



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

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liberals

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April Session in Strasbourg

- ALDE congratulates Mrs Meritxell Mateu Pi (Andorra) and Mrs Ana Gutu (Moldova) who joined the Bureau of the ALDE, and Mr Igor Kolman (Croatia) who was elected vice-chairman of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development of the Parliamentary Assembly. The ALDE thanked Mr Roman Jakic (Slovenia) recently appointed Minister of Defence, and Bernard Marquet (Monaco) for their outstanding service in the ALDE and the Assembly.
- ALDE discussed ways to improve the access to human rights and political participation of young people with a delegation of the International Federation of Liberal Youth (IFLRY). Mr Jacob Moroza-Rasmussen, Secretary General of ALDE Party, Mr Thomas Leys, President of IFRLY and Ms Guoda Lomonaite, Vice-President of the European Youth Forum addressed the ALDE-PACE as guest speakers. Ahead of the meeting, Mrs Anne Brasseur, President of ALDE, delivered a keynote speech at an IFLRY seminar in Strasbourg.
- ALDE heard a worrying report on the situation of civil society in Russia presented by human rights defenders. A vivid and creative civil society is an inherent part of democracy and governments must fully guarantee its free development. The ALDE Group will continue to follow the dismaying situation around the implementation of the recently adopted legislation on non-commercial organisations and on the so-called “foreign agents” in Russia.

The Group is proud to welcome 17 new members from Estonia, Germany, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Monaco, Netherlands and Romania, who joined us since the January session.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who took active part in plenary debates on behalf of the ALDE, presented reports, and attended group meetings and side-events. The Group is also thankful to the trainees Mr Jean-Baptiste Maillard (France) and Ms Jelizaveta Puzanskaja (Lithuania).

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Access to human rights and political participation of youth



Assuring equal access to human rights and participation of youth in civil and political life are a major task for liberals in Europe. ALDE raised this topical subject with 35 delegates from the International Federation of Liberal Youth (IFLY) during its meeting on 22 April in Strasbourg. Jacob Moroza-Rasmussen, Secretary General of ALDE Party, Thomas Leys, President of IFRLY and Guoda Lomonaite, Vice-President of the European Youth Forum addressed the ALDE-PACE as guest speakers.

The participants underlined that although human rights were universal and open to all - and there were no specific human rights for youth, as there could be no specific human rights for women, religious, sexual or other minorities - in reality, the access of different social groups to these rights in different regions of our continent still remains unequal. In order to improve this situation, however, there is no need to create new institutional arrangements, stressed Mr Moroza-Rasmussen. "We don't need new institutions to work with youth rights. What we do need is to use the existing institutions and to be more aware of how to empower young people through them."

One of the questions that were raised was how to assure that young people actively endorse political responsibility and do not get disillusioned and consumed by extremist ideas. A very practical proposal was made by Baroness Emma Nicholson (United Kingdom) who invited liberal politicians to involve young people in local and national political life by giving them a chance to assist parliamentarians and local representatives and experience how important such engagement can be.

"It is never too early to engage in education of the human rights culture", concluded Anne Brasseur, President of ALDE-PACE. "Not only the youth should be protected by human rights, but first and foremost, the youth has to protect human rights. What I mean by that is that young people need to engage and actively support political and social movements that share and cherish this human rights culture, especially taking into consideration the general decrease in political and civil society participation. If young people do not become relays of human rights values, the human rights culture may simply disappear or be perverted by extremists."





Ms Nursuna MEMECAN (Turkey)

Ending discrimination against Roma children (Doc. 13158)
– Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination - 23 April 2013

“Combating discrimination needs to be addressed from two perspectives: the perpetrator and the victim.”



Anne BRASSEUR (Luxembourg)

Culture and education through national parliaments: European policies (Doc. 13142)- Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media – 24 April 2013

“Talking about culture in times of crisis is seen by many as something of a luxury, and to talk about education in times of crisis often boils down to a discussion of the cost of education or the employability of young people, and yet we all know that that cannot be the case.”



Polonca KOMAR (Slovenia)

Young Europeans: an urgent educational challenge (Doc. 13155) – Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media – 24 April 2013

“We, as elected representatives, have a duty to bear in mind the needs of each and every one of our citizens. We must make sure that young people get all the support they need to live in dignity.”



Andrea RIGONI (Italy)

Management of mixed migration and asylum challenges beyond the European Union’s eastern border (Doc. 13163)
- Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons – 25 April 2013

“The main countries in focus at the moment are Turkey, which is under particular pressure, Croatia, Serbia, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine.”

**Question to Mr Joachim
GAUCK, President of Germany**



Ms BRASSEUR* (*Luxembourg*) – I thank you very much indeed, Mr Gauck, for the commitment that you have shown to the Council of Europe and for your remarkable statement here this morning. My question is about religious freedom. We have differing religions. Many people here are of no particular religion. As a theologian, not as the President of the Federal Republic, how do you view the co-existence of various religions here in Europe?



Mr GAUCK - Ms Brasseur talked about cohesion and co-existence. We can achieve those aims if we are sure of our own values. I sometimes have the impression that some groups in society tend to be intolerant because they are less sure of their own identity and that is why they need to define others as very "other". People who are particularly attached to their own religion seem to me to be ready to accept differences. When we are sure of our own identities, we can afford to live together peacefully. It is important that we acknowledge the rights of others even though they are different and that form of tolerance is born of conscience of one's values. A twofold strategy should be employed when talking about religious tolerance. We need to be confident in and aware of our values while paying attention to the principle of diversity. Of course, cohesion is based on diversity, but if diversity is conceived to be positive we will not discriminate. Of course, there are those who wilfully wish to discriminate and misunderstand, but we need to contest and fight that.

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Question to Mr Gilbert SABOYA SUNYÉ, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Andorra, Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers



Mr XUCLÀ* (*Spain*) – Good afternoon, Minister, and many congratulations. The ALDE had decided to ask about the budget, but that question has been formulated recently. You have reported that you visited Armenia and Azerbaijan during your chairmanship, so I would like to know what your conclusions were and what your impressions of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict were.

Mr SABOYA SUNYÉ* – Thank you for the question. Over the last couple of months there have been visits to Armenia and Azerbaijan, which entered the Council of Europe at the same time and it was hoped that that would be conducive to a political settlement. The Committee of Ministers has continued to do its level best to assist in attaining that ultimate objective. A delegation of the Committee of Ministers visited Yerevan in March to look at the situation in Armenia, and the results of its visit will be forwarded to the Committee of Ministers in the near future, as I said in my statement a few minutes ago. I can assure you that in due course the Parliamentary Assembly will be informed of the findings and results of those discussions in the Committee of Ministers.



The Council of Europe supports the Armenian authorities in implementing practically the commitments that are still pending in the plan of action. We intend to ensure that everything that was adopted in March 2012 will be seen through. The February 2013 presidential elections were observed and deemed to have been well managed, although we should not conceal the fact that there were some shortcomings, especially in the use of administrative resources. However, we believe that all that is part and parcel of the process of consolidating the values of the Council of Europe, which we can describe as positive and hopeful. We hope that Armenia's chairmanship may further contribute to attaining those objectives, which we all share.

The question also covered the Azerbaijan mission. As you know, and as I pointed out in my statement, earlier this month there was also a visit to Baku. Those results will be presented to the Committee of Ministers soon, and the Parliamentary Assembly will be informed in a timely fashion of the results of the debates on this issue. As I said in the earlier part of my answer, there are some serious issues before the Committee of Ministers, but we hope that the next presidential elections, in October 2013, will be an important test. An invitation was sent to the Azerbaijani authorities towards the end of 2012, and the Committee of Ministers hopes that there will be a response to the proposed action plan. In any event, Azerbaijan will enjoy the fullest support in the Committee of Ministers in endeavouring to find the right solutions to this problem.

**Question to Mr Bidzina
IVANISHVILI, Prime Minister of
Georgia**



Ms GUȚU
(Republic of
Moldova)* –

Where are the lines of division between you, as Prime Minister of Georgia, and the current president, Mr Saakashvili in this political cohabitation, as we call it, given that Georgia has firmly decided on European integration, which requires the rule of law and respect for fundamental human rights?



Mr IVANISHVILI* – I think that we are managing with co-habitation. My personal desire is for both the government and the opposition to stand together. There are many problems in our country, and we do not have time to engage in disputes. We should join our efforts and move in the right direction.

However, co-habitation and the restoration of justice are different matters. We should not confuse politics with justice; those terms are often mistakenly used. There are many talented and gifted people in the opposition. Instead of arguing with each other, we should support each another, but the restoration of justice and co-habitation are different matters.

**Question to Mr Victor PONTA,
Prime Minister of Romania**



Ms SCHUSTER
(Germany)* – I
thank you for
your address.

Yesterday evening we had a debate on the situation of Roma children. What tangible measures are you implementing to help the Roma community, particularly Roma children, and other minorities?



Mr PONTA – Thank you very much for that question. I was honest in saying that the integration of the Roma community is, in my view, not only our top priority but one of our biggest challenges. I mentioned the school that was visited by your Secretary General, where the Roma kids learn in their own language. Our legal provisions and projects, which we have already included in the new

European Union financial framework, are tools for improving the education of Roma kids. You referred to other minorities, and I should say that all Hungarian minorities learn in their native language, not only in primary and high school but even in university. That is an effective system that meets all the standards. We will always work with minority representatives to keep our legislation updated so that it meets their needs.

With the Roma community, the issue is not only one of educating the children; it is one of convincing the parents to send their children to school. We have, as I told you, a good strategy, but in Romania, as elsewhere, implementing good strategies can be most challenging. I put myself forward as the first one not only to have a good strategy but to achieve results. As I said, we will not have results in six months or a year, but I believe that, in the medium and long term, better education and positive discrimination could have the beneficial effects that everyone hopes for.

**Question to Mr Antoni MARTÍ,
Head of Government of Andorra**



Mr XUCLÀ
(Spain)* – On
behalf of the
ALDE group, I
congratulate
you, Mr Martí,
on your
successful

chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. The central focus of your chairmanship was education, and you used Andorra as a practical example of how education can lead to an increase in democratic values, democracy and respectful pluralism, and Andorra has different nationalities living in a small area that is linguistically diverse.



Mr MARTÍ* – It is true that the Andorran chairmanship has focused on fundamental values and on what the Council of Europe has been doing for the past 60 years. Education is one of the most important issues for Europe.

Let me be perfectly honest. Political classes across Europe have been discredited. We are living in difficult times and it is only through education that we will find solutions to the problems. That is why the Andorran chairmanship has viewed education in the broadest terms. We need to make real efforts for our children. Politicians should be there to serve young people because they are so important if we are to defend human rights. If we do not do that, the issues will be both economic and social.

Andorra's education system is special. Of course, some things do not work perfectly in Andorra, but our education system largely works well. We have three free public systems: the Andorran, the Spanish, and the French. The Andorran system is the most recent and was put in place to complement the others for reasons of sovereignty. We have excellent relations with both France and Spain and have had them for many years, which is why we have made the three systems available. There is, however, some imbalance between them because the most-preferred option for Andorrans has recently changed, which is an ongoing problem, but I want to thank the Kingdom of Spain and the French Republic for the fact that we have the three systems, which are so precious to Andorrans.

**Question to Mr Nils MUIŽNIEKS,
Council of Europe Commissioner
for Human Rights**



Ms ACKETOFT
(Sweden) – This
morning, the first
case arising from
the new, confused
Russian law on
foreign agencies

was presented in a Russian court. The case concerns the independent election observation organisation, Golos. The law will effectively limit the majority of contacts that we, as parliamentarians, can have with many NGOs in Russia, and it is a serious threat to the pillars of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. It is not only in Russia that human rights defenders are under heavy artillery. What are your plans to ensure that we can strengthen and highlight their work?



Mr MUIŽNIEKS – Human rights defenders are important partners for us, and if they are under pressure in any country and their working conditions are difficult, it concerns us because it directly affects our ability to work. As I said, I am concerned about this law not only because several of its formulations are vague, which allows for arbitrary interpretation, but because of its implementation. There have been several hundred inspections, and I find that I have to seek information to convince me that that was a proportionate response to the concerns that lay behind the law.

What do we do with regard to human rights defenders? I meet them regularly, and we receive information from them in Strasbourg, on country visits and between visits. In certain contexts I might visit a defender who has been detained or imprisoned to draw attention to that case. Although my mandate does not permit me to take up individual cases, if I see a pattern, I might want to highlight it. I might want to raise cases or patterns of cases with the authorities and push them to investigate pressure or attacks on human rights defenders. We also organise regular round tables with human rights defenders. The first, in Sarajevo, I held with my predecessor in the last month of his mandate; the second was in Paris on issues pertaining to migration and human rights. We will be organising another such round table at the end of May in Kiev. Human rights defenders are very important partners for us, and wherever they are under pressure, wherever their working conditions are difficult, it is a matter of concern to us all and we should voice that very loudly.

Monday 22 April 2013

Progress report of the Bureau and the Standing Committee (Doc. 13169 + Addendum, Doc. 13175); Observation of the presidential election in Armenia (18 February 2013) (Doc. 13172)



Ms BECK (*Germany*) - Belarus: we want to renew that contact, but we must not forget such flagrant breaches of our standards and principles. Serbia and Kosovo: an agreement is one thing, but we now have to see what will become of its application and implementation. Armenia: our judgment, and that of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, is positive. However, certain Armenian NGOs drew our attention to several points. Our short-term observer missions are at a disadvantage because they see only a fragment of the electoral process. We do not see everything that goes on at the campaigning level or everything that precedes the election, when there are all sorts of possibilities for influencing voting. [Read more](#)

Tuesday 23 April 2013

Post-monitoring dialogue with Turkey, AS/Mon (Doc. 13160)



Mr HANCOCK (*United Kingdom*) – I am enormously grateful for the part Turkey has played and continues to play in offering humanitarian aid to the people who, sadly, have had to flee oppression and the war in Syria. I commend Turkey for that, and it should not go unmentioned today. We can congratulate ourselves on working carefully and conscientiously to help Turkey to assimilate more into the family of Europe... [Read more, voting results](#)

Joint debate: Fighting “child sex tourism” AS/Soc (Doc. 13152); Parliaments united in combating sexual violence against children: mid-term review of the ONE in FIVE Campaign AS/Soc (Doc. 13151)



Ms GUȚU (*Republic of Moldova*)* – The scourge of sexual tourism affects above all the countries of eastern Europe, where national legislation does not already provide for criminal responsibility for the sexual abuse of children. The poverty of some such countries and the mass emigration of adults towards western Europe are furthering the problem of sex tourists. [Read more, voting results 1, 2.](#)

Ending discrimination against Roma children



Ms BECK (*Germany*)* – A number of good proposals have been made - practical proposals that need to be acted on, and could be very readily were there the political determination to do so. We would all agree that no one is going to vote against the report, yet so very little seems to be happening out there. [...] If we examine the collapse in the successor states to the former Yugoslavia, we have to say that the situation of Roma has deteriorated. They are more excluded from the labour market than before and discrimination in this whirlpool of ethnic conflict has continued – so very little has been achieved. [...]The problem lies not so much at the level of proposals, but with the absence of any political will. We have to take up that issue and take these commitments back to our national parliaments. Only if that happens will this report make any sense. [Read more, voting results](#)

Wednesday 24 April 2013

Violence against religious communities AS/Pol (Doc. 13157), for opinion AS/Mig (Doc. 13178)



Ms ACKETOFT (*Sweden*) – The rapporteur said that the rule of law is powerless, and if we vote for this resolution, it will indeed be powerless. The report, or rather the rapporteur, has strayed very far from the motion that was initially tabled. [...] The motion aimed to promote the development of human rights in relations with third countries within the framework of political dialogues and to support initiatives aimed at promoting dialogue among religious communities in the Middle East. Instead, 16 out of 25 paragraphs are devoted to the protection of freedom of thought, conscience and religion. That does not respect the European Convention on Human Rights. [Read more, voting results](#)

Culture and education through national parliaments: European policies AS/Cult (Doc. 13142)



Mr BARDINA PAU (*Andorra*)* – The Council of Europe of Europe has produced several relevant documents, such as the White Paper, “Living together as equals in dignity”, and [Recommendation 1975](#) (2011), “Living together in 21st-century Europe: follow-up to the report of the Group of Eminent Persons of the Council of Europe”. [...] As members of our respective Parliaments, we must encourage our governments to show great interest in the work done at the ministerial conference level, to ensure that culture and education remain firmly on the agenda. [Read more, voting results](#)

Joint debate: Young Europeans: an urgent educational challenge AS/Cult (Doc. 13155); Young people's access to fundamental rights AS/Cult (Doc. 13156), AS/Soc (Doc. 13180)



Mr STROE (*Romania*) – For young people, the most important thing is to have a successful start in their careers. Many factors determine the status of young people: their financial state, health and professional development. Some young people are at greater risk than others of becoming NEET – not in education, employment or training – especially those with few or no qualifications and those with low aspirations or, unfortunately, health problems or disabilities. [...] Human rights are the core values of the Council of Europe, and that is

why we deal with them almost every time we are here. It is essential that our member states rethink youth policies, to render them more comprehensive and allow young people to access their fundamental rights. [Read more, voting results 1, 2.](#)

Thursday 25 April 2013

Current affairs debate: Syrian refugees in Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and Iraq: how to organise and support international assistance?



Ms FIALA (*Switzerland*) Colleagues, do you realise that Jordan has to cope with 2,000 more refugees every day? They struggle for water and for security. When listening to discussions in my country about refugees, I am sometimes ashamed. I have looked at people from Syria in the eye. When I visited a detention centre in Greece, they told me that they would rather go back and die in Syria than stay for another year. That is what they want. They do not want to come to Europe and we should not fear that. They want to go home.

They want to rebuild their cities and their houses. Those are the facts, but we are merely afraid that they may come to Europe. I say to members of the Assembly: please, go home to your country and to your parliament and take responsibility for these humanitarian tragedies. It is a responsibility that we all share, especially at the Council of Europe. [Read more](#)

Joint debate : Frontex : human rights responsibilities, AS/Mig (Doc. 13161), for opinion AS/Jur (Doc. 13187); Management of mixed migration and asylum challenges beyond the European Union's eastern border, AS/Mig (Doc. 13163)



Mr CHIKOVANI (*Georgia*) – I have talked about readmission under the EU agreements, but I also want to seek your support on creating an effective tool that will help us to deal with this problem while it is still at the grass roots and make sure that we are able to respond to it in an effective manner. A number of organisations are trying to deal with these issues, but we need to develop a more results-oriented approach and provide more support, and we must share the burden between EU and non-EU countries. [Read more, voting results 1, 2.](#)

Free debate



Ms ACKETOFT (*Sweden*) – In some of our member countries today, despite legislation medical professionals refuse to provide lawful services on the basis of their beliefs and the right to conscientious objection is not regulated, presenting an obstacle to citizens who try to access lawful services. Let me state, as a liberal representing ALDE, that I think the Church should never stand above the right to freedom of choice. [Read more](#)

Friday 26 April 2013

Draft Protocol No. 15 amending the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms



Ms FIALA (*Switzerland*)* – I express my heartfelt thanks to the rapporteur for his work. On behalf of ALDE, I will speak in support of the amendments to the European Convention on Human Rights. The amendments are listed in the draft opinion – in paragraph 2.1, regarding the principle of subsidiarity and the doctrine of the margin of appreciation; in paragraph 2.2, regarding the new age limits; in paragraph 2.3, deleting the words, “unless one of the parties to the case objects” from Article 30; in paragraph 2.4, shortening the time limit under Article 35(1) from six to four months; and in paragraph 2.5, deleting the present admissibility requirement under Article 35(3)(b). [Read more, voting results](#)

Joint debate: Nanotechnology: balancing benefits and risks to public health and the environment, AS/Soc (Doc.13117); Ethics in science and technology, AS/Cult (Doc. 13141)



Ms FIALA (*Switzerland*)* – There is a question about whether this is the right forum for analysing and seeking to regulate the issues under discussion. At the moment, there is general controversy about science and specific scepticism about new technologies. On the one hand, we are all happy to use science in our daily lives – we like smaller and smaller mobile phones that do more and more and we like more effective medicines and treatments. On the other hand, however, there is an increasingly critical attitude to research itself. [...] An entire continent might say no to research on cutting-edge technologies such as nanotechnology because of its ill thought through fears and because certain risks are involved. That would not be right. Before we regulate, we should ask what the opportunities are.

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