Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
https://pace.coe.int

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Doc. 11793 Addendum I
24 January 2009

Communication by the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to the Bureau of the Parliamentary Assembly

President's activities between the Fourth part of the 2008 Ordinary Session and the First part of the 2009 Ordinary Session

Communication
President of the Assembly

1. Past meetings and visits

1.1. Forum on the Future of Democracy, Madrid, 15-17 October 2008

During the Forum, hosted this year by the Spanish government, I delivered a speech at the opening session, which also featured the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Terry Davis, and the President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, Yavuz Mildon. The Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers was represented by the Secretary of Sweden, Christer Hallerby. I also chaired the first plenary session.

In addressing the participants of the Forum, I underlined that e-democracy was complementary to representative democracy and offered more direct forms of participation in political life. The role of parliamentarians as representatives of the electoral body was not threatened by the emergency of e-democracy. Despite some risks and disadvantages of electronically assisted participation in political life, especially the so-called digital divide, e-democracy could have a positive impact on participation, both by making politics more interesting and accessible and by offering politicians quicker and more effective ways of communicating with citizens.

1.2. Official visit to Mexico (Mexico City and Guadalajara), 21-26 October 2008

At the invitation of the Mexican Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I visited Mexico with a view to holding meetings with the high representatives of the Mexican Government and Parliament, and delivering a series of lectures on the European experience in combating human trafficking.

Thus, in Mexico City, I met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs Patricia Espinosa Cantellano, the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies César Duarte Jáquez and members of the Chamber's Committee on Foreign Affairs, the Under-secretary of State for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights Juan Manuel Gómez Robledo and his senior colleagues, as well as the Special Federal Prosecutor for Crimes of Violence against Women and Human Trafficking, Maria Guadalupe Morfín Otero. Unfortunately, because of the political upheaval surrounding the adoption of energy reform, it was not possible to meet with the representatives of the Mexican Senate.

During these meetings, I appreciated Mexico's leadership among Latin American countries in abolishing the death penalty and expressed hope that the country could further contribute to advocating Council of Europe values in the region. I explained the Assembly's ongoing work on 'feminicides', domestic violence, and

migration, and urged Mexico to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Human Trafficking. Later, in a series of lectures in Mexico City and in Guadalajara, I highlighted the European experience of fighting human trafficking – especially involving women and children – using the Council of Europe convention and the Protocol of Palermo of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime. I also recalled a 2005 Assembly report on the disappearance and murder of women and girls in Chihuahua as a matter of continued concern. The lectures formed part of an ongoing seminar on "Human rights from a gender perspective", organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The visit was also a good opportunity to discuss the role of Mexico as an observer state in the Council of Europe and prospects for future co-operation in the light of the forthcoming 10th anniversary of Mexico's observer status and the 60th anniversary of the Council of Europe in 2009. In this context, I raised a possibility that Mr Felipe Calderón, President of Mexico, address our Assembly in April 2009.

1.3. Plenary session of the CALRE (Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies), Basque Country, Spain, 3-4 November 2008

At the invitation of Ms **Izaskun Bilbao Barandica**, President of the CALRE, I participated – together with Luc Van den Brande, President of the Committee of the Regions, and Yavuz Mildon, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe – in the Plenary session of the CALRE at the Basque Parliament (Euskadi), where I delivered a speech on co-operation between these institutions. In my speech, I also stressed the important role national and regional parliaments played in the European integration process.

1.4. Visit of the Presidential Committee to Tbilissi, Georgia, 29-31 October 2008

The report on this visit is included in the Document AS/Bur (2008) 81 (see Doc. 11793 Addendum II).

1.5. European friends of Israel Policy Conference, Paris, 6-7 November 2008

On 6 November I took part in the EFI (European Friends of Israel) Policy Conference which involved many parliamentarians from Council of Europe member states and was chaired by Gunnar Hökmark, Swedish member of the European Parliament. In my contribution to the first plenary session, devoted to the theme "Promoting Europe-Israel Dialogue and Partnership", I spoke about the close cultural, historical and political ties between Europe and Israel. I emphasized that Israel was a real representative democracy and recalled that the Knesset had taken part in the work of the Parliamentary Assembly for decades. I pointed out that our Assembly supported a two state solution – Israel and a Palestinian state coexisting side by side within safe and internationally recognized borders – which was key to securing lasting peace and stability in the region. Promoting democracy, respect of human rights and the rule of law was the best investment in the development of the region.

1.6. Commemoration of the 70th Anniversary of the "Kristallnacht", in the framework of the United Nations Day of Tolerance, European Parliament (Brussels), 10 November 2008

I participated in a series of events in Brussels to mark the 70th anniversary of Kristallnacht, the night in 1938 when Jewish-owned buildings were smashed and burned across Nazi Germany and Jews were murdered or sent to concentration camps. The events were sponsored by the European Jewish Congress, the European Council for Tolerance and Reconciliation, Yad Vashem and the World Holocaust Forum and were attended by, amongst others, the President of the European Parliament Hans-Gert Pöttering, the Vice-Presidents of the European Commission Günter Verheugen and Jacques Barrot, the Prime Minister of Belgium Yves Leterme and many politicians, diplomats and dignitaries from across Europe, as well as Holocaust survivors.

The events also launched several initiatives to promote tolerance throughout Europe.

Addressing the special event on "promoting tolerance throughout the European continent" which took place in the European Parliament, and in my speech at the diplomatic dinner afterwards, I pointed out that the "old demons" which after the end of the Cold War people had hoped were a thing of the past, had often been replaced by new ones: rabid nationalism, religious and political intolerance, terrorist acts, the persecution of ethnic groups and even 'ethnic cleansing', with its cortege of ghastly wars and conflicts. The greatest danger was when people took ordinary, everyday racism and intolerance which were present everywhere in everyday life as something ordinary, almost natural. With reference to the present world financial crisis, I warned that it is precisely in difficult economic times that tolerance would be put most severely to the test.

I outlined the work of the Council of Europe and its different mechanisms aimed at promoting tolerance. I pointed out that tolerance is not only a matter of legal jurisdiction and therefore the Council of Europe and its Assembly have been heavily investing in education and culture, especially in history teaching and the promotion of intercultural dialogue.

1.7. Plenary session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, Strasbourg, 1-3 December 2008

During my participation in the plenary session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, I delivered a speech highlighting the support of our Assembly to regionalism and regional democracy. Our two assemblies had a major role to play in addressing the concerns of citizens, such as in the field of environment, democracy and governance. I therefore recalled our efforts to broaden the concept of human rights in order to guarantee everyone the right to live in a healthy environment free of danger to life. Moreover, breaking the vicious circle of violence and assisting the populations affected by the armed conflicts in the Caucasus called for a substantial contribution of the Congress at local and regional level.

1.8. 24th Annual ordinary session of the Latin American Parliament, Panama, 5-6 December 2008

On 5 and 6 December, I attended the annual ordinary session of the Latin American Parliament (*Parlatino*) in Panama. My visit was in response to an invitation from the President of the Parlatino, Senator Jorge Pizarro (Chile). It was a follow-up to the visit which Senator Pizarro and the Secretary General of the Parlatino, Senator Sonia M. Escudero (Argentina), had made to Strasbourg during the October 2008 session of the PACE.

My address to the Parlatino, delivered during the opening session, provided an excellent opportunity to talk about the Council of Europe and in particular our Assembly, its principles and how it works.

I also spoke in the debate on the return of Latin-American migrants, following the adoption of the EU directive, in an effort to bring a European perspective to the discussion, and in the debate on the implications of the financial crisis for Latin American countries, in which I sought to underline the need to respect the rights of all citizens during these difficult economic times.

During the visit, I signed a co-operation agreement between the Parliamentary Assembly and the Latin American Parliament, similar to those which already exist with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Pan-African Parliament. As with the others, the purpose of this latest agreement is to organise and widen co-operation between our two assemblies and to promote democracy, the rule of law and the protection of human rights, values that we both hold dear.

During the Parlatino session, I also met with the President of Panama, Mr Martín Torrijos, the President of the National Assembly of Panama, Mr Raúl Rodríguez Arauz, the President of the Andean Parliament, Ms Ivonne Baki, and various parliamentary delegations attending the session, including notably delegations from Argentina, Aruba, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Uruguay and Venezuela, as well as with observers from the Chinese parliament.

The session took place in the National Assembly of Panama building but with the setting-up of the Parlatino headquarters in Panama, it is planned to build a hemicycle at the current site, using funds provided by the host country and the Chinese government.

1.9. Visit of the Presidential Committee to Moscow (Russia), 19 January 2009

The report on this visit is included in the Document AS/Bur (2009)22 (see Doc. 11793 Addendum II).

2. Press releases

1. PACE President: “A day for persuading the world to end judicial execution” (10 October 2008)
2. Lluís Maria de Puig: ‘direct democracy and representative democracy can coexist’ (15 October 2008)
3. Official visit of PACE President to Mexico (17 October 2008)
4. PACE President: Mexico can help to spread Council of Europe values in Latin America (27 October 2008)
5. PACE President welcomes Georgian commitment to meet Assembly requirements (31 October 2008)

6. PACE President: the start of dialogue on Nagorno-Karabakh is a window of hope for the entire region (4 November 2008)
7. 'Investing in the future of Israel means investing in the development of democracy' (6 November 2008)
8. PACE President condemns Vladikavkaz bombing (7 November 2008)
9. One lesson of Kristallnacht: the danger of intolerance in hard times (10 November 2008)
10. PACE President calls for delivery of humanitarian aid (1 December 2008)
11. Strengthening democracy in Europe: a shared aim for PACE and the Congress (2 December 2008)
12. Death of Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow and all Russia (5 December 2008)
13. Co-operation agreement signed in Panama between PACE and the Parlatino (5 December 2008)
14. PACE President on Human Rights Day: 'We must not allow an economic crisis to become a human rights catastrophe' (10 December 2008)
15. 2009: the year of the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Council of Europe (23 December 2008)
16. PACE President calls for an end to all violence in Gaza (5 january 2009)
17. Non-renewal of licences of foreign broadcasters in Azerbaijan (15 January 2009)
18. Assembly's Presidential Committee to visit Moscow (16 January 2009)
19. President welcomes frank discussions with Russian authorities on PACE demands (21 January 2009)
20. PACE President congratulates President Obama on his inauguration, welcomes his request to suspend tribunals at Guantanamo (21 January 2009)

3. Speeches

1. Opening speech delivered at the Forum for the Future of Democracy (Madrid, 15 October 2008)
2. Lectures delivered in Mexico City (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and Guadalajara (Regional Parliament) on the European experience of fighting human trafficking, especially involving women and children (23-24 October 2008)
3. Speech at the Plenary session of the CALRE (Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies) and of the Basque Parliament (Euskadi) (Vittoria, Spain, 3 November 2008)
4. Speech during the EFI (European Friends of Israel) Policy Conference (Paris, 6-7 November 2008)
5. Speeches on "Promoting tolerance on the European continent" at the commemoration of the 70th Anniversary of the "Kristallnacht", organised in the framework of the United Nations Day of Tolerance (European Parliament, Brussels, 10 November 2008)
6. Message on the "Principle of the universality of Human Rights and its implementation at the international and regional level" (Lisbon Forum, organized by the North-South Center of the Council of Europe, 10-11 November 2008)
7. Message to the participants of the 2nd Seminar of the *European Forum Cyprus*, organized in co-operation with the European Institute for the Mediterranean (IEMED), (Barcelona, 13-16 November 2008)
8. Speech delivered at the plenary session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (Strasbourg, 2 December 2008)
9. Speech delivered at the annual session of the Latin American Parliament (Panama, 5 December 2008)