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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 first part of the 2011 Ordinary Session and
the second part of the 2011 Ordinary Session**

Communication

President of the Assembly



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1. PAST MEETINGS AND VISITS

1.1. Visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau at the invitation of the Aladdin Project, the City of Paris and UNESCO (Auschwitz, 1 February 2011)

The visit in respect to the victims of the Holocaust at the Nazi camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau was organised by the Aladdin Project in partnership with UNESCO and the City of Paris. More than 200 personalities from forty countries across five continents took part, including UNESCO Director General, UN Deputy Secretary-General, former Heads of State and Government, the special envoys and representatives of the Heads of State and Governments of Poland, France, USA, Russia, Turkey, Morocco, Jordan, Israel, and Iraq and mayors of major cities in Europe, Middle East and Africa. The delegation also included Algerian, American, British, French, German, Iraqi, Iranian, Israeli, Jordanian, Moroccan, Pakistani, Palestinian, Polish, Romanian, Spanish, Tunisian and Turkish political, religious and civic leaders and intellectuals and Holocaust survivors.

In my speech, I stressed the importance of people coming together, as on that day in Auschwitz, regardless of their origin, country, culture and religions in order to fight growing hate speech and intolerance in the world. I highlighted some of the most important achievements of the Council of Europe in teaching the memory of the Holocaust and preventing crimes against humanity through education. I also mentioned the major debate on the religious dimension of inter-cultural dialogue that the Parliamentary Assembly will hold during its April 2011 part-session, which is part of the Assembly's endeavor to contribute towards a hate-free and phobia-free Europe.

1.2. Official visit to Moldova (8-10 February 2011)

At the invitation of Mr. Marian Lupu, President of Parliament and Acting President of the country, I carried out an official visit to Moldova on 8-10 February 2011. During this visit, I met Mr. Lupu as well as Prime Minister Mr. Vlad Filat, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration Mr. Iurie Leanca and all political groups represented in parliament.

The objective of the visit was to help solve the current deadlock concerning the election of the President of Moldova. Mostly because of this deadlock, three elections and one referendum took place in less than two years and Moldova now needs political stability to make progress on the necessary reforms.

During my meetings, I was encouraged by the willingness of the Moldovan political parties to dialogue to solve this political deadlock. I stressed that any solution to overcome it should be based on a large consensus of political forces and that it was fundamental for the majority and the opposition to engage, without further delay, in meaningful negotiations and to accept compromises in the interest of the country.

In this connection, I welcomed the readiness of all concerned to discuss all the different proposals which have been put forward by different political parties. Mr. Lupu informed me of his intention to set up a parliamentary committee to discuss possible constitutional arrangements following the latest decision of the Constitutional Court on this matter. I urged all political parties to take part in this initiative and I received a favorable reaction from all of them.

In the meantime, it is of utmost importance that a lasting solution is found without blocking the normal functioning of Moldova's institutions, in particular the Parliament. It was encouraging to see that despite difficulties with the election of the President, the state institutions are working and fulfilling their functions.

I also stressed that any solution must be in conformity with the Moldovan Constitution and laws as well as with the Council of Europe standards and invited the authorities to seek advice of the Council of Europe's Venice Commission as much as needed.

Furthermore, it is obvious that the process of looking for a solution of this deadlock must also go hand in hand with work on a far-reaching institutional and legislative reform, including constitutional amendments where relevant, in order to establish genuine democratic safeguards against similar situations.

Moldova is still under the Assembly monitoring procedure and I invited both the majority and the opposition to concentrate fully on completing the implementation of remaining commitments and obligations to the Council of Europe. These reforms were also needed to accelerate the integration process with the European Union and advance towards a visa-free regime with the European Union, an objective which I fully supported.

1.3. Lecture at the Moscow State University of Culture and Art (Moscow, 10 February 2011)

At the invitation of Mr. Ilyas Umakhanov, Vice-President of the Council of the Federation, and Mr. Ramazan Abdulatipov, Rector of the University, I addressed students and lecturers of the Moscow State University of Culture and Art on 10 February 2011 and held an exchange of views with them. In this connection, I was awarded an "honoris causa" degree of this University.

In my speech, I welcomed the positive climate in relations between Russia and the Council of Europe. Referring to the Assembly priorities, I expressed concerns about the general rise of extremist, racist and xenophobic rhetoric in many of our member states and stressed that intercultural dialogue and its inter-religious dimension was the most effective tool for promoting mutual understanding and fighting against discrimination.

1.4. Meeting with the "Dialogue Eurasia Platform" (Moscow, 11 February 2011)

With a view of discussing the role of NGOs in promoting intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, I held a meeting with the "Dialogue Eurasia Platform" on 11 February in Moscow. "Dialogue Eurasia Platform" is a major non-governmental organisation, which promotes tolerance and peaceful co-operation among nations and different ethnic groups in the Euro-Asian space.

In my statement, I stressed that NGOs are indispensable partners in the fight against growing intolerance and xenophobia in our societies and they also make a valuable contribution to the integration of migrants and the fight against discrimination. I also mentioned my intention to invite NGOs active in the field of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue to the June part-session of the Assembly.

1.5. Visit to the Republic of Tatarstan (Russian Federation) (11-13 February 2011)

Upon the invitation of Mr. Ilyas Umakhanov, Vice-President of the Council of the Federation, and Mr. Rustam Minnikhanov, President of the Republic of Tatarstan, I visited this Republic - subject of the Russian Federation - on 11-13 February 2011.

During my visit, besides the meeting with the President of Tatarstan, I met the Chairman of the State Council, Mr. Farid Mukhametshin, members of the State Council, representatives of political parties and national and cultural associations in the Republic, religious leaders and students at the University of Kazan.

At the end of the visit, I expressed my appreciation to the authorities of the Republic for their efforts to develop and preserve the cultures and traditions of about 115 nationalities and ethnic groups. In my opinion, the Republic of Tatarstan can serve as an example of tolerance and peaceful and prosperous coexistence of cultures and religions for the whole region. At the same time Tatarstan, with its system of broad autonomy, can also be a model for organising relations between the federal center and autonomous entities.

1.6. 20th Anniversary of restoration of the Independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan (Paris, 17 February 2011)

On 17 February 2011, I attended the ceremony to mark the 20th anniversary of restoration of Azerbaijan's independence held in Paris. The ceremony was held at the initiative and with the support of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation and Azerbaijani Embassy in France. Mrs Mehriban Aliyeva, the First Lady of Azerbaijan and President of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation as well as the French Culture Minister Mr. Frederic Mitterrand took part and addressed the event.

1.7. Lectures at the National Conference of University Professors (Carlton House Terrace) and the London School of Economics (London, 18 February 2011)

On 18 February 2001 in London, I presented the activities of the Assembly to the National Conference of University Professors (Carlton House Terrace) and also addressed students from the London School of Economics, one of the most prestigious universities in the world. I, in particular, paid a lot of attention to the ongoing developments in Arab countries and stressed that the Council of Europe stands ready to support democratic transformation in this region.

1.8. Visit to the United Nations (New York, 21-25 February 2011)

On 21-25 February, I paid an official visit to New York in order to participate in two events organised in the margins of the 55th Plenary Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. On 23 February, I addressed the annual parliamentary meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Union on “the Role of Parliaments in promoting access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology”, focusing on the issue of non-discrimination and combating gender stereotypes in education. On 25 February, I spoke at the Council of Europe on “Combating Gender Stereotypes in Education”, highlighting the key Assembly recommendations in this area. Both meetings offered a good opportunity to present the Assembly contribution to our global and European partners.

In the margins of both events, I met Ms Michele Bachelet, UN Under-Secretary General for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women, as well Executive Director of the recently established UN Women – UN structure dealing with the issues of empowerment of women. During my meeting, I stressed the complementarity of the activities of the Assembly and of UN Women as well as invited Ms Bachelet to address the Assembly on the occasion of one of our forthcoming debates on the issue of empowerment of women.

I also met a number of Permanent Representatives to the UN of Council of Europe member and observer states. The issues discussed were: interaction with UN bodies in the field of inter-cultural dialogue and its inter-religious dimension, parliamentary diplomacy and complementary and joint actions in countries presenting difficult political and institutional situations (e.g. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, frozen conflicts), as well as the situation in the Middle East and the Euro-Mediterranean region (Libya, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria).

1.9. Official visit to Serbia (7-8 March 2011)

On 7-8 March 2011, I paid an official visit to Serbia, at the invitation of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia. During my stay in Belgrade, I met Ms Slavica Djukic-Dejanovic, Speaker of the National Assembly, Mr Mirko Cvetkovic, Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia, Mr Vuk Jeremic, Minister of Foreign Affairs, the representatives of the political parties represented in the National Assembly as well as the members of the Serbian delegation to the Assembly. I also had an opportunity to address the National Assembly on 7 March 2011.

In my talks with the officials I stressed that the reforms should not slow down and that the Serbian Government and Parliament should intensify efforts to amend the electoral legislation and abolish the so-called ‘party-administered mandates’, strengthen the independence of the judiciary, step up efforts to fight corruption and continue strengthening minority rights. I invited the National Assembly to complete the drafting of the Roadmap for the completion of Serbia’s remaining post-accession commitments and obligations, in consultation with the Assembly co-rapporteurs, stressing that the Assembly stands ready to provide its full political support to Serbia in this process.

As far as regional co-operation is concerned, I invited the Serbian authorities to play a constructive role in the region, by promoting reconciliation and dialogue, supporting neighbours on their path to European integration (especially, Bosnia and Herzegovina), as well as engaging in meaningful constructive negotiations with the authorities in Pristina in order to find solutions to the problems individuals living in this area have to face, irrespective of their ethnic, cultural or linguistic background.

On 8 March 2011, I visited Vojvodina where I met the Speaker of the Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, Mr Sandor Egeresi, the Chairman of the Executive Council, Mr Bojan Pajtic, as well as the representatives of the National Minority Councils whose offices are located within the territory of the Autonomous Province. In my talks with officials I welcomed the efforts of the institutions of Vojvodina aiming at promoting integration and supporting minority communities in the fields of education, culture, the use of minority languages and access to the media. I also praised Vojvodina’s success in implementing cross-border co-operation projects with regions in neighbouring countries, stressing that the best practice developed should be replicated in other parts of Serbia as well as elsewhere in Europe.

Finally, I raised the issue of the composition of the Serbian delegation with the Speaker of the National Assembly and with the Chairman of the Serbian delegation to the Assembly. I was informed of the tabling of a draft decision which would bring the composition of the delegation into line with the Assembly Rules of Procedure and invited the Serbian Parliament to complete the procedure quickly, in order to submit a new delegation to the Assembly for the April part-session.

1.10. "Leaders of change" Summit (Istanbul, 14 March 2011)

On 14 March 2011, I addressed the "Leaders of Change Summit" in Istanbul during a session on international leadership in the modern age. I took this opportunity to stress that today's challenges were no smaller than those 60 years ago when the Council of Europe was founded. I said that we were living through a challenging and uncertain period for Europe and the world and, in many respects, it would seem that our differences were again becoming more important than what we have in common.

Therefore, I called on current political leaders to show the same attachment to the fundamental values as the founders of the Council of Europe did in 1949, to concentrate on our common future and not revive the evils of history again.

This two-day summit, which was opened by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, was attended by global statesmen, academic leaders and business executives from around the world, including the Prime Minister of Ukraine Mykola Azarov, member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina Bakir Izetbegovic and a number of Foreign Ministers, as well as former heads of state and government. Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and Nobel prize-winner Al Gore also participated.

1.11. Official visit to the Principality of Monaco (17-19 March 2011)

During this official visit, I stressed that, since its accession to the Council of Europe, Monaco has demonstrated its commitment to the Organisation's standards as well as the political will to carry out further reforms. The country has made progress in a number of areas such as the fight against money laundering, terrorist financing and corruption, exchanging information on tax matters as well as the reform of the judiciary and the revision of the Criminal Code.

However, I also recalled that some issues still remain unresolved and invited the authorities to continue further reforms of Monaco's institutions and fulfill commitments in the framework of the post-monitoring dialogue. In this connection, I encouraged further progress in ensuring that the National Council was able to fulfill its constitutional functions of supervising government action, initiating legislation and debating the executive's policies and budget. The Monegasque authorities should also consider revising the legal status of political parties as well as seek to bridge legal gaps between Monegasque and non-Monegasque.

My programme included an audience with His Serene Highness Prince Albert II, to whom I expressed my condolences following the death of the Prince's aunt, Princess Antoinette. Furthermore, I met with the Principality's Minister of State Michel Roger, the President of Monaco's National Council Jean-Francois Robillon and representatives of political groups in the National Council.

1.12. Official visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina (23-25 March 2011)

My visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina on 23-25 March 2011 aimed at following up to the talks with the authorities and leaders of key political parties during my official visit of 1-3 March 2010, in order to identify concrete ways of supporting Bosnia and Herzegovina further, in the process of formation of authorities after the October 2010 general elections as well as in the implementation of Bosnia and Herzegovina's post-accession commitments and obligations.

During my visit, I met the members of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the leaders of key political parties. I expressed serious concern that, almost six months after the 2010 general elections, authorities have not been established at every level, stalling urgently-needed reforms. In this context, I called upon all political stakeholders to engage in meaningful negotiations and, if necessary, make concessions in order to come to a compromise, because a whole country cannot be held hostage by politicians who cannot agree.

Furthermore, I regretted very much that, more than one year after the Judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the Sejdic and Finci case, the authorities have not made any convincing attempts to implement the judgment and carry out a constitutional reform. In this respect, I again urged the key political stakeholders to establish a serious domestic institutionalised process to draft constitutional amendments in order to execute this judgment but also to improve the functioning of Bosnia's institutions at every level.

Finally, I again urged the Presidency to complete the process of appointment of Bosnia and Herzegovina's members to Council of Europe expert and monitoring bodies, including the Venice Commission, the CPT, the Advisory Committee of the FCNM and ECRI. I also called upon the key political stakeholders to urgently launch consultations about the appointment of a new delegation to the Assembly for the April part-session.

1.13. XVI Award ceremony of the North-South Prize of the Council of Europe and working visit to Portugal (28-29 March 2011)

I participated in the XVI Award Ceremony of the North-South Prize of the Council of Europe on 29 March 2011 in Lisbon. In my speech I underlined the action, the political experience and the huge moral authority of the two prize-winners Louise Arbour – former Chief Prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda, as well as former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights – and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, former Brazilian President. I also praised their commitment in favour of dialogue and understanding amongst cultures and religions, and recalled the holding, during the April 2011 part-session of the Assembly, of a major debate on the religious dimension of inter-cultural dialogue.

I took the occasion of my visit to Lisbon to meet some of the highest officials of the State, namely Luis Amado, Minister of State and Foreign Affairs and Jaime Gama, President of the Portuguese Assembly, and I also had an interesting exchange of views with the Portuguese Delegation to the Assembly. I equally paid a visit to ACIDI (Portuguese High Commissioner for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue), the experience of which is impressive and deserves to be more widely known in Europe.

Talks focused on the need to enhance inter-cultural dialogue and co-operation with neighbouring countries, in particular in the light of the revolutions in the Arab world; the economic crisis; the reform of the Council of Europe and of the Assembly, and the European Union accession to the European Convention of Human Rights. I was impressed by the commitment of the Portuguese authorities to the further development and action of the North-South Centre and shared their desire to persuade more countries, Council of Europe members and other neighbouring countries, to join the Centre.

1.14. Working visit to the Czech Republic (30 March – 1 April 2011)

During my working visit to Prague, I discussed the contribution of the Czech Republic to the priority tasks of the Council of Europe, in particular as regards the accession of the European Union to the European Convention on Human Rights and the reform of the Organisation. Other issues, which I raised with the Czech authorities included the situation of the Roma population, the situation in Belarus, recent developments in the Arab world as well as the Assembly's new "Partnership for democracy" status.

I welcomed the authorities' commitment to the fight against extremism and progress made in the fight against discrimination and racism with the entry into force of the new Criminal Code and the passing of the 2009 Anti-Discrimination Act.

At the same time, I invited the Czech Republic to join important Council of Europe conventions such as the Convention on Cybercrime, the Protocol on non-discrimination to the European Convention on Human Rights, the Revised Social Charter, the Convention on Money Laundering, the Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse and the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.

During this visit, I met the President of the Chamber of Deputies Miroslava Nemcova, the President of the Senate Milan Stech, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Vladimir Galuska, the Minister of Trade and Industry Martin Kocourek and members of the Foreign Affairs Committee of both Chambers of Parliament.

1.15. European banking and financial Forum "World Finances on the Threshold of the Asian Era" (Prague, 31 March 2011)

On the occasion of my working visit to the Czech Republic (30 March - 1 April), I was invited to address the European banking and financial Forum "World Finances on the Threshold of the Asian Era".

I stressed that business was not the priority area of the Council of Europe work, but that we were concerned with the larger picture of business, including the fight against discrimination, intolerance, corruption and cyber crime or the defense of social protection standards.

Furthermore, I declared that as politicians, we were very much concerned about some global economic developments which have consequences on human rights of our citizens. In this connection, I recalled a report by Pieter Omtzigt (Netherlands, PPE/DC) on "Over-indebtedness of states: a danger for democracy and human rights" which will be discussed during the April Assembly part-session. This report expresses serious concerns about the vicious circle of excessive debt, large budget deficits and low economic growth, which is now threatening the very foundations of European structures and the quality of life of European citizens.

I also addressed the issue of links between human rights and business. Due to globalisation, businesses have grown in power and influence and even though the duty to protect human rights traditionally remains with the state, I stressed that there was an increasing legal recognition that private individuals and legal persons, including businesses, also have responsibilities in this respect.

2. PRESS RELEASES

1. 'European Court explodes myth that Europe is able to protect the rights of refugees', says PACE President (21 January 2011)
2. PACE President's 'shock and horror' at Moscow airport bombing, Assembly members stand for a minute's silence (24 January 2011)
3. The Assembly pays tribute to Mateo Sorinas (24 January 2011)
4. PACE President recalls that human rights and freedoms must be the same for all (24 January 2011)
5. International Holocaust Remembrance Day (27 January 2011)
6. PACE President: "All forms of intolerance are on the rise again" (1 February 2011)
7. PACE President to make a visit to the Republic of Tatarstan (7 February 2011)
8. PACE President makes official visit to Moldova (7 February 2011)
9. PACE President welcomes willingness of Moldovan political parties to dialogue to solve the political deadlock (9 February 2011)
10. PACE President expresses concern about the rise of extremist rhetoric in Europe (10 February 2011)
11. PACE President meets the Dialogue Eurasia Platform (11 February 2011)
12. Arrivals in Lampedusa: all of Europe is concerned, says PACE President (14 February 2011)
13. Tatarstan an example of multinational and multi-religious coexistence (14 February 2011)
14. PACE ready to support democratic transformation in Tunisia (18 February 2011)
15. PACE President suggests measures for non-sexist education (23 February 2011)
16. Teachers are reinforcing gender stereotypes, PACE President suggests (25 February 2011)
17. PACE President strongly condemns indiscriminate and excessive use of force in Libya (25 February 2011)
18. PACE President calls for Europe to support humanitarian evacuation following massive exodus from Libya (2 March 2011)
19. PACE President makes official visit to Serbia (3 March 2011)
20. Serbia: 'the reforms should not slow down' says PACE President (7 March 2011)
21. PACE President welcomes Serbia's contribution to the reconciliation process between the countries of the former Yugoslavia (7 March 2011)
22. 'Gender equality should not wait another century' says PACE President (7 March 2011)
23. PACE President: Vojvodina 'a successful multi-cultural, multi-ethnic society' (9 March 2011)
24. The values we stand for can defeat dictatorships, says PACE President (11 March 2011)
25. PACE President expresses solidarity and sympathy following earthquake in Japan (11 March 2011)
26. PACE President issues call for leadership in an uncertain time (14 March 2011)
27. PACE President to make official visit to Monaco (15 March 2011)
28. PACE President welcomes Monaco's contribution to the Council of Europe (18 March 2011)
29. PACE President to make official visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina (18 March 2011)
30. PACE President to make a visit to the Czech Republic (25 March 2011)
31. PACE President in Bosnia: 'A whole country cannot be held hostage by politicians who cannot agree' (25 March 2011)

32. The North-South Prize is a symbol, but also a cause, said PACE President (29 March 2011)
33. PACE President concerned about global economic developments and their consequences on human rights (31 March 2011)
34. The North-South Prize is a symbol, but also a cause, said PACE President (29 March 2011)
35. PACE President: "Each death of a boat person is one too many" (1 April 2011)
36. PACE President: 'We must design and implement comprehensive national policies for promoting inter-cultural dialogue' (7 April 2011)

3. SPEECHES

1. Opening statement delivered at the 1st part of the 2011 Assembly's Session (Strasbourg, 24 January 2011)
2. Words to Mr Mateo Sorinas, Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly (Strasbourg, 24 January 2011)
3. Welcome words to Mr Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, President of the Committee of Ministers (Strasbourg, 24 January 2011)
4. Welcome words to Mr Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe (Strasbourg, 24 January 2011)
5. Welcome words to Mr Arne König, President of the European Federation of Journalists (Strasbourg, 25 January 2011)
6. Welcome words to H.E. Mr Abdullah Gül, President of Turkey (Strasbourg, 25 January 2011)
7. Welcome words to H.E. Mr Boris Tadić, President of the Republic of Serbia (Strasbourg, 26 January 2011)
8. Speech at the first meeting of contact parliamentarians of the council of Europe campaign against sexual violence against children (Strasbourg, 26 January 2011)
9. Welcome words to H.E. Mr Traian Băsescu, President of Romania (Strasbourg, 27 January 2011)
10. Words for the commemorative ceremony on the occasion of the international day of commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust (Strasbourg, 27 January 2011)
11. Press conference during the official visit to Moldova (Chisinau, 9 February 2011)
12. Lecture at the University of Kazan (Republic of Tatarstan, Russian Federation, 12 February 2011)
13. Speech at the London School of Economics (London, 18 February 2011)
14. Speech at the IPU Parliamentary meeting on "The Role of Parliaments in Promoting access and participation of women and girls to Education, Training, Science and Technology" (New York, 23 February 2011)
15. Speech at the Council of Europe event on 'Combating gender stereotypes in education' (New York, 25 February 2011)
16. Speech before the Parliament of Serbia (Belgrade, 7 March 2011)
17. Welcome speech to Mr. Dominique Baudis, President of the Institute of the Arab World (Paris, Standing Committee, 11 March 2011)
18. Speech at the Summit "Leaders of change : "Leadership in Modern Age - Why it has to be international?" (Istanbul, 14 March 2011)
19. Address on the occasion of the XVI award ceremony of the North-South Prize (Lisbon, 29 March 2011)
20. Speech at the European Banking and Financial Forum "World finances on the threshold of the Asian area' (Prague, 31 March 2011)