



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

N°4, 2015

*PACE Session
28 September –
2 October 2015*

IN THIS ISSUE:

Exchanges of views

Rapporteurs

Questions

Speakers

ALDE
members

September – October 2015 session in Strasbourg

- **Freedom of journalists:** ALDE welcomed the creation of the Council of Europe [Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists](#). The platform was presented at the group meeting by Mr Matjaz Gruden, Director of the Directorate of Policy Planning of the Council of Europe. As of 29 September the platform launched on 2 April 2015 has become a full-fledged pan-European database on threats to media freedom.
- ALDE held a hearing on the situation of **media freedom in Azerbaijan**. Representatives of the Human Rights House Foundation and International Media Support reported on the worrying situation.
- ALDE discussed the political **situation in Turkey** following the address by Mr Selahattin Demirtas, co-chair of the HD Party.
- ALDE-PACE members attending the next [ALDE Party Congress](#) will **meet in Budapest on 20 November**, 3-4 p.m., on the margins the European liberals' annual meeting.

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. We welcome all new members who joined the group since June and wish them excellent work. We are also thankful to IFLRY and particularly to James Bowles (UK, IFLRY Executive Assistant) for having worked with us during the session. A very warm and special thanks goes to Mr Peter Kallenberger for his unfailing support and commitment.

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Presentation of the Council of Europe Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists



Mr Gruden, Mr Xuclà

On 28 September, ALDE received Mr Matjaz Gruden (Director) and Mr Adrian Evtuhovici (Head of Division) of the Directorate of Policy Planning of the Council of Europe who presented the recently launched **Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists**, its aims, functioning and first results.

This platform is a public space that facilitates the compilation, processing and dissemination of information on serious concerns about media freedom and safety of journalists in Council of Europe member states, as guaranteed by Art. 10

of the European Convention on Human Rights. The platform was set up in close co-operation with five major journalists' and freedom of expression organisations – signatories of the Memorandum of Understanding with the Council of Europe (Reporters Without Borders, International Federation of journalists, European Federation of journalists, Association of European journalists and Article 19). They are responsible for providing verified information on serious concerns with regard to the media freedom and safety of journalists.

Currently, the total number of alerts registered on the Platform amounts to 82; these cases concern 21 Council of Europe member states. The highest numbers of cases regard Turkey (29, including 20 "level 1 alerts"), Azerbaijan (10, including 9 "level 1") and the Russian Federation (8, including 6 "level 1").

ALDE members welcomed the creation of the platform and hoped it would become a useful tool for targeted and systematic actions to improve the situation of media freedom in Europe.

Media freedom in Council of Europe member states: situation in Azerbaijan

On 28 September, ALDE held a hearing on the situation of journalists and media freedom in Azerbaijan, featuring Ms Gulnara Akhundova, International Media Support, and Mr Florian Irminger, Human Rights House Foundation. The speakers shared their concerns over the grim record of persecution of critical journalists in the country.

Several prominent media activists, including Khadija Ismailova from RFE/RL and Tofiq Yagublu from Musavat newspaper were sentenced to disproportionately long prison terms on allegedly fabricated charges. The speakers sketched the repertoire of harassment of critical journalists and unequal treatment of media in the country.

ALDE President Jordi Xuclà reiterated ALDE's commitment to the freedom of media and recalled numerous statements that he made on behalf of the group in support of human rights in Azerbaijan.



Ms Akhundova, Mr Xuclà



Mr Rafael HUSEYNOV, Azerbaijan

Freedom of religion and living together in a democratic society, Rapporteur AS/Cult (Doc. 13851), Wednesday 30 September 2015

“My report insists, on the one hand, on the fundamental duty of religions to promote the shared values and principles that underpin our living together and, on the other hand, on the responsibility of States to ensure an even balance between religious and non-religious beliefs so that society remains inclusive and diversity-friendly”.

[Back](#)

ALDE questions

*translation

Question to Mr Igor CRNADAK, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe



Ms ZELIENKOVÁ (Czech Republic) – I would like to ask a question about Ukraine. As you all know, Ukraine is in a very difficult

situation, as it faces a war. Political stability is very important at this moment and there are local elections coming up. What steps will the Committee of Ministers take to support that country?

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



Mr GARDARSSON (Iceland) – Today President Barack Obama and Russian President

Vladimir Putin are meeting in New York, where they will discuss rising tensions over Moscow’s military engagement in Syria as well as the crisis in Ukraine. Putin supports President Assad and has opened the possibility of supporting further military action in Syria, but at the



Mr CRNADAK – Thank you for the question. That matter has the permanent attention of the Committee of Ministers and is often at the heart of the discussions at our ministerial sessions. Two things must be underlined: there must be firmness on the principles and there must be the peaceful settlement of disputes. The

Minsk agreements must be implemented fully and swiftly. That is the position of the Organisation and the Committee of Ministers, and we will continue to follow that.

In respect of our approach to the Ukraine conflict, it is important to underline the importance of respect for the territorial integrity of Ukraine. The protection of human rights is one of the key issues for us. In answering the question, it is important to say that the Committee of Ministers remains focused on this issue.

When it comes to assisting the Ukrainian authorities, it is important that our contribution is respected, including our support for the elections, the constitutional reforms and the reform of the judiciary, as well as our legal work on decentralisation, the protection of national minorities and other matters.



Mr JAGLAND – Yes, but not on the issue of Syria because there we do not have a mandate. Of course we are having discussions with the Russian Federation. We are not only discussing but have issued a lot of decisions from the Committee of Ministers regarding the illegal annexation of Crimea and the involvement in eastern Ukraine. At

the same time, as you know, we are giving strong support to the Ukrainian efforts to build a solid, non-corrupt state. I think it is positive that President Putin and President Obama are meeting. They have an obligation to meet, actually. Here I refer to international law. We should start to read the UN Charter again, because it says that the Security Council has the responsibility for peace and security for all the UN family, so the 15 members have that responsibility on behalf of all of us, but they have failed to take it.

That is why we have this crisis in Syria. I think it is absolutely unbelievable and unacceptable that the Security Council, and

same time wants western countries to reduce sanctions against his country. My question is this: are there any negotiations or discussions going on between the Council of Europe and Russia concerning the position of Russia within the Council?

Question to His Royal Highness the Grand Duke of Luxembourg



Mr XUCLÀ
(Spain) – Sir, I wish to welcome you on behalf of the Liberal group of the

Parliamentary Assembly. Luxembourg's affairs are now directed by a Liberal prime minister, so I welcome you to this home of the defence of human rights and democracy. As you said, the deep, tranquil force of Europe is creating this pan-European institution that goes beyond the 28 members of the European Union to reach 47 member States.

Your country is an example of plurilingualism. You have your own language, but the President, Mrs Brasseur, spoke in her opening address in her own language and you are fluent in French and German. Luxembourg is an example of how a country can be governed with different languages. The university of Luxembourg, for many years directed by a good friend of mine, Professor Tarrach, also constitutes an example of how that is possible. Will you tell us how we could extend plurilingualism in our other European States?

particularly the five permanent members with veto powers, have looked at their own strategic interests rather than taking responsibility, as stated in the United Nations charter, for all of us. That has to come to an end, which is why I think it is good that the Russian Federation and the United States have started to discuss how they can find a compromise on Syria. This was done on nuclear weapons in Iran. All the P5 members were there. They signed the agreement, and I hope that they can do that for Syria and find a solution to the crisis in Ukraine, so that Ukrainian independence and territorial integrity can be safeguarded. Otherwise, it will be about the power of the strong, which we did away with after the war, putting power in the hands of the UN. I hope that those countries will look to their responsibility under the UN charter.



THE GRAND DUKE OF LUXEMBOURG* – This is a fascinating question, especially when we are building up the European Union and exchanges between us are becoming increasingly important. I shall begin by telling you a little story that is rather symptomatic. A few years ago, perhaps even 25 years ago, President

Mitterrand came on a state visit to Luxembourg. At the gala dinner I was seated next to a minister in the Mitterrand government – I shall not mention the person's name. We spoke about education and language. I explained to him the rather particular situation of Luxembourg and how we called upon children at a very young age to listen to different languages, which allowed them to learn languages far more easily. The French minister responded, "You know, French people are totally unable to learn a language other than French; it's impossible for them". I said, "That is not possible. Why should Luxembourgers be more intelligent than the French?" He did not much appreciate that reply.

The story shows that, in the mentalities of some of our countries, people perhaps do not have access to the possibility of imagining that they can be capable of learning a new language. In Luxembourg we are obliged, perforce because of our size, to learn at least the languages of our neighbours, German and French, alongside Luxembourgish, which is our national language. To this we add a fourth language, English, the international language. I shall give you a family example. My spouse here speaks six languages fluently, I speak only four, our children speak five to six languages, and this is perfectly normal. In Luxembourg we constantly move from one language to another during the day: we read and speak in German, then in French and then English. These are the mental gymnastics that we have learnt.

Luxembourg has always supported the initiatives of the Council of Europe in the field of languages. I also believe that linguistic diversity in Europe is very important; you, as a Spaniard and as a Catalan, know what that represents. It is part of culture. I believe that our brains are sufficiently supple and intelligent to allow us to learn at least one or two extra languages, and we will increasingly do so in future. We are going to see ministries of national education in Europe looking increasingly into this matter. We can also see that parents are interested in their children learning foreign languages. This is important for communication in Europe.

*translation

**Question to Mr Denis ZVIŽDIĆ,
Chairman of the Council of Ministers
of Bosnia and Herzegovina**



Ms PALLARÉS
CORTÉS
(Andorra) –
Aside from
maintaining
technical
divisions,
Dayton is
keeping alive an
economically

unsustainable administrative system. Moreover, it sometimes seems that politicians in your country worry more about political protest than about how to reactivate your economy and make it more effective. Do you have any specific plans to reduce your public expenses and to favour the private sector, to try to give more opportunities to new generations?



Mr ZVIŽDIĆ* – Thank you for your question. As I mentioned, a few months ago we adopted a very important document, the economic reform agenda, which defines a number of measures and activities aimed at improving the business environment, taking advantage of our natural resources, developing

SMEs and reforming the entire public sector, with a special focus on job creation for young people so that they remain in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We look to rationalise public spending. In the public sector we have imposed a ban on employment and a wages freeze, and all other funds and budgets in the sector are funnelled towards providing favourable loans and enabling young people to start their own businesses, particularly SMEs, thus creating a better business environment and increasing employment in the country.

All that, of course, requires an improved business environment and amendments to labour legislation. We have already started that process. A new labour act has been adopted in one of the entities, namely the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and will soon be adopted in the other, the Republika Srpska. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, we have already improved the parameters that measure the quality of business, and some indicators show that the entrepreneurship and economic potential of the country is increasing, especially among young people, who are opening up businesses and therefore leaving the country in reduced numbers..

**Question to Mr Aleksandar
VUČIĆ, Prime Minister of Serbia**



Mr XUCLÀ
(Spain)* –
Prime
Minister, I
would like
to
welcome
you here
on behalf

of the liberal group in the Assembly. I am very impressed by everything you have done in dealing with issues concerning migration and Kosovo. I have a question about the judicial system – the courts system. A couple of weeks ago, I took part in a seminar organised by the Venice Commission on reforming laws and dealing with past. The legal system in your country was on the agenda for that meeting – the lustration laws. I understand that there was some self-criticism regarding the reform of the judicial system in your country and other reforms. Will you tell us a little more about these reforms and what your government is doing about the lustration laws?



Mr VUČIĆ – The lustration law was brought into force in 2001 and lasted for 10 years. That was a limited time in which to face the consequences of violating or breaching human rights in the past. Very recently, we had a proposal on this from a regional political party from Vojvodina that we still have not discussed in our parliament. This is not the biggest issue that I have been concerned with. We have already

discussed not only the proposals of our political colleagues but the proposals that we might get from the Venice Commission and from the European Union. I am very dissatisfied with the efficiency of our courts, which means that you can still find some unresolved files from 1996 to 1997. What kind of justice do we speak about if you have cases unresolved for 20 years? It is no longer about seeking justice; it is about something else. I do not say that justice has to come in a quick way, but after 20 years it is no longer any kind of justice. That is what we need to reshape and change. We need to change our habits. I am still very dissatisfied with our approach, but I am satisfied that we have finished the cleaning process. We will probably open the first chapters by the end of this year, but we will also open chapters 23 and 24 at the beginning of next year.

I hope that we will be able to do this together with our European colleagues, and to learn much more, perform much better, and deliver much better. I am always a bit constrained about this, because someone might say, “This is your involvement or interference in an independent judicial area or justice area.” That is why I cannot comment very openly on things that are very visible for ordinary citizens of Serbia. [Back](#)

Monday 28 September 2015

Progress report of the Bureau and the Standing Committee



Mr XUCLÀ* (*Spain*) – Exporting democracy as if it were fast food – fast democracy – is not a straightforward endeavour and often has counterproductive effects. We must consider how to develop the response, not only to Islamic State but to those who are driving the refugees in the Balkans and elsewhere and to those who are likely to join the ranks of the migratory movement heading towards prosperous, rich Europe.

[Read more](#)

Tuesday 29 September 2015

Public health and the interests of the pharmaceutical industry: how to guarantee the primacy of public health interests? (Doc. 13869)



Mr DESTEXHE (*Belgium*)* – We share the report's objectives to ensure more transparency, greater information flow and the avoidance of conflicts of interest, thereby allowing research to happen. All of that is in the report, but it is already largely regulated in national law. The resolution is not very practical and will not be easy to apply. [...] I am not sure that the draft report would get through our national parliaments, so I advise members to peruse the text. Some 80% of new medicines are produced in the United States, with 19% coming from Europe. If we enact the report's recommendations in national legislation, I am afraid that the proportion would not even be 19%. For all those reasons, the ALDE group will not vote in favour of the report, even though we recognise that the principles are well meant. [Read more, voting results](#)

Current affairs debate: A comprehensive humanitarian and political response to the migration and refugee crisis in Europe



Mr JENSEN (*Denmark*) – I do not say we should have a system to count how many refugees we should take in; that is a discussion for the European Union and other organisations. But I am sorry to say that it is shameful when we have heads of state, prime ministers and other politicians saying, “Now we should all act” but then taking in either very few asylum seekers or none at all, whether it is because they are not Christian or for whatever other excuse is made. If Europe cannot act and say that we now have to help each other, some countries will take on the majority of asylum seekers, which puts enormous pressure on them, especially the small countries to which asylum seekers are heading, such as the Scandinavian countries. [Read more](#)



Ms ZELIENKOVÁ (*Czech Republic*) – I will draw the Assembly's attention to another challenge that is linked to the ongoing refugee crisis, which we need to take seriously. I am referring to a worrying tendency that has recently manifested itself in my homeland. Negative rhetoric from politicians and the mainstream media about migration is gaining popularity in many European Union countries. Refugees are perceived as a threat. That prevailing opinion poses a serious risk to our democracies. [...] It is the responsibility of politicians to raise public awareness and stop xenophobic tendencies among the population. [...] Last but not least, as the UN General Assembly is meeting right now in New York, I propose that our Assembly makes its voice heard through the appropriate mechanisms and asks that the human rights of migrants, which the Council of Europe is meant to guarantee, be

secured. [Read more, voting results 1, 2](#)

Wednesday 30 September 2015

The activities of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2014-2015 (Doc. 13865)



Mr PASQUIER (*Monaco*) – As market-oriented liberals, we share the beliefs that private initiative and opportunities for all are the key ingredients to economic growth and poverty reduction. [...] Our concerns are essentially pleas to the OECD to allocate more resources in two areas. The first is related to the understanding of the concentration of income and wealth that we have been witnessing for two decades now. If people are deprived of opportunity, if people lose hope of becoming wealthy by their hard work and intelligence, if we are moving from a system of prosperity for all to a “winner takes all” system, then we need to worry. [...] The second concern relates to the labour markets. I mention this in the light of the sudden large migration flows that we have been witnessing recently in Europe. I do not say “migration crisis”

because we believe that these flows can and should be seen as an opportunity, both for the migrants and for the countries that they migrate to. [Read more, voting results](#)

Implementation of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (Doc. 13864, Doc. 13864 Add.)



Ms TAKTAKISHVILI (*Georgia*)* – The report is informative from a statistical point of view, but it sometimes talks only about the statistics, and yet these are grave violations of human rights that have been highlighted by the ECHR. The judgments are about the lives and futures of European citizens, so as parliamentarians we must facilitate the process of execution of judgments. It is clearly up to those in government to ensure that the recommendations and individual or general measures ordered by the Committee of Ministers are implemented, but it is also up to parliamentarians to act in the absence of political will. [Read more, voting results](#)



Mr HEER (*Switzerland*)* – Obviously, freedom of religion has to be respected, but there are limits. We must have the rule of law in a constitutional democracy. I am thinking also about girls and women whose development or education may be held back because of their sex. That cannot be tolerated. We must ensure that the leaders of the different religious groups are involved in a discussion with the authorities. They have to see the relevance of the rules that we live by, whether they are Muslims, Jews or Christians.

[Read more, voting results](#)

Thursday 1 October 2015

Abuse of pretrial detention in States Parties to the European Convention on Human Rights (Doc. 13863)



Ms SOTNYK (*Ukraine*) – One in five people who have been held in places of detention have suffered torture or have been illegally detained. The report focuses on an important international and internal problem that is often discussed but, unfortunately, still exists: the violation of human rights during pretrial detention. We need to work harder on our legislation so that we can guarantee the efficient protection of everyone's rights and humanitarian conditions during detention. Without that work, we might be responsible for ruining someone's life. [Read more, voting results](#)

Progress of the Assembly's monitoring procedure (October 2014-August 2015) (Doc. 13868 Part 1, Doc. 13868 Part 2, Doc. 13868 Part 3, Doc. 13868 Part 4, Doc. 13868 Part 5)



Mr XUCLÀ (*Spain*)* – This report was unable to reflect the work that has been done by our rapporteurs in Russia. The Russian Federation continues to have links at other levels of the Organisation, such as the Committee of Ministers, but not at the level of the Parliamentary Assembly. [...] This year, we have reports on countries that have not been under monitoring previously – Andorra, Belgium, Croatia and Cyprus. That was a good job of work, but it needs fine tuning. [...] Perhaps in future, other members of the committee could take on countries in this category and work on one country for more months of the year. There would then be a broader distribution of the work. [...] On 23 April this year, we completed the procedure in respect of Monaco. [...] We did not make a declamatory statement, but found creative ways to move forward. [Read more, voting](#)

[results](#)



Ms SOTNYK (*Ukraine*) – I want to raise the issue of intervention in a state's domestic affairs and in particular military intervention in another state's political processes. The UN friendly relations declaration states: "No State or group of States has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatever, in the internal or external affairs of any other State. Consequently, armed intervention and all other forms of interference or attempted threats against the personality of the State or against its political, economic and cultural elements, are in violation of international law." [Read more](#)

Friday 2 October 2015

Equality and shared parental responsibility: the role of fathers ([Doc. 13870](#))



Ms GAMBARO (*Italy*)* – In qualitative and quantitative terms, we must look at both parental figures, the parents of both genders. In various states, legal systems have moved in that direction – greater emphasis on the interests of the child. Considerable progress has been made with the alternate approach to residence, which is shared residence and shared custody. This is an interesting principle: the equal and shared responsibility of both parents. The point of the draft resolution is to encourage member States – to push them – to have a unified approach to those modern mechanisms, which allow the child to develop its own personality in the best possible conditions, and to have shared responsibility in law. [Read more, voting results](#)

Rethinking the anti-doping strategy ([Doc. 13852](#))



Mr JORDANA MADERO (*Andorra*) – I congratulate Mr Schneider on his excellent report, but some points deserve greater emphasis. He rightly talked about healthy sport at both elite athlete and amateur level. I engage in amateur sports and I am aware of very odd things happening around me. People attach great importance to record breakers and sports heroes, such as Marco Pantani, an idol for many Italians, Richard Virenque of France and, above all, Lance Armstrong. He created an iconic image of himself worth millions of dollars, claiming that he could overcome all sorts of setbacks through sheer will power, but that was not the case. My group will certainly support the report. [Read more, voting results](#)

[Back](#)