October 2019 part-session highlights:

- At its meeting on 30 September ALDE-PACE unanimously supported Rik Daems to run for the next Presidency of PACE. The election will be held on 27 January 2020.

- ALDE-PACE thanked the outgoing bureau member Mart van de Ven (VVD, Netherlands) who served as the group’s Treasurer since January 2018. On the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe celebrated during the October part session, the group was glad to exchange views with the former liberal President of the Parliamentary Assembly Anne Brasseur (2014-2016) and Secretary General of the Council of Europe Daniel Tarschys (1994-1999).

- During the January 2020 session, ALDE-PACE will renew the composition of its bureau, including the group’s president, vice-presidents and treasurer. The next group meetings in Strasbourg will be held from 27 to 31 January 2020.

- Ahead of the current affairs debate requested by ALDE-PACE on the “Democratic rights violations and suppression of peaceful protests in the Russian Federation against the background of elections to the Moscow City Council”, the group exchanged views on the current political situation in Russia with the leader of the Russian Yabloko Party Emilia Slabunova. During her visit to Strasbourg on 30 September – 1 October 2019, Ms Slabunova also took part in a hearing on “Civil society and democratic participation in Russia” organised by the PACE Monitoring Committee and met with the PACE President Ms Liliane Maury Pasquier.

- At his request, ALDE-PACE met with film director Oleg Sentsov who returned to Ukraine after the recent exchange of prisoners between Russia and Ukraine, and discussed the situation of those still remaining behind bars.

- Speaking with relatives of victims of the MH17 flight downed over the territory of Ukraine in 2014, ALDE-PACE renewed calls for justice.

- On 3 October 2019 the Parliamentary Assembly celebrated the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe. French President Emmanuel Macron took part in the ceremony and addressed PACE. Rik Daems delivered a speech on behalf of ALDE-PACE.

We wish to thank all members who took part in the group’s work in Strasbourg, defending the liberal position in the plenary debates and committees, presenting reports and participating in group meetings. We welcome new members who joined ALDE-PACE since the last part-session and wish them good work. We thank IFLRY for excellent cooperation. 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 Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe defending the core European values

Visit our website: www.alde-pace.org
Ms Nicole TRISSE (France)
➢ Progress report of the Bureau and the Standing Committee (Doc. 14968, Doc. 14968 Add. 1, Doc. 14968 Add. 2, Doc. 14970)
➢ The Council of Europe Development Bank: contributing to building a more inclusive society (Doc. 14961)

Rapporteur AS/Bur & AS/Soc, 30 September & 2 October 2019

Sylvain WASERMAN (France)
➢ Improving the protection of whistleblowers all over Europe (Doc. 14958)

Rapporteur AS/Jur, 1 October 2019

Marie-Christine VERDIER-JOUCLAS (France)
➢ A legal status for "climate refugees"(Doc. 14955)

Rapporteur AS/Mig, 3 October 2019

Martin POLIACIK (Slovak Republic)
➢ Democratic rights violations and suppression of peaceful protests in the Russian Federation against the background of elections to the Moscow City Council

Opening speech, 3 October 2019
This morning I had a nice speech. But, Madam President, Madam Secretary General, I began to think about what the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is in fact.

I began to think about what the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is in fact. There are three keywords in there. There is a word “assembly”: it means to be together, all together, doing something together.

There is also the word “parliament”. There, it's easy in French, the word "parler" means "to speak", "dialogue". On the other hand, when I put it in English, it becomes quite another thing: when we had parties that were in conflict, in English, we said "let's parley", which means "solve a conflict". So parliament is not just about talking, it's not just about dialogue, it's about solving the problems, all together. But there is more.

I also started to think about Europe. What is Europe? And so I was started to think about is there something like European identity? What a difficult and dangerous word, "identity". I think there is. I think there is something like European identity, only, it is defined by unity in diversity. [...] And when I come back to what Churchill said, “united states of Europe”, I got to thinking that states have borders, but values do not have borders.

When we're talking about Europe, we're not talking about countries, we are talking about values, that is what we are talking about. The Council of Europe is not some kind of the united states of Europe. [...] My feeling is that this house, this temple of democracy, is the Council of the Europeans; because again, states have borders, values do not. And so when someone would ask me outside or inside, who are you? What are you? I would tend to answer, well, "I'm a European". And my wish for the future will be when any one of you would get the same question, I would really hope that you would answer, "me too, I'm a European, I also am a European". Read more
Mr Hendrik DAEMS (Belgium) Mister President, Thank you for your important and motivating comments. But I have a very specific question: will your new approach to dialogue with Moscow change France’s position on the illegal annexation of Crimea? More concretely, will you sooner or later accept the annexation of Crimea by Russia?

Mr Emmanuel MACRON – In fact, several of your questions were quite similar – the next two questions pertained to Russia. The first question, Sir, was related to limitations. I don’t for a moment underestimate the indignation which many feel when a member state of this Council invades another member. The question we have to ask ourselves is what we can achieve with our decisions. We should never forget that. So the decisions we take must be legally watertight. So, would a decision taken by the Parliamentary Assembly alone have been fully watertight, legally speaking? I think probably not. Secondly, we have to evaluate the consequences. Would any such decision have an impact on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine or potential consequences elsewhere? I think it’s clear that it wouldn’t. One of the consequences might have been Russia simply leaving the Council of Europe. And that, in my view, would have been very much against the intentions of those taking such a decision. If the Russian Federation were to have left the Council of Europe, that would have meant that Russian nationals would no longer be able to access the European Court to defend their rights, including against their government. So, let me say that I understand your indignation, but I think that the decision initially made wouldn’t have actually been effective in translating that indignation into reality.

Ms MONTCHALIN - I believe that the accession of the European Union to the Convention on Human Rights is essential to our credibility. The Council of Europe has a larger perimeter than the European Union, but it seems a little strange that the European Union has not already adhered to this Convention. It is indeed at the heart of the Lisbon Treaty, it is also on France’s side, a commitment, a wish, I would say an ambition, that the President of the Republic Emmanuel Macron had posed when he went to the European Court of Human Rights in October 2017, two years ago. And I think it is very important to pay tribute to the reports that the European Commission published last June to chart a course towards this accession. I believe it is essential, before that happens, because we know that it is legally quite complex, that the Strasbourg judges and the Luxembourg judges can have a fruitful dialogue. It is also important that the Strasbourg judges can have a dialogue with all the supreme courts in all the countries of the European Union. This is what we were encouraged by the dialogue held on 12 and 13 September in Paris with all the supreme courts. President Sicilianos saw the value of enforcing this famous protocol sixteen so that in the end there would be fewer decisions going back to Strasbourg. Not because the European Court would have lapsed, but because European law – this convention – would already be applied much more daily by all jurisdictions.
Monday 30 September 2019

Progress report of the Bureau and the Standing Committee AS/Bur (Doc. 14968, Doc. 14968 Add. 1, Doc. 14968 Add. 2, Doc. 14970)

Mr Jacques MAIRE (France) I want to come back to an important part of the report, which is the consequences of Russia's return to our organization. This return, as you have said, was marked by fears. The fear of a retreat of the Council of Europe in its role of defending our values, the rule of law and Human Rights. However, when I look at your report, what has happened in the past three months shows some encouraging signs that our organization is willing and committed to this challenge. I speak of course about the mission by our colleague Frank Schwabe to the North Caucasus. I also highlight the exchange of prisoners between Russia and Ukraine, including the Ukrainian sailors and Oleg Sentsov. Lastly, I see the vote we had a few moments ago as an important sign, as we have put on the agenda on the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe group's initiative a current affairs debate on the violation of democratic rights and the repression of peaceful demonstrations in Moscow. These first steps should definitely be followed by other ones. I am thinking, in particular, about the visit of the Commissioner for Human Rights to Crimea and the high level peace talks. Read more, voting results

Tuesday 1 October 2019

Improving the protection of whistleblowers all over Europe, AS/Jur (Doc. 14958)

Mr Robert TROY (Ireland) Whistle-blowers play an essential role in any open and transparent democracy. Whistle-blowing is acknowledged as one of the most effective ways to stop wrongdoing [...]. In Ireland we are one of just 10 EU countries which currently have enacted comprehensive protected disclosure legislation. It is acknowledged as setting a benchmark with regard to anti-corruption agenda. While the EU Directive on whistle-blowing will soon be adopted and we will have two years to transpose that, Ireland has made a good start, but yet still there are many key differences. I think we have a responsibility, all of us here, to work within our own legislature to make sure that brave citizens are protected and supported. Recently back home a member of our police force endured unbearable treatment. Both him and his family suffered character assassination for speaking out. This is not acceptable and it must be stamped out. Read more, voting results

Wednesday 2 October 2019

Ombudsman institutions in Europe – the need for a set of common standards AS/Jur (Doc. 14953)

Mr Edmon MARUKYAN (Armenia) In his speech in the European Forum on the topic of the role of ombudspersons and national human rights institutions, the ombudsman and the president of the International Ombudsman Institution, Peter Tyndall, referred to a number of threats against ombudspersons over the world. [...] The National Council of Slovakia recently refused to discuss the report of the ombudsman for Slovakia, Dr Jana Dubovcová, on the placement of Roma children without intellectual disabilities into schools for children with special needs. Dr Adam Bodnar, Polish Ombudsman, was outspoken and the government sought to drastically reduce his budget. More recently, he spoke out about his speech following the killing of the Mayor of Gdansk. [...] In the meantime, it is very important to address the issue of ombudspersons accessibility to grey zones, because it does not matter whether a part of the world has been recognised or not, it matters that everywhere human rights violations take place that the ombudsperson should have an unrestricted mandate to monitor and provide the necessary assistance in every single part of the globe. Read more, voting results
Exchange of views with Ms Marija PEJČINOVIĆ BURIĆ, Secretary General of the Council of Europe

Mr Hendrik DAEMS (Belgium) Madame Secretary General, You just told us that you wanted to hear from the Assembly what we wanted. I'm inclined to say: "Do you have a minute?" Well, that's exactly what we've got, one minute. It's not enough, but still, a few elements: One, I totally agree with the fact that we should focus. We should focus on what? We should focus on empowering people, empowering governments, empowering countries to comply fully with the values that we stand for and this is not the case today. So that, indeed, should be the focus. Secondly, we should not forget that the Council of Europe is not only the Assembly, is not only the Committee of Ministers — with all due respect to the ambassadors — it's not only you, it's so much more. I mean there's more than two hundred conventions that indeed have an influence on daily life of more than so many hundreds of millions of people within the context of the Council of Europe and even outside of that. So we, I think, we should also focus a little bit on that and reach out, instead of staying within. Reach out and have all these people, these countries, know what the value in the daily life of the Council of Europe represents. Read more

The Council of Europe Development Bank: contributing to building a more inclusive society AS/Soc (Doc. 14961)

Ms Yolaine de COURSON (France) The Council of Europe Development Bank supports social investments in 41 of the Member States [...] I pay particular attention to the rural environment, because —as we know— it is in these rural areas that there is the most sense of injustice, relegation, institutional abandonment, drying up of public services , closing schools or health centers. The examples in our different countries are not lacking and we all remember them when I speak to you. [...] We support this report because this bank is an extension of the work of the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly. [...] The facts do not deceive. Countries using the bank increased from 20 in 2014 to 32 in 2018, encouraging states that are not yet contributors to become so. They really have everything to gain. Read more, voting results

Protecting and supporting the victims of terrorism AS/Pol (Doc. 14957)

Mr Jokin BILDARRATZ (Spain) On February 22nd of 2001, when in San Sebastián, in the Basque Country, the ETA organisation placed a bomb, two people died and two people were injured. One of the people that was killed was somebody that I knew, from our city. After a couple of months, his widow called me because she felt totally abandoned by the system. She wanted to convey to us that, in the first week, all of the politicians, society and local community had come to her support. But once the cameras were gone and time had passed, the politicians and all that support disappeared. That is the moment I understood and comprehended the importance of empathy for victims. When we have the capacity to express that empathy, we’re in a position to solve some of the problems that are generated by this issue. Read more, voting results
Mr Jacques MAIRE (France) The ALDE Group supports the recommendations of this excellent report, but we think we should probably go one step further. Northern Macedonia is taking steps in many areas, but it is not doing it quickly enough or strongly enough, despite the commitment of its leaders. The local context does not facilitate, indeed, the adoption of legislation. Certainly, and this is a positive point, the opposition does not boycott the institutions, unlike other countries in the region, but reform of the judiciary requires two thirds of the votes of the parliament, which drags down the negotiations. Emphasis must also be put on behavioral changes and the effective implementation of the reforms, and to do so, we must help the country even more, because the Council of Europe has a duty to actively support this transition phase. We believe that it is time to think about a more direct involvement in the process of reforms through monitoring, of course, but also by involving other reference institutions, such as the Venice Commission or GRECO. This is important in order that accession negotiations to the European Union, this central objective of Northern Macedonia which we fully share, are started as soon as possible. Read more, voting results

Thursday 3 October 2019

Debate under urgent procedure: Saving persons in the Mediterranean Sea: the need for an urgent answer AS/Mig (Doc. 14971)

Ms Petra STIENEN (Netherlands) Allow me to quote our Commissioner for Human Rights to the Council of Europe, Dunja Mijatović: "Whilst states have the right to control their borders and ensure security, they also have the duty to effectively protect the rights enshrined in maritime, Human Rights and refugee laws". [...] I recommend this report to all of our colleagues. It has an excellent analysis and excellent recommendations. It is worth reading and implementing. Our Group supports this call of the Commissioner of Human Rights, and the need expressed in the report of Mr Damogoj Kajdukovic, for an urgent response in saving lives in the Mediterranean Sea. [...] Let me be clear. In this urgent debate we are discussing saving lives. The discussion about refugees and migrants is related, but not the topic of today. The ALDE group does have a few objections to some of the wording and recommendations in the report. We consider these as topics for further discussion in this Parliamentary Assembly. For example, on the implementation of the recommendation of the Commissioner of Human Rights. Read more, voting results

Current affairs debate: Democratic rights violations and suppression of peaceful protests in the Russian Federation against the background of elections to the Moscow City Council

Mr Bertrand BOUYX (France) We reaffirm our commitment to freedom of expression, freedom of demonstration, freedom of opinion, freedom to stand for election. [...] And it is precisely to allow these values to come fully to the floor that it seemed necessary to reintegrate Russia into this Council. [...] We believe in this European Russia, we believe in "European sovereignty", that is to say, to a stronger Europe, a Europe that has the right to reinvent itself in this dialogue. [...] The renewal of dialogue, within the Council, cannot be done without precise monitoring of the commitments and obligations of the Russian Federation. The latest report by the Committee on the Honoring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe on this subject dates back to 2012. It already pointed out the shortcomings and the restrictive implementation of laws essential for the functioning of democratic and regional institutions for the political environment, which has led to a deterioration of conditions necessary for genuine political pluralism. It seems important now to continue this type of evaluation in our Assembly. Read more
Obstetrical and gynaecological violence AS/Ega (Doc. 14965)

Ms Béatrice FRESKO-ROLFO (Monaco) How not to be scandalised that forced sterilisations can take place in our modern societies in the 21st century? What about clinics that practice female genital mutilation? What can one think when these constraints affect the minorities of a country, making them supposedly morally acceptable when they are condemned by most of the legislations of our countries and by the Istanbul Convention? […] But let's not fall into systematic criticism. There are many practitioners who practice their profession with passion, respect and compassion. It is not wrong to say that certain actions are not malicious, they do not come from a desire to mistreat, they are the result of inadequate training, and a lack of time making the medical profession expeditious. This report was necessary not – and you pointed this out – to attack a profession but to show that the medical care of 50% of the population deserves to have the financial means and infrastructure and for practitioner training to include a human dimension and education on respect. Read more, voting results

A legal status for "climate refugees“ AS/Mig (Doc. 14955)

Ms Melisa RODRÍGUEZ HERNÁNDEZ (Spain) We need to look for solutions, and we need to pay closer attention to adaptation. I think it is also important for us to create a common legal framework to respond to displacements, as this situation will only worsen if we don't do anything about it. On behalf of the liberal group, I would like to just add that we don't believe it's adequate to talk about a typology of refugees we might be dealing with. Aside from that, we believe we need to do more. We need to have a global change to respond to these displacements. If we fail to do that, an increasing number of people will be affected. And if we don't commit to our planet, we might not have a future. Read more, voting results

Functioning of democratic institutions in the Republic of Moldova AS/Mon (Doc. 14963)

Mr Alfred HEER (Switzerland) The evil thing that we see, not only in Moldova, but also in other countries of the Council of Europe, is corruption. Corruption grows in countries where poverty exists. And corruption leads to the fact that there won't be any private investments. That there won't be any economic growth. And I think the key should be, if we want to develop a small country like Moldova, also, to ensure that we have a real rule of law and a real independent justice. […] The Council of Europe, I think, here we have a real possibility to show what we can do in good faith and what we can help together with the Venice Commission to have improvements in this republic and I'm glad that we have two good rapporteurs that are really working well and we should support them by our Parliamentary Assembly, by giving an okay to this very good report. Read more, voting results
Friday 4 October 2019

Jewish cultural heritage preservation AS/Cult (Doc. 14960)

Mr Sylvain WASERMAN (France) I was mayor of the village of Quatzenheim for 10 years. The village of Quatzenheim is a beautiful village, 20 minutes from here. The President of the Republic went there some time ago because the cemetery of Quatzenheim was desecrated. And I guarantee you that when you've been a mayor of a village for 10 years, and you go back to a Jewish cemetery that has been there for generations, and you see these 94 blue swastikas on the graves, you realise the violence that these heritage crimes imply, which go well beyond the value of heritage. It is a profound attack on the values we believe in and bring us together here. So your report, sir, counts. The topics and issues you raise are of utmost importance, and wholeheartedly, on behalf of the ALDE Group, I would like to thank you for your very important work. Read more, voting results

Labour migration from Eastern Europe and its impact on socio-demographic processes in these countries AS/Mig (Doc. 14956)

Ms Maria JUFEREVA-SKURATOVSKI (Estonia) First of all I would like to thank the rapporteur for raising awareness about the alarming issues that plague labour migration from Eastern Europe to Northern and Western Europe. Recently, it has become an acute problem and its peculiarity is that it has a strong impact on sociodemographic process in the countries of Eastern and Western Europe. These impacts can be both positive and negative for the countries concerned. [...] Taking into consideration the current report, in my opinion despite all these sociodemographic issues and important challenges, this is a truly positive side of this phenomenon. Many labour migrant families usually try to adapt to their host countries. Therefore, I agree with the rapporteur that we need to take together specific measures for supporting better integration as well as promoting a good image of labour migrants in Europe. Read more, voting results

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