Europe, the United States, Japan and Belarus, still carried out capital punishment. In 2007, the Assembly had called for a moratorium on the death penalty, and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe believed that a moratorium should be a prerequisite for dialogue with Belarus over membership of the Council of Europe. But a moratorium was only a beginning. [Read more, voting results](#)



Mr MARQUET (*Monaco*) said that Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights was a fundamental principle, from which no state could derogate. [...] Existing mechanisms could always be improved, and, for example, CPT public statements sometimes seemed to be cries in the wilderness. They were exceptional, but they should instead be published on a regular basis. The process of selection of the well-informed experts, in order to be effective, had to be non-political. Experts would gain democratic legitimacy through election by the Assembly, which would encourage public debate. The convention should therefore be amended to permit both elections and regular publication of reports. [Read more, voting results](#)

### **Friday 15 April 2011**

#### **Water – a source of conflict ([Doc. 12538](#))**



Mrs SCHUSTER (*Germany*) said that it was important that today the Assembly should be dealing with water as an aspect of human rights. According to the United Nations, there were currently 1 billion people worldwide who did not have access to clean water and 2.6 billion who did not have access to proper sanitation. There were more children dying across the world from water-related illnesses and infections than from malaria or AIDS or HIV[...] Access to water would become an even more serious problem in the future. Climate change, urbanisation and increases in population would exacerbate the shortage of water. [Read more, voting results](#)

#### **Unaccompanied children in Europe: issues of arrival, stay and return ([Doc. 12539](#))**

[Read more, voting results](#)

#### **Protecting migrant women in the labour market ([Doc. 12549](#))**



Mrs REPS (*Estonia*) Migrant women suffer on many fronts. The pay for women working in traditional sectors such as childminding, education or social work is much lower than that of those working in traditional male sectors. Many migrant women work in unregulated or even illegal sectors, so they are vulnerable on three counts. In many cases, visa regulations prevent such women from working for extended hours or even working at all. They may be asylum seekers or refugees, and the possibility of separate asylum status for them may not have been looked into... [Read more, voting results](#)