

Highlights of the April part-session in Strasbourg

PACE Session
24-28 April 2017

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- ALDE-PACE welcomes the ratification of the terms of reference of the investigation body which will look into the **allegations of corruption** made against some members and former members of the Parliamentary Assembly. The composition of the independent external investigation body is expected to be ratified at the June part-session.
- ALDE-PACE issued a [statement](#) **condemning the recent visit to Syria** by three high-ranking members of the Assembly, including its President: "ALDE-PACE reiterates its strong commitment to the respect of human rights and its condemnation of the hideous crimes perpetrated by the Assad regime, as well as the actions of those who support this regime for geopolitical reasons and make Syrian people pay the price with their lives". ALDE conveyed to the President of PACE its decision to demand his resignation. The ALDE group will continue its reflection and resolves to contribute to restoring full trust in our organisation.
- Assessing the **situation in Turkey**, liberals voiced serious concerns and called on Turkey to remain "democratic, fair and part of [the Council of Europe's] family because that is where the human rights are strongest" (Martin Poliačik MP, Slovak Republic). With two votes against in the plenary, ALDE-PACE members supported the resolution proposing to reopen the monitoring procedure in respect of Turkey. The ALDE group underlined that the monitoring procedure should not be perceived as punishment but rather as a tool designed to help countries uphold the Council of Europe's standards.
- At its meeting on Monday 24 April, ALDE held a hearing on the **persecution of LGBT persons in Chechnya**. The hearing featured Elena Milashina, investigative journalist of the Russian "Novaya Gazeta" who uncovered the facts of abduction, detention, torture and extrajudicial killings of men in Chechnya based on their alleged sexual orientation, and Igor Kochetkov, chair of the Russian LGBT network.

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 new members who joined the group since the last part-session and wish them excellent work. We thank Philomena Taylor (IFLRY) for her helpful assistance during the session. Finally, a very warm and special thanks goes to Peter Kallenberger for his unfailing support and commitment.

**ALDE endeavours to be the engine of the Assembly defending the core
European values**

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HEARING

Hearing: Persecution of LGBT persons in Chechnya



Elena Milashina, Igor Kochetkov, Jordi Xuclà, ALDE-PACE meeting, 24 April 2017

On Monday 24 April 2017, ALDE-PACE held an urgent hearing on the on-going attacks against LGBT persons in Chechnya. The hearing featured Elena Milashina, investigative journalist of the Russian “Novaya Gazeta” who researched and published a series of well-documented articles on the situation, and Igor Kochetkov, chair of the Russian LGBT network.

ALDE-PACE took serious note of the report on large-scale detentions, abductions, torture and extrajudicial killings of men in Chechnya based on their alleged sexual orientation. The Russian authorities have so far failed to carry out proper investigation into the alleged crimes.

ALDE-PACE joins the calls from the international community to shed light on the situation in the Russian region of Chechnya, to investigate and bring to justice those responsible and to ensure the safety of all those who face persecution based on their sexual orientation or alleged sexual orientation, as well as those who report on the crimes and help the victims. The liberals decided to raise the issue in the plenary debate and supported a number of amendments to the resolution on “Human rights in the North Caucasus: what follow-up to Resolution 1738 (2010)?”

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ALDE REPORTS



Mr Jordi XUCLÀ (Spain)

Progress report of the Bureau and the Standing Committee, Rapporteur AS/Bur (Doc. 14289, Doc. 14289 Add. 1, Doc. 14289 Add. 2, Doc. 14289 Add. 3, Doc. 14292), 24-25 April 2017

Mr Jordi XUCLÀ (Spain)

25 years of the CPT: achievements and areas for improvement, Rapporteur AS/Jur (Doc. 14280), Wednesday 26 April 2017

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ALDE QUESTIONS

*translation

Question to Mr Ioannis KASOULIDES, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Cyprus, Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers



Ms LUNDGREN (Sweden) – On behalf of the ALDE group, I thank the Minister for his communication from the Committee of Ministers on a lot of important topics that we are dealing with. As you mentioned, today

we face a lot of challenges and we hope to sort several of them out. One is the issue of corruption, which was mentioned in a previous question – corruption concerning not only this Assembly but member States. I would like to hear a little more about where the Committee of Ministers is ready to take action on this issue in respect of the Parliamentary Assembly or member States.

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



Mr van de VEN (Netherlands) – Yesterday, we voted in the plenary on a request for an urgent procedure debate on introducing an

impeachment procedure for members holding elected office in the Parliamentary Assembly. The vote was not carried; we were one vote short of the required two-thirds majority. As Secretary General, you have the power of political initiative in the Committee of Ministers. My question is whether you would consider raising with that committee the issue of introducing impeachment procedures for members who hold elected office. What do you consider to be the pros and cons of formulating such procedures?

Question to Mr Prokopios PAVLOPOULOS, President of the Hellenic Republic



Mr COMTE (France)* – Cyprus is highly topical because negotiations

are under way between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots about the unification of the island, and Greece plays an important role in the Cypriot question. What is Greece's view on the negotiation process? What contribution would Greece like to make to resolve the situation?



Mr KASOULIDES – Mr KASOULIDES – Taking action in respect of the Parliamentary Assembly would not comply with the need for each organ

in this Organisation to have its own independence and for one not to interfere in the affairs of the other. My strong belief is that honourable members of the Parliamentary Assembly are well able to take decisions that will be questioned by nobody in resolving this matter.

On the issue of member States, there are previous instruments covering a number of issues such as money laundering and other issues pertaining to corruption, so the Council of Europe is in a position to have a look and to take up the matter if the need arises.



Mr JAGLAND – As I have already said, the Parliamentary Assembly has to decide on its own procedures, but I have also made it clear that if the Assembly's procedures or activities are harming its basic functions, that affects

the whole Organisation, and I intervene, as I did by sending a letter to the President of the Assembly. As I said in the letter, the Parliamentary Assembly elects judges to the European Court of Human Rights, the Commissioner for Human Rights and the Secretary General, and that must be done with full integrity. We have to be sure that the Assembly works with 100% integrity. I therefore urge the Assembly always to take action on anything that is not in conformity with that basic principle, but the decision has to be in the hands of the Assembly.



Mr PAVLOPOULOS* – I reassure you that Greece and Cyprus are ready to contribute to a resolution of the Cyprus issue. It has been an open wound since 1974, and a foreign army is occupying part of Cyprus. It is not a national issue of Greece or Cyprus; it is a European

and international issue. Where does the disagreement lie? The Cyprus issue must be resolved on the basis of European law. Cyprus is a member of the European Union and is in the eurozone, too, so the solution has to come from within European legislation, because only then will the *acquis* apply to the entire island. For that to happen, we have to respect primary European laws about the sovereignty of a member State of the European Union. Paragraph 2 of Article 4 of the Treaty on European Union states what sovereignty entails, and it is clear that an occupying army is totally incompatible. [...]

I say that with all due respect for Turkey. You all know

what our position is with regard to Turkey and Cyprus. Turkey too has much to gain from a resolution of the Cyprus issue, because the Turkish Cypriot community and the Greek Cypriot community within a federal state – we are speaking about a federation, not a confederation – would be European citizens and enjoy all the rights of European citizens. Only in that way will Cyprus be able to move forward effectively into the future. The non-solution, the troops on the island and the system of guarantees from the past, is not compatible with resolution of the issue. [Read more](#)

ALDE QUESTIONS

Question to Mr Nils MUIŽNIEKS on the Annual activity report 2016 by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights (CommDH(2017)3)



Ms BRASSEUR
(Luxembourg,
Spokesperson for the
Alliance of Liberals and
Democrats for Europe)

– I thank you and congratulate you on your excellent work. You

are our voice. We as politicians are far too often very diplomatic about addressing issues but, as you rightly said, the situation is deteriorating. Fortunately, the Council of Europe has your voice, because you have always been vocal. You have been vocal about defending the human rights of the most vulnerable, the Roma people, and you are also the voice outside the Council of Europe. I will not ask you a question, but will say that I really regret that you can no longer stand for a second mandate. We made the right choice, although you are criticised for being too vocal, or being someone's puppet. You can be proud of that. I thank you for the co-operation we enjoyed when I was President of this Assembly. Thank you very much, Commissioner – thank you very much, dear Nils.



Mr MUIŽNIEKS – I think it is a very good thing that my mandate is not renewable, because I can be independent until its very end. I do not have to think about re-election; I might have to think about what I

am going to do after my six years as Commissioner. It is a wise step. The framers of the mandate did a very good thing in having only one six-year mandate: that is long enough so that you can think in the long term, but you also need fresh blood and a fresh view. It is very good that the mandate is not renewable, because I can be a principled voice for human rights until the very last day. That is a very wise thing.

Afterwards, it will be time for someone else, and it is incumbent on the Assembly to think very hard about the next person whom you want in this office, to talk with potential candidates over the next year and to get good people to run. I very much look forward to having many strong human rights candidates competing for this job. I think it needs it. It is an important job and it is important to have good people in it in the future. For the time being, however, I am here for another year, so you will have to contend with me.

*translation



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Monday 24 April 2017

Free debate



Ms LUNDGREN (Sweden) – I assure the Assembly that the ALDE group condemns and strongly deplores the visit of three high-ranking members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to Syria. We had some debate about that this morning. The situation in Syria is well known to most of us, because it is now in its seventh year, and we have all seen the ongoing war crimes and crimes against humanity. [...] Now we see how Russia, one of our member States, is putting out fake news about what has happened to try to make us doubt what we have seen and what so many others have verified [...] We must make it clear that we in the Assembly will not be used as fools in a way that makes

it possible for crimes against humanity and war crimes to continue. I urge colleagues to be firm in demanding human rights for all people, even those in Syria. [Read more](#)

Tuesday 25 April 2017

The functioning of democratic institutions in Turkey (Doc. 14282, Doc. 14282 Add.)

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Mr POLIAČIK (*Slovak Republic*) – On behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, I thank the rapporteurs for this thorough and detailed report and I thank the Turkish authorities for their co-operation. [...] As far as past events are concerned, we saw the attempted coup d'état and we are in solidarity with the Turkish people and Turkish Government on that. However, in many cases there has been great overreaction. We are worried about the situation of media representatives and thousands of State employees. [...] As far as future events are concerned, we have to say one thing very clearly. The introduction of the death penalty in Turkey would be the crossing of

a red line. [...] We see Turkey as a very important partner of the Council of Europe. Turkey is important in stabilising the region. We call on Turkey to stay democratic, fair and part of this family, because that is where human rights are strongest. [Read more, voting results](#)

Progress report of the Bureau and the Standing Committee (Doc. 14289, Doc. 14289 Add. 1, Doc. 14289 Add. 2, Doc. 14289 Add. 3, Doc. 14292)



Ms BRASSEUR (*Luxembourg*)* – I would like to raise two issues: the visit to Syria by three of our members and allegations of corruption. [...] Three members of the Assembly, including its President, who visited Syria, have put this Assembly in a difficult situation. [...] Yesterday, ALDE decided to [publish a statement](#) [condemning this visit by the President of PACE and two high-ranking ALDE members]. On the allegations of corruption, there have been attempts in this Organisation to counter the initial proposal by the Bureau [of PACE] to establish an independent external investigation body. I was shocked when I realised that there was a desire to confer that responsibility on an

internal body in the Assembly, i.e. on ourselves. [...] If we really want to combat corruption, we have to put our own house in order. We should start to do that as soon as possible. [Read more](#)

Human rights in the North Caucasus: what follow-up to Resolution 1738 (2010)? (Doc. 14083)



Ms LUNDGREN (*Sweden*) – I thank Mr Schwabe for presenting the report, even if it is a year old. The amendments from the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights improve the report, and I ask the Assembly to endorse them. The situation in the North Caucasus is important for the ALDE group. Many of us remember Dick Marty talking about the humanitarian black hole in the North Caucasus. It is amazing that Russia – a member State that is obliged to co-operate with us and signed up to our rules when it became a member – is not co-operating, meaning that we are unable to go to the region and do our work. [...] Human rights are being systematically violated in Chechnya. A climate of impunity seems to be more or less the rule

and we have found even worse things over the past year. LGBT people are hunted. They face large-scale abductions, secret detention, torture, and extra-judicial killings, and that is unacceptable. [Read more, voting results](#)

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Mr van de VEN (*Netherlands*) – As a liberal, I am of the opinion that the State's interference with individuals and in the private sector should be kept to a minimum. Having said that, I support – again, as a liberal – all measures that States introduce to combat tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance. However, the State is not a means of applying a theft tax, or a kleptomania tax, to level out the income of citizens, with the purpose of re-distributing income from citizens with higher income levels to those with lower ones. Each and every individual has the right and duty to exploit his talents and earn as much income as he can, to pursue his own happiness. Creating a so-called level income field is a disaster for the development of the individual and a disaster for the welfare of the State. The Alliance of

Liberals and Democrats for Europe disapproves of the report and calls on the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe's members to use their common sense and follow suit. [Read more, voting results](#)

Wednesday 26 April 2017

Protecting refugee women from gender-based violence (Doc. 14284)



Ms RODRÍGUEZ HERNÁNDEZ (*Spain*)* – The last report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said that 40% of refugees who have come across the Mediterranean to European shores are women and children. We endorse the rapporteur's proposal to include girls in our consideration, because the problems of female genital mutilation, violence and so on have nothing to do with age. Some 20 000 women requesting asylum have come from countries where FGM is practiced. [...] We also think it essential for all the member states of the Council of Europe and the European Union to ratify the Assembly convention and underscore the need to combat violence against women. As has been said, the recipient countries have

a lot to do, and things such as well-lit bathrooms and separate sleeping areas are required. There is still a lot to be done, but with only a little we can do a great deal to protect these women, who have not chosen to be refugees but have been driven out by necessity and fear. [Read more, voting results](#)

Current affairs debate: European values under threat: addressing rising xenophobia, antisemitism and Islamophobia in Europe



Ms RODRÍGUEZ HERNÁNDEZ (*Spain*)* – We would like to speak about the role played by politicians, and their responsibilities regarding their vision and the hatred that we see in society. There are various populist movements on both sides of the Atlantic, and, looking at them, they do not seem very different. We even have one here in France; look at the electoral campaigns of Le Pen and Trump and you will find that there are a lot of similarities and much common ground. It is important for us to bear in mind that these movements are looking for a schism. They want to make sure that people do not feel that they belong – to Europe, their country, or society – and that people want to break with that. These

movements have something else in common: there is always an enemy, a guilty party, and they try to polarise society against that enemy. They end up destroying society. [Read more](#)

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Mr DAEMS (*Belgium*) - The committee mainly uses its preventive function, which is implemented through agency visits, monitoring, dialogues with national governments, and recommendations. It should be noted that these visits stopped being a goal as such and became the basis of a system for developing standards that aim at eliminating torture and improving conditions for detainees. The Assembly and the Committee of Ministers have to promote States' implementation of these standards by giving full political support to those who adopt the recommendations, and by strongly reacting against those who do not. [Read more, voting results](#)

Abusive use of the Interpol system: the need for more stringent legal safeguards (Doc. 14277)



Mr KROSS (*Estonia*) - I cannot emphasise enough how important the topic of systematic abuse of Interpol Red Notices by several authoritarian and corrupt regimes has become. We have heard the numbers, and it is long overdue for this Assembly to get seriously involved in this matter. I am very pleased that we are doing so now. [...] From reading the report, we see that a lot of it is about legal details and legal aspects. Yes, it is in large part a problem of legalities, a problem of judicial and police co-operation. But it also has political and security dimensions. [Read more, voting results](#)

Thursday 27 April 2017



Urgent debate: Alarming developments in Hungary: draft NGO law restricting civil society and possible closure of the European Central University (Doc. 14298)

Ms LUNDGREN (*Sweden*) - We have several times in this Assembly spoken about Hungary and these developments, and have said that we will follow them closely. Once again, we are debating those developments and asking the authorities to follow the recommendations of the Venice Commission. It is sad to have to ask this, but have you seen any reaction from the Hungarian authorities, and seen them taking on board the recommendations of the Assembly or the Venice Commission? So far, there has

been very little of that. We have seen them stepping back from the values that this Organisation was founded to promote and safeguard. [Read more, voting results](#)

The protection of the rights of parents and children belonging to religious minorities (Doc. 14260)



Ms GAMBARO (*Italy*)* - The terrible news recently regarding the persecution of religious minorities by majorities forces us to move in that direction. Given that evidence and other facts, the Assembly must ensure that the fundamental principles set out in the European Convention on Human Rights, which call on States to defend a pluralist form of education and training, will be respected. The Assembly has dealt with the rights and duties of religious minorities in the past. That is closely linked to the great diversity of our continent. We must preserve that; it is an inheritance for the world as a whole. [Read more, voting results](#)

Possible ways to improve the funding of emergency refugee situations (Doc. 14283)



Ms PALLARES (*Andorra*)* - The refugee crisis has escaped our control and we are now seeing the institutionalisation of a crisis that, for many reasons, is not likely to end any time soon. It is no longer something that can be viewed as a one-off state of emergency. Rather it is becoming permanent. The crisis is here to stay and these humanitarian needs cost money – a great deal of money. That is why we will have to be more efficient. [...] ALDE believes that it is not sufficient simply to support this resolution here today. We will have to continue to evaluate the proposals that have been made and to debate them, especially on the basis of certain criteria that have been established for the designating of aid. We of course have border security,

which is necessary, but it may need to be dealt with differently for accounting purposes. There are many inefficiencies because of all the red tape and complicated bureaucratic and administrative procedures, which need to be carefully reviewed. We need to harmonise and simplify criteria to avoid duplication. [Read more, voting results](#)

Friday 28 April 2017

Technological convergence, artificial intelligence and human rights (Doc. 14288)



Mr COMTE (*Switzerland*)* - . We want to regulate all the details, but sometimes the best laws are the ones that we do not pass. Technology is moving so fast that any law will quickly become obsolete, so we need the wisdom to legislate well and in a minimalist way, and on the principles, through framework legislation, rather than in too much detail. Human beings must always be at the heart of concerns when we talk about technology. [...] For every machine, there has to be a human being who takes responsibility for its actions. Also, every human being should be able to say how much technology they want in their life, particularly their private life. Technology can be a major risk for the private life of every individual, and everybody has the right to defend

themselves against that danger, so everybody needs new rights, such as the right to be left alone, or to be anonymous, as was mentioned in the report. [Read more, voting results](#)

Draft Council of Europe Convention on Offences relating to Cultural Property (Doc. 14300, Doc. 14290)



Mr van de VEN (*Netherlands*) - After 32 years, the new draft convention is due, as is made clear to the world by the appalling and shocking examples of the destruction of Palmyra, the earlier destruction of archaeological sites in Iraq, and other instances. Unscrupulous thieves, traffickers, traders, criminal receivers, abettors and the like, be they individuals or legal entities, should be called to justice based on our values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. ALDE thus endorses the draft convention, but we also strongly support the proposed changes to it set out in Mr Schennach's report. The recommendations in the report that we will be voting on today are essential to

strengthen the impact of the draft convention. [Read more, voting results](#)