



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

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IN THIS ISSUE:

Anne Brasseur re-elected President of PACE

ALDE members in committees

Rapporteurs

Questions

Speakers

ALDE members

January 2015 session in Strasbourg

- ALDE is pleased to announce the re-election of **Mrs Anne Brasseur** as **President of the Parliamentary Assembly** of the Council of Europe. "We congratulate Anne Brasseur. This is a very high responsibility for the liberal group and we are proud that our candidate has received unanimous support in the Assembly to continue her mandate," said Jordi Xuclà, President of ALDE.
- ALDE candidates have been successfully elected to **bureaus of five Parliamentary Assembly's committees**, including the newly created Committee on the Election of Judges to the European Court of Human Rights.
- ALDE continues to pay **special attention to the situation in Ukraine** and is thankful to Ukrainian colleagues for providing first-hand information. In a restricted format, ALDE members exchanged views with Ukrainian and Russian human rights defenders and took note of their detailed reports on the situation in Crimea and in areas affected by the armed conflict in the East of Ukraine. "ALDE will stand shoulder to shoulder with the Ukrainian people," stressed Jordi Xuclà, President of the group in his speech in the plenary.
- ALDE also held **working meetings** on media freedom in Azerbaijan, political developments in Belarus and geopolitical situation in the Middle East, including in Iran and Syria.

As always, we wish to thank ALDE members who took active part in plenary debates, defended our position in committees, presented reports and attended group meetings. This time the group had to say good-bye to three long-standing and active members, Mrs Tina Acketoft (Sweden), Mrs Ana Gutu (Moldova) and Mr Mike Hancock (UK). ALDE thanks them again for their contribution to the work of the group and the Assembly. We also welcome all new members who joined the group since October and wish them excellent work.

We are especially thankful to the valuable contribution of Christian Scharling, President of IFLRY and ALDE trainee Mariëlle van Heumen (Netherlands).

ALDE endeavours to be the engine of the Assembly defending core European values
Visit our website: www.alde-pace.org

**Anne Brasseur
re-elected
President of
PACE**

Liberals remain at the head of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

On 26 January 2015 the Parliamentary Assembly unanimously confirmed the mandate of Mrs Anne Brasseur as President of the Assembly.



"Today you have again expressed your confidence in me, for which I thank you. I am grateful for your unfailing support in our common task, which is becoming less and less easy", said Mrs Anne Brasseur upon re-election. Mrs Brasseur devoted her opening speech to outline the main challenges to the European system of peace, democracy and human rights. [Click here to consult the full text.](#)

**Other key
positions in the
Assembly**

ALDE members in key positions in the Assembly



Mrs Ksenija Korenjak Kramar (Slovenia) will sit on the Bureau of the Parliamentary Assembly as a Vice-President of PACE



Mrs Adele Gambaro (Italy): new Chair of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media



Mrs Tinatin Khidasheli (Georgia): 1st Vice-Chair of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy



Mr Rait Maruste (Estonia): 1st Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Election of Judges to the ECtHR



Mrs Mailis Reps (Estonia): re-elected for a second term as the 2nd Vice-Chair of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights



Mr Igor Kolman (Croatia) re-elected for a second term as the 3rd Vice-Chair of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development



Mrs Kerstin Lundgren (Sweden)

The implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Council of Europe and the European Union, Rapporteur of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy ([Doc. 13655](#)), Tuesday 27 January 2015



Mr Terry Leyden (Ireland)

The honouring of obligations and commitments by Montenegro, Co-Rapporteur of the Monitoring Committee ([Doc. 13665](#)), Tuesday 27 January 2015



Mr Igor Kolman (Croatia)

Equality and the crisis, Rapporteur for opinion, Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development ([Doc. 13683](#)), Wednesday 28 January 2015



Mr Jordi Xuclà (Spain)

Post-electoral shifting in members' political affiliation and its repercussions on the composition of national delegations, Rapporteur, Committee on Rules of Procedure and Immunities ([Doc. 13666](#)), Thursday 29 January 2015

Question to Mr Didier Reynders, Minister for Foreign and European Affairs of Belgium, Chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe



Mr DAEMS (*Belgium*) – The Ukrainian and Russian crisis is very important to this Assembly and to Europe as a whole. The Alliance of Liberals and

Democrats for Europe welcomes your action plan for Ukraine in 2015-17. However, there is a risk that it will have no result if we do not find a solution to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. My question is very concrete: apart from sanctions, what building blocks do we need to re-establish confidence between the parties and create a basis for peace and prosperity between those two countries and between the Russian Federation and Europe as a whole?



Mr REYNDERS* – We can try to establish some sort of confidence-building process and create principles that must be respected. The Committee of Ministers has often called for Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence to be fully respected. It condemned

the annexation by the Russian Federation and called on it to withdraw all its troops from Ukraine and to refrain from any future military incursions into it.

(in English.)

There must be clear principles before dialogue is opened. If possible, we should set up a confidence-building process. That can be achieved in different ways. Like the Secretary General and others, I went to Kiev and Moscow to organise discussions not only about the situation in the region but about human rights. However, there are many other things to discuss with the Russian Federation, including the situation in Syria and the issue of nuclear power in Iran. Later this year, there will be an important conference on climate change in Paris. We must also have a real discussion about energy.

If it is possible to make some progress on those things through dialogue, it is possible to make progress on respecting the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine. However, the first step is to re-establish the cease-fire. I was more optimistic a few weeks ago before the recent violence. However, through our contacts and meetings, we were able to establish a cease-fire for several weeks. We need to re-establish it, acting on the same principles. We must discuss many different issues with the Russian Federation.

Exchange of views with Mr Michael D. HIGGINS, President of Ireland



Mr LEYDEN (*Ireland*) – On behalf of our president, Mr Jordi Xuclà, and members of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, all the Irish delegation and, indeed, everyone in

the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, I extend to you, President of Ireland – Uachtarán na hÉireann – Michael Higgins and first lady Sabina Higgins, céad míle fáilte.

Having served as a distinguished member of the Council of Europe from 2001 to 2003, you are familiar with the Assembly's work and that of the European Court of Human Rights. Your speech certainly outlined the situation extremely well – well done on that wonderful, inspirational speech. As one of the founding members in 1949, Ireland can be very proud to have been a small country that worked with the



Mr HIGGINS – I did not cover that in my lectures, President.

I am very grateful for those good wishes. To begin at the end, I do not think that any of us could overestimate the importance of making significant progress on the issues in Palestine and Israel. This is a significant day,

because the Secretary General is representing us in Auschwitz. We must move forward into a new space and have discussions that are supported by a secretariat, rather like we had in Ireland and Northern Ireland, so that it is possible to have continuity between one set of suggestions and another.

I would also suggest that 2015 is an incredibly important year. The meeting in Addis Ababa on the funding of the millennium sustainable development goals is very important and, as I have said, September is important. When I mentioned issues in the South and the North, I meant the large exclusions as a result of unemployment, poverty and so on. When I mentioned what had gone from the North to the South, I meant that developments on continents such as Africa and South America must include the people, rather than letting the benefits flow to an elite. Those are real issues. However, after Doha, and given the

other nine to form the Council of Europe. You were a distinguished lecturer in sociology and political science at the National University of Ireland in Galway, where I had the benefit of hearing your inspiring lectures when I was an extramural student in the early 1970s, so thank you for your contribution to my political career. You were one of the most inspirational lecturers of sociology and politics in Galway.

Your record on human rights is well documented. One issue on which you and I worked together in the Irish Parliament was the future of Palestine and the establishment of an independent Palestine living in harmony with Israel. That subject is very close to your heart and your political work. Go raibh míle maith agat, Mr President.

Question to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe Mr Thorbjørn JAGLAND



Mr XUCLÀ (Spain)* – On behalf of ALDE, I thank you for your annual report, Secretary General. You raised an important

issue. In the Council of Europe, we vehemently defend fundamental freedoms, including the right to freedom of expression. However, as has been said clearly, that freedom, like others, has limits. But who imposes those limits? The obvious answer is that only positive law can impose such a limit; religion and tradition cannot do it. However, member states' legislation varies tremendously. In some countries, blasphemy is a crime. You said that we should have a general debate on the limits. Perhaps we could create some kind of legal instrument. Can we have a general debate on that issue?



Mr JAGLAND – This is a difficult issue and it is hard to draw the line. The only body that can do it is the Court, which is why I referred to Article 10 of the Convention. The Court has case law on a variety of subjects, including blasphemy. It is important that all national courts look at the Court's case law. Most, if not all, European nations have legislation that makes incitement

to violence, racism, anti-Semitism and the denial of the Holocaust unlawful. However, although there is legislation, it is difficult for courts to make judgments in concrete cases, so it is important that extremist expression is countered also in the public sphere. That is why we have the No Hate Speech campaign. It is important that everybody speaks out against extremist expression. However, we must remind ourselves that we have the rule of law at a European level through Article 10 and the Strasbourg Court's case law. Not everything is okay. I was a little worried when I saw, after what happened in Paris, people commanding others to express everything and to insult everyone. Of course you have the right to do it, but is it okay for everyone to do that? We need to have some responsibility, too.

One of the survivors of the Charlie Hebdo attack, a cartoonist, referred to the famous cartoons in the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten. Charlie Hebdo published some of the cartoons in solidarity with that newspaper. There was a debate throughout the world about those cartoons. He added, however, that one of the cartoons was dubious – the one of Mohammed with a bomb in his turban – because it could indicate that all Muslims and all those who believe in Mohammed are terrorists. We have to think about what we are doing, too. We have freedom of expression but we also need to have some responsibility. Someone who was attacked in Charlie Hebdo's premises had that approach, so should we have the same approach?

We need to think about what happened before the Second World War and how a whole group of people were dehumanised by many means. It is a fine line. Those acts were committed to suppress freedom of expression, but that can be misused; we can go too far. That is the other danger of which we must be aware.

Monday 26 January 2015

Progress report of the Bureau and the Standing Committee; Observation of the parliamentary elections in Tunisia (26 October 2014) (Doc. 13654); Observation of the presidential election in Tunisia (23 November and 21 December 2014) (Doc. 13654); Observation of the parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova (30 November 2014) (Doc. 13672)



Mr HEER (Switzerland) – Tunisia is today the only state where the Arab Spring has succeeded. We have to admit that it was a failure in Egypt. In Libya we have turmoil and civil war because the European countries that bombarded Gaddafi out of the country did so without a strategy for what will follow [...] All in all, when we speak to the Tunisian people, we find that they have a good sense of democracy and a living spirit. That is a good sign for the future and also an example for other countries in the Arab world to see how a democratic society can be built.

[Read more, voting results](#)

Tuesday 27 January 2015

The humanitarian situation of Ukrainian refugees and displaced persons (Doc. 13651, Doc. 13651 Addendum)



Ms TAKTAKISHVILI (*Georgia*)* – More than 1 million people have been displaced as a result of this conflict, which is certainly not frozen; it is a real conflict between two member states of this Organisation. I would like to share some information with you about our group's activities. We have exchanged views with several representatives of Ukrainian non-governmental organisations. We have been informed about the problems that they are confronting every day in trying to gain access to territory controlled by the separatist forces controlled by the Russian Federation. [Read more, voting results](#)

The implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Council of Europe and the European Union (Doc. 13655)



Mr KOLMAN (*Croatia*) – By analysing co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union, we are addressing a fundamental question: how are we going to make sure that the values and standards to which we are committed fully come to life? [...] The Council of Europe is the home of human rights in Europe and the world, and it is only rational that the European Union draws on tradition and expertise in this and other fields. It is encouraging that co-operation is getting better and more structured, strategic and political. [...] The European Court of Justice ruling on the matter of the European Union joining the European Convention on Human Rights is certainly a disappointment, but it should not discourage further efforts towards that goal. [Read more, voting results](#)

The honouring of obligations and commitments by Montenegro (Doc. 13665)



Mr XUCLÀ (*Spain*) – I thank Mr Sasi and Mr Leyden for the excellent job they have done in providing Montenegro with the opportunity to move from a monitoring to a post-monitoring period. Montenegro has been monitored for eight years, and in the past three years. [...] Let me address something that is not directly within the competence and capacity of the Council of Europe, but which is relevant. There is a European perspective to Montenegro and I am convinced that its efforts to integrate into the European Union and NATO will improve the quality of the process of moving from the monitoring to the post-monitoring stage. [Read more, voting results](#)



Mr XUCLÀ (*Spain*)* – The recent publication of a book on Guantánamo hit the headlines as it gives the first-hand account of the life of a prisoner who has been there for 12 years without being tried, Mohamedou Ould Slahi. He is one of 122 such prisoners, and they are being held in pre-trial detention. [...] This is the home of human rights and the rule of law, so it behoves us to remind ourselves that this is happening. It might be happening a long way from here, in Cuba, but nevertheless it concerns us all. We are seeking to fight jihadist terrorism and at the same time to guarantee the rule of law, but I also think that it is appropriate in this debate to recall the striking testimony of the Guantánamo detainee. [Read more](#)

Wednesday 28 January 2015

Debate under urgent procedure: Terrorist attacks in Paris: together for a democratic response (Doc. 13684)



Ms MATEU PI (*Andorra*)* – This is a thorny debate. The attacks in Paris were an attack against our values, our culture and our society. They were an attack on our Organisation – on democracy, human rights and the rule of law. You do not kill someone because you do not agree with them, here or anywhere else. That is unacceptable and totally unjustifiable. [...] The journalist who shared with us her comments last Monday stated that the only limit to freedom of expression is hatred, and I agree with that vision. The Paris attacks not only struck at freedom of expression, but were motivated by hatred of others, hatred of difference and hatred of the rule of law. [Read more, voting results](#)

Joint debate: Equality and the crisis (Doc. 13661); Protection of the right to bargain collectively, including the right to strike (Doc. 13663)

Mr DAEMS (*Belgium*) – ALDE adheres to investing in social rights, which is an investment in the future. We agree about that. We also agree that social partners should be considered as



partners in economic performance. Hence they should contribute to growth and job creation. [...] We also firmly believe in the right of freedom of assembly, including the right to strike as a means of balancing out bargaining. [But]The right to strike does not give people the right to make sure that others do not work: the right to strike is also the right to work. Collective action [also] means responsibility and accountability. [...] What we have on paper saying that we must end austerity policies is a little too large-scale. We liberals believe that you cannot have an austerity policy on social rights. However, austerity does not necessarily mean that only certain elements should be tackled. [Read more, voting results 1, 2](#)

Challenge, on substantive grounds, of the still unratified credentials of the delegation of the Russian Federation (Doc. 13685)

Mr XUCLÀ (*Spain*)* We now find ourselves facing the most dangerous conflict on European soil



since the Second World War. ALDE stands shoulder to shoulder with the Ukrainian people, who are the first victims of this war, and we believe that the Assembly and the Council of Europe are duty-bound to play a role in helping to alleviate a humanitarian crisis that is afflicting many thousands of Ukrainians. [...] There are different currents of opinion in ALDE, about the way to approach this issue of credentials of the Russian delegation. This morning, ALDE decided that the suspension should be extended, but some felt that the best way of being helpful, under the constraints within which we work, is [...] to await June and see what progress has been made by then. [...] Russia needs to face up to its responsibilities, and we must make it possible for it to remedy the

harm that it has caused. We should do as was done on 5 May 1949. [Read more, voting results](#)

Thursday 29 January 2015

Protection of media freedom in Europe (Doc. 13664)



Mr GARDARSSON (*Iceland*) –Without free media, the public do not have the means to form an educated opinion, which is the basis of effective democracy. Media freedom is more limited now than it has often been previously. The financial stability of public broadcasting is being dissolved in some member states, threatening its independence and decreasing the likelihood of an open, unbiased debate. Furthermore, the weak financial situation of many media outlets makes them vulnerable to outside influences, which can influence their editorial policy and news coverage. Transparency in media ownership is also often lacking. That decreases the likelihood of pluralism in the media, which is a necessary condition for a pluralistic society and political system, as rightly stated in the report. Journalists in Europe are being threatened, attacked, jailed, tortured and killed – a horrendous situation. Member states of the Council of Europe must do everything they can to prevent such atrocities and secure freedom of speech and freedom of the press in their own countries and internationally. [Read more, voting results](#)

Tackling intolerance and discrimination in Europe with a special focus on Christians (Doc. 13660)



Ms FIALA (*Switzerland*)* – Hostile and violent acts and vandalism targeting Christians and their places of worship worldwide affect 100 million Christians and the trend is on the increase. In some 50 countries, Christians are prevented from freely exercising their faith: they have no right to religious freedom. We cannot pass over in silence this massive violation. [...] Freedom of thought, conscience and religion are anchored in Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which must continue to serve as the foundation of any democratic and pluralist society. All people who abide by the rule of law must ensure that their right to freedom of religion is upheld, that they can live in security and peace, bring up their children in the Christian faith and freely participate in public life, free from violence and incitement to violence. [Read more, voting results](#)

Post-electoral shifting in members' political affiliation and its repercussions on the composition of national delegations (Doc. 13666)



Ms TAKTAKISHVILI (*Georgia*)* –This debate is not entirely technical in nature, as one might think on a cursory reading , but a substantive debate that concerns the representatives and composition of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Does the Assembly reflect the position of European citizens in a proportional, balanced and legitimate way? [...] The rapporteur provides no guidelines for national parliaments and does not say that one should prohibit MPs from crossing the floor. Such things can happen, including in democratic countries, and the rapporteur does not say that one should limit the right to switch party, but rather that there should be transparent rules and clear procedures for us to examine the situation and see whether the composition of the national parliament reflects the position of citizens. [Read more, voting results](#)

Witness protection as an indispensable tool in the fight against organised crime and terrorism in Europe (Doc. 13647)



Ms FIALA (*Switzerland*)* – Organised crime works across borders and has increased in Europe because of globalisation. No man is an island, all the more so today, and it is only through co-operation between countries that organised crime, human trafficking and crime tourism can be foiled. Without the co-operation of collaborators of justice and without insider knowledge, it is impossible to demolish criminal structures. That is why elaborate witness protection measures are particularly important. A change of identity is no small step for the person concerned. According to the rapporteur, there are still enormous differences in the experience and best practice of member states. The Assembly therefore is rightly calling on member states to set up mechanisms for witness protection or to revisit

their existing mechanisms, and to work closely with other law enforcement authorities. [Read more, voting results](#)

Equality and inclusion for people with disabilities (Doc. 13650)



Ms OEHRI (*Liechtenstein*)* – I thank the rapporteur for this excellent report. She sensitively explained the disabilities that affect people and said how much disability can be a problem in society. Disabled people are subject to so many barriers, and even violence, and they therefore have to combat not just their disability but all sorts of other difficulties as well. The way that our member states cope with such issues varies from country to country, and there is no ideal panacea. Nevertheless, the issue must remain on the agenda, despite the pressure for budgetary cuts. [Read more, voting results](#)

[Back](#)