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Political punishment

Written question No. 543 to the Committee of Ministers

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In the night of 2 and 3 March, the leader of Yabloko in St Petersburg was arrested. About the same time, I was in St Petersburg on a Parliamentary Assembly mission to observe the presidential election and the outcome of that election.

I was shocked to learn that Max Reznik, a leader of an opposition movement, was arrested on suspicion of “insulting the representatives of the state” and “using violence toward representatives of the state”, that is to say, three policemen.

Building democracy is the main purpose of the Council of Europe and the members of the Parliamentary Assembly. By doing so, life conditions will improve, human rights will be respected and basic freedom will be granted.

The foundation of democracy rests on freedom of expression, freedom of information and freedom of assembly. This is of the utmost importance for people who have suffered lack of freedom and been deprived of these fundamental rights. There is now a strong need for them to feel free to act and express political opinions without fearing the risk of being arrested.

The arrest of the leader of an opposition movement sends the opposite signal to the citizens.

For everyone taking an interest in building democracy it is very important to make sure that neither preventive punishment nor the ambition to lead a political opposition is a crime. In that respect an independent and fair trial is also crucial.

In respect of this, my questions are:

How will the Committee of Ministers make sure that the member states keep to the core values of the Council of Europe and promote the development of human rights, such as freedom of expression, freedom of information and freedom of assembly?

How will the Committee of Ministers make sure that the member states grant citizens the right to free and fair trials?

