April 2019 part-session highlights:

- ALDE-PACE member Olivier Becht (France) is set to become the first Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Election of Judges to the European Court of Human Rights. ALDE-PACE congratulates the following members elected to leading positions in sub-committees: Goran Beus Richembergh (Croatia), Chair of the Sub-Committee on the Rights of Minorities; Petri Honkonen (Finland), Chair of the Sub-Committee on Media and Information Society; Anne Kalmari (Finland), Vice-Chair of the Sub-Committee on Public Health and Sustainable Development, and Robert Troy (Ireland), Vice-Chair of the Sub-Committee on Gender Equality.

- ALDE-PACE thanks Judith Pallarès (Andorra), Vice-President of the Group and PACE member since 2015 for outstanding service. Judith lost her seat in the recent elections in Andorra but will remain active in the international liberal network where we will be glad to see her soon!

- ALDE-PACE recommends for parliamentary follow-up the report on Laundromats: responding to new challenges in the international fight against organised crime, corruption and money laundering, Rapporteur Mart van de Ven, AS/Jur (Doc. 14847, Doc. 14847 Add.) Download report

- Four motions for resolution authored by ALDE-PACE members have been referred to committees for report: The human being-machine connection: new rights or new threats to fundamental freedoms? (Olivier Becht, AS/Jur); Preventing discrimination caused by the use of artificial intelligence (Damien Thiéry, AS/Ega), Transparency and regulation of donations to political parties and electoral campaigns from foreign donors (Konstantin Kuhle, AS/Pol), and Strengthening the fight against so-called “honour” crimes (Béatrice Fresko-Rolfo, AS/Ega)

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**
Claude KERN (France)

- Observation of the parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova (24 February 2019)

Rapporteur (Doc. 14859), 8 April 2019

Goran BEUS RICHEMBERGH (Croatia)

- Stop hate speech and acts of hatred in sport

Rapporteur AS/Ega (Doc. 14842), 10 April 2019

Mart van de VEN (Netherlands)

- Debate under urgent procedure - Role and mission of the Parliamentary Assembly: main challenges for the future

Rapporteur for opinion AS/Pro (Doc. 14867), 10 April 2019

- Laundromats: responding to new challenges in the international fight against organised crime, corruption and money laundering

Rapporteur AS/Jur (Doc. 14847, Doc. 14847 Add.), 11 April 2019

Question to Mr Timo SOINI, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe

Mr DAEMS (Belgium) – Minister, we welcome the procedure that you have put on the table. There are two crucial elements: the first is how to start it and the second is how to end it. For us it is crucial, also in the Kox report, that PACE should be able to initiate this procedure. As far as the second element is concerned, at the end the matter should be closed and it should not take an enormous amount of time. Would you propose to the Committee of Ministers in Helsinki, first, that the Assembly can indeed initiate

Mr SOINI – If I understand it right, we build on the 1994 declaration of the Committee of Ministers, but I fully recognise your worry that if we start a process we should end it as well. Now we are creating wheels of fortune in a way, which can be hijacked and used for political means. My worry when I try to figure out the steps is how a problem can be raised in both establishments. I think PACE must have the right to take an initiative, but we must also create in a profound way the means to end it. How can we create the
the procedure, and secondly, that the Committee of Ministers should take a decision within a fixed timeframe when you are in phase 4?

Question on the Annual activity report 2018 by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

Ms MIJATOVIĆ – As you probably noted, today I marked International Roma Day with a statement about my view on the current situation when it comes to the Roma community in Europe. I started engaging from the very beginning of my mandate, when I visited the centre that was created in Berlin with the help of the Council of Europe and the German Government. In August last year, to mark the genocide of the Roma, I went to Auschwitz-Birkenau and met young people and survivors. Even though it is quite embarrassing that we still need to remind States and our societies of how important it is that we embrace diversity and do not push people away from us, that will have to continue because unfortunately that is not how it is, which is why our voices should be stronger when we talk about the Roma community.

Co-operation with the European Union goes without saying. I was recently in Brussels, where I attended a conference organised by the Swedish parliamentarian and prominent fighter for Roma rights, Ms Soraya Post, to try to see how we can do things better and together. There are many plans, but it remains to be seen what we are going to do to reach out to people and to see how we can be more visible and get more results.

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

Mr JAGLAND – I am very much in favour of alternatives, but I am against some of them. I am against what you proposed at the time, Mr van de Ven – namely, that we should go to the private market and somebody should buy up our debt. Others have said that we should go to a bank and ask for a loan.

Let us be serious: no bank will lend us the shortfall of the Russian money. I cannot go to a bank and say, “Will you please give me a loan for €33 million per year? I don’t know how long it will last; perhaps it will come to an end next year, but maybe it will last 10 years.” No bank would say yes to that, particularly because the member States would have to guarantee such a loan. I do not see the member States being willing to guarantee a loan for the foreseeable future to pay the contribution of a member State that is not paying its fee.

I come back to what I have said before. We are upholding the public order on the entire continent with our Convention and nearly 200 other conventions. That has to be paid for by public money.

There are alternatives that I am in favour of. One is that member States’ contributions should go from zero nominal growth to zero real growth, so that we can get compensation for inflation. Another proposal, which is in my annual report, is that we should set up a so-called Helsinki fund, to which member States can contribute so that we can mitigate serious economic problems when they occur. We already

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

Mr POLIAČIK (Slovak Republic) – Today we celebrate International Roma Day, which should be a reminder of the urgent need to better protect the human rights of Roma people. Across Europe, there is a need for meaningful commitment to combat racism and discrimination against Roma, and we should especially address the continuing segregation of Roma children and children with disabilities in education. As you state in your annual report, measures to tackle school segregation cannot be ad hoc, piecemeal and temporary. Mr Kox said recently that the promotion of European Union accession to the European Convention on Human Rights “is and should remain at the forefront of the Assembly’s political dialogue” with the European Union. Do you think that closer co-operation with the European Union could help to tackle these issues in a more efficient way?

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

Mr VAN DE VEN (Netherlands) – On 23 January 2019, we discussed the financial crisis in the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs, in your presence, Mr Jagland. A request was made to investigate alternatives to the proposed cuts to the Council of Europe’s activities and staff. Why do you present no alternatives to your contingency plan?

Yesterday, we spoke to the two candidates to be your successor as Secretary General of the Council of Europe. In ALDE’s meetings with the two candidates, it became clear that both of them want to have some room for manoeuvre to solve the
current financial crisis in the short term without any cutbacks. What are your arguments, Mr Jagland, for your legacy being the shipwrecking the Council of Europe under your contingency plan? Is not the presentation of alternatives for solving the financial crisis part of leaving behind a sustainable organisation for the future?

I presented those kinds of proposals to the ministerial meeting in Helsinki, but we have kept going for two years with the non-payment of the Russian Federation, so we have had to borrow from the Organisation’s cashflow. From June, that cannot go on any longer, so if the Russians are not back in June, from July this year we will need to start to implement the contingency plan that I have presented. The other proposals to which I referred can be implemented, but not soon enough to rescue us from that particular situation. The solution to that problem is to solve it. Regardless of whether the problem is solved, we need better funding of the Council of Europe, and governments must take responsibility for that. They have the money. For instance, we saw reports in the media the other day that because of Brexit there will be a big shortfall in the European Union budget. It was said that Germany is bound to pay €1 billion – that is Germany’s share – and the German Government said, “We’ll pay.” That is three times the Council of Europe’s budget. I say to the governments of member States that they should stop saving small amounts of money here and paying big money elsewhere. I really mean it. If you are serious about the role of human rights, you have to pay for that. A very small amount of money is needed to make us even more forceful.

Question to Mr Mamuka BAKHTADZE, Prime Minister of Georgia

Mr BULAI (Romania) – My question concerns the recent elections in Georgia in November 2018. How in line with the rule of law do you think it is for a leader of a ruling party to pay bank loans for 600,000 people from his own pocket? Do you think that such a gesture, and allegations relating to pressure on public sector employees, should, could or will be investigated by an independent body in Georgia? If not, how could that affect Georgia’s relationship with Europe?

Question to Mr Nikol PASHINYAN, Prime Minister of Armenia

Mr van de VEN (Netherlands) – In April 2018, this Assembly adopted my
report on fighting organised crime by facilitating the confiscation of illegal assets. I know that fighting crime, including high-level crime, is one of the priorities of your government. Can you say how your country will co-operate with international partners on the better use of the positive international experience and legal mechanism in this field?

Note that this practice is unacceptable internationally. Since 2015 it has been one of the international commitments of Armenia, which include a commitment to the Council of Europe. I recall that this mechanism was mentioned in the money-laundering proceeds investigation and the Council of Europe project on combating terrorism financing, as well as the United Nations Convention against Corruption. Armenia undertook some commitments regarding this mechanism in 2015, within the framework of the Council of Europe’s Moneyval.

To be frank, I believe that this mechanism really could and should be implemented in Armenia but, as I said, ours is a democratic country and its decisions are not taken by one person. We need to have broad public consultation on this institution and that will result in any decision to be taken. It will be very useful for us to engage further in this area with the Council of Europe because we want to ensure that no one tries to interpret or present it as a tool for persecution. As I said, this chapter is irreversibly closed in our country.

Monday 8 April

Progress report of the Bureau and the Standing Committee (Doc. 14855, Doc. 14855 Add. 1, Doc. 14855 Add. 2, Doc. 14857)

Mr VAN DE VEN (Netherlands) – [...] On 23 January 2019, we discussed the financial crisis in the Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs in the presence of the Secretary General, Mr Jagland. There, a request was made to investigate alternatives to the proposed cut in the Council of Europe’s activities and staff. On 24 January in the Presidential Committee, the leaders of the political groups decided to investigate alternatives to cuts in activities and staff. My first question is whether you have come across alternatives that have been raised with Mr Jagland. My second question is whether Mr Jagland’s contingency plan will be distributed to members of the Parliamentary Assembly in preparation for the June discussion of the Parliamentary Assembly’s budget, which we agreed earlier today. Read more, voting results

Tuesday 9 April 2019

Joint debate: Strengthening co-operation with the United Nations in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Doc. 14848); Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals: synergy needed on the part of all stakeholders, from parliaments to local authorities (Doc. 14851)

Mr TROY (Ireland) – We need to be clear that the challenges to achieving the 2030 goals have only become more prevalent. From the obstruction of multilateral efforts and the rejection of treaty obligations to the global crisis of climate change and increasing environmental degradation, the threats are considerable. In that context, the Council of Europe’s core role in promoting human rights, the rule of law and good governance through democratic institutions is a significant asset that should not be underestimated. In particular, we can ensure that State action is framed by the key principles of leaving no one behind and reaching the farthest behind first. The Council of Europe has a major opportunity to support SDG implementation while sharing and promoting an inclusive, rights-based approach to multilateralism [...] We should be absolutely clear that failure by states to make progress on SDG targets not only goes against the 2030 Agenda, but calls into question the respect for democratic processes and human rights that is the cornerstone of this institution. Read more, voting results 1, 2
Establishment of a European Union mechanism on democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights (Doc. 14850)

Mr MARUKYAN (Armenia) – It is regrettable that two and a half years after the European Parliament’s adoption of the resolution of 14 November 2018 on the need for a comprehensive European Union mechanism for the protection of democracy, rule of law and fundamental rights, the European institutions – the Council and the Commission – have undertaken no concrete initiatives to give effect to the resolution or prepare the inter-institutional agreement that it called for. Several European Union rule of law initiatives exist, but they are driven by different institutions, have different dynamics and are based on different paradigms. [...] We call on the Committee of Ministers to create a more integrated approach to political decision making. That approach should involve dialogue with the relevant European Union institution every time an assessment is made of whether a Council of Europe or European Union member State risks committing a serious breach of the common rule of law standards, and whether that deficiency has been remedied or has ceased to exist. Read more, voting results

Promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment (Doc. 14843)

Ms FRESKO-ROLFO (Monaco)* – The figures provided by the joint IPU-PACE study are dreadful. For example, 85.2% of women parliamentarians have had to deal with psychological violence. That has awful consequences. Sexism and violent behaviour in parliaments creates an environment that intimidates and deters women from speaking out and defending their rights. Little by little, these working conditions prevent women – whether they are parliamentarians or staff members – from doing their work. Sexism offers a vision according to which women have no legitimacy to sit in parliament or champion their ideas. Ultimately, the representation of half the population is jeopardised, and even more so for women who belong to minorities [...] This evening we must extend our support to a major text on promoting women’s rights in parliamentary institutions… Read more, voting results

Wednesday 10 April 2019

Joint debate: The role and responsibilities of political leaders in combating hate speech and intolerance (Doc. 14845); Stop hate speech and acts of hatred in sport (Doc. 14842)

Mr WASERMAN (France)* – Finally, it is important that throughout our countries we put an end to the impunity around Internet platforms and users when hate speech is propagated online. The impact of Twitter and Facebook shows how important it is for them to be held to account. We therefore need to make them more accountable and to ensure that that is an integral part of our efforts to combat hate speech. It is going to be part of French legislative work in the near future, and we have already made some headway on the issue […] Hate speech is a societal challenge that calls for rapid action on our part. We should never underestimate this threat, which affects all our democracies. Read more, voting results
Debate under urgent procedure: Role and mission of the Parliamentary Assembly: main challenges for the future (Doc. 14863)

Mr DAEMS (Belgium) – The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe welcomes the report, which introduces a new element into the relationship between the Secretary General, the Committee of Ministers and the Assembly. The report introduces a procedure proposed by Minister Soini – I welcome his creativity in doing so, on behalf of at least part of the Committee of Ministers – for common action when things that the Council of Europe simply cannot accept happen in a country. At the same time, it is important that the Assembly is empowered to initiate such procedures itself. Any procedure will consist of different steps, but a decision will have to be taken at the end of the procedure – be it after six months or in a fixed time frame – by the Committee of Ministers. On behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe and, I think, the whole Assembly, I invite the Committee of Ministers to look through the report and accept it. If they do, we will be able to take common action when we need to react, in an efficient and impactful way, to situations that we cannot accept. I thank the Committee of Ministers in advance for considering the new procedure.

Thursday 11 April 2019

Modification of various provisions of the Assembly’s Rules of Procedure (Doc. 14849)

Mr van de VEN (Netherlands) – On two points, which have already been mentioned this morning, we think that alternatives should be sought. The first is on the proposal to set out in Rule 19.2 that a political group should meet a 5% threshold to be recognised and to take part in our deliberations. ALDE feels that political groups should not have to meet a percentage, because the ability to do so is subject to outside factors that groups cannot influence. ALDE welcomes bringing up the minimum number of members from 20 to 28. The second issue on which we have questions is the fourth sentence of Rule 50.1, which says that a rapporteur cannot prepare more than five reports simultaneously. The perception of ALDE is that there are various instances where more than three reports are required, so we prefer to stick to the sentence as it stands. We are also against the proposal to not allow colleagues to be rapporteur unless they have been a member of a committee for at least a year.

Laundromats: responding to new challenges in the international fight against organised crime, corruption and money laundering (Doc. 14847, Doc. 14847 Add.)

Ms de BRUJIN-WEZEMAN (Netherlands) – The rapporteur has shown that money laundering takes place on a large scale, that a huge amount of money is involved, and that this is a serious threat because of how it facilitates, encourages and conceals corruption and other criminal activity. Corruption at a high level leads to human rights violations and affects the independence and impartiality of justice. It leads to the buying of power and influence, which is used to buy off judicial prosecution, among other things. This creates a self-sustaining system against which insufficient action has been taken, until now. Last summer, ING bank in the Netherlands was convicted and fined €775 million for serious negligence and not acting in compliance with the anti-money laundering regime. This was a wake-up call for my country and for the Dutch Parliament.
The situation of migrants and refugees on the Greek islands: more needs to be done (Doc. 14837)

Mr VAN DE VEN (Netherlands) – For more than a decade, the Greek islands have been a main entry point for migrants to the European Union. A few migrants cross the Turkish-Greek land border, while the vast majority of migrants come by boat from the nearby shores of Turkey. There are currently around 20000 people living in reception centres, often in unheated tents and containers, with limited access to running water and electricity, insufficient food supplies, as well as a lack of health services and poor security. They are exposed to violence, harassment and exploitation, without proper security or protection. This situation needs our immediate attention. Read more, voting results

Anonymous donation of sperm and oocytes: balancing the rights of parents, donors and children (Doc. 14835)

Ms de BRUIJN-WEZEMAN (Netherlands) – From a human rights perspective, we have to support donor-conceived children having the right to know their parents – for medical reasons, to avoid consanguinity, and for their identity-building. On behalf of Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, I therefore agree with the rapporteur that anonymity should be waived for all future gamete donations, but that the anonymity of donors should not be lifted retrospectively. Read more, voting results

Social media: social threads or threats to human rights? (Doc. 14844)

Mr HUSEYNOV (Azerbaijan) – The Cambridge Analytica scandal raised some important questions regarding the impact of social media in political campaigning. We are entering a phase in which electioneering loses its accountability, because we are not keeping step with what technology can do to influence the process and potentially corrupt it. A campaign in which people vote on the basis not of a national conversation, but of ads the contents of which cannot be addressed, leads to bad government […] Transparency is key and is in fact merely a technological update of existing rules on political campaigning. Internet governance thrives on transparency, which should also be implemented in digital political campaigning and strategies. The report calls for social media companies to rethink and enhance their internal policies to uphold more firmly the rights to freedom of expression and of information. Read more, voting results

Free debate

Mr HUSEYNOV (Azerbaijan) – Bullets shot at peaceful Muslims worshipping in New Zealand on 15 March 2019 were fired shot at God. New Zealand is not Europe; the innocent Muslims who were murdered were not Europeans either […] However, these shots were also directed at each of us, irrespective of religion and nationality, and at all member States of the Council of Europe […] I feel very sorry that in the Parliamentary Assembly this week, we did not commemorate those who died or exchange views on this great sorrow, which should take the attention of the whole world. People silently worshipping were murdered in cold blood in a few seconds, simply for being Muslim. Read more