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President's activities between the second and the third part of the Ordinary session of 2013

Communication
President of the Assembly

1. Visits and meetings

1.1. Meetings with the Ministers' Deputies of the Council of Europe (Strasbourg, 30 April 2013)

At this meeting, which has now become a tradition after each session, I informed the Ministers' Deputies of the recent activities of the Assembly; my presentation was followed by an interesting and fruitful exchange of views with the Ministers' Deputies.

1.2. Meetings in Brussels (6-7 May 2013)

On 6-7 May 2013, I held a number of working meetings at the European Parliament in Brussels, in particular, with Mr Elmar Brok, Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Mr Milan Cabrnich, Chair of the European Union-Delegation to the European Union-Armenia, European Union-Azerbaijan and European Union-Georgia Parliamentary Co-operation Committees, and Ms Hélène Flautre, Chair of the European Union-Delegation to the European Union-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee.

During my meetings, I emphasised that the European Union and the Council of Europe must speak with one voice when it comes to the respect of our standards of democracy, human rights and rule of law. Election observation provides an ideal opportunity for putting this goal into practice and we agreed to hold regular consultations through the heads of election observation delegations, whenever the European parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly observe elections together. Moreover, we stressed the need to hold exchanges of views between the competent Assembly and European Parliament rapporteurs working on the same issues. Finally, I called on my colleagues in the European Parliament to ensure that political messages be co-ordinated in the context of Euronest and Assembly debates on human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

1.3. Tribute to the late President Lluís Maria de Puig (Girona, Spain, 10 May 2013)

During this ceremony, I paid tribute, together with the Mayor of Girona and the Chair of the Catalan Council of the European Movement, to the former President of the Assembly, Lluís Maria de Puig, who died in December 2012. The ceremony was also attended by the Chair of the Girona Provincial Council, the territorial delegate of the Government of the Generalitat, the rector of the University of Girona and the Director of the European Commission Representation in Barcelona.

I also presented the Plaque of Honour to the City of Girona, which is one of the 11 municipalities to have been awarded this distinction in 2013 for their work to promote the European ideal.



1.4. Official visit to Turkey (13-15 May 2013)

At the invitation of the Speaker of the Grand National Assembly, I paid an official visit to Turkey from 13 to 15 May 2013. During this visit I met with the President of the Republic, the Speaker of the Grand National Assembly, the Minister for the Family and Social Policy and the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, as well as representatives of various political parties and members of the Turkish delegation to the Assembly. I also visited the Council of Europe programme office in Ankara and the University of Galatasaray in Istanbul.

Following the Assembly debate in April 2013 on post-monitoring dialogue and the adoption of [Resolution 1925 \(2013\)](#), I invited Turkey to continue along the path of reform, following the recommendations made in that Assembly resolution, particularly where judicial reform and reform of the Constitution are concerned. In this context, I welcomed the reforms carried out by Turkey in respect of democratic institutions and human rights and its exemplary co-operation with the Council of Europe in implementing these reforms. I particularly commended Turkey's commitment to the combating of violence against women, and I proposed working with the authorities towards the rapid entry into force of the Istanbul Convention and the promotion of that Convention throughout Europe.

I emphasised that Turkey is a vital partner in promoting the objectives and values of the Council of Europe, and sets an example to the whole region, particularly the Arab States undergoing democratic transition as well as the States of Central Asia. I also pointed out that Turkey is our indispensable partner in the resolution of frozen conflicts, particularly that of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Just a few days after the dreadful terrorist attacks in the province of Hatay, I reiterated my firm condemnation of such heinous acts, and of terrorism in general.

I called on the whole international community, as a matter of urgency, to find a political solution to the conflict in Syria, which, in my view, represents an ever greater danger to the stability of the whole region. I expressed my support of the Turkish authorities' efforts to take in Syrian refugees, and appealed for greater international solidarity in dealing with the humanitarian consequences of the conflict.

Finally, our discussions covered the Council of Europe's role and its relations with the European Union, as well as the reform of the Council of Europe and the functioning of Assembly's monitoring procedure.

I should like to thank the Speaker of the Grand National Assembly and the Chair of the Turkish parliamentary delegation for the excellent organisation of this visit and for the constructive and very rewarding discussions that we had in both Ankara and Istanbul.

1.5. 123rd Session of the Committee of Ministers (Strasbourg, 16 May 2013)

I participated in the 123rd session of the Committee of Ministers and gave a speech in which I called for reinforcement of Council of Europe action in the fields of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

I stressed that the European Union's accession to the European Convention on Human Rights was an historic step towards the creation of a pan-European legal area protecting fundamental rights, and emphasized that it is essential to ensure that the Council of Europe and the European Union speak with one voice when it comes to compliance with our standards.

I welcomed the adoption of Protocol No. 15 to the European Convention on Human Rights, which will help to increase the effectiveness of our Court, encouraging at the same time member States to continue working on structural and systemic problems, so that petitions to Strasbourg would become the exception.

I stated that as regards the efficiency of the Council of Europe monitoring mechanisms, emphasis should be placed on implementing the monitoring recommendations and on the specific support that our Organisation can give to member States, and I informed the Committee of Ministers that an examination of the Assembly's monitoring procedure had been initiated with the aim of making it an effective and fitting tool of political dialogue, founded on the conclusions of independent and impartial thematic monitoring bodies.

Referring to the so-called "frozen" conflicts in Europe, I pointed out that their consequences for the populations affected represented a real challenge to our Organisation, and expressed the conviction that the Armenian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, together with the Azerbaijani Chairmanship 12 months later, will afford a unique opportunity to make advances in seeking a solution to the conflict that still divides these two States today.

1.6. Hearing before the External relations Committee of the House of Representatives of the Belgian Parliament (Brussels, 21 May 2013)

At the invitation of the External relations Committee of the House of Representatives of the Belgian Parliament, I presented an assessment of my activities since my election to the Presidency of the Assembly and emphasised the importance I attach to a strengthening of links between the Assembly and national parliaments. I particularly stressed the importance of closer co-operation with the European Union.

I then answered questions, in particular on how to enhance the visibility of our Organisation, but also on its priorities. The lunch which followed enabled me to have most fruitful contacts with the Belgian delegation.

1.7. Working meetings in Strasbourg (21-22 May 2013)

1.7.1. Working dinner with Mr Štefan Füle, Commissioner for Enlargement and the European Neighbourhood Policy

Continuing our now traditional meetings, we discussed, in particular, the questions of recent developments in Moldova, the situation in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia (in the light of my visit to the region) and subjects relating to Ukraine, Turkey and Hungary.

1.7.2. Meeting with Mr Stéphane Leyenberger, Acting Head of the Division for the independence and efficiency of justice of the CEPEJ (European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice)

We discussed the co-operation between the Assembly and the CEPEJ and, in particular, concrete initiatives which could help make the work of the CEPEJ more visible for Assembly members, so that they could use the CEPEJ's report on the evaluation of the efficiency of justice in their activities at national level and within the Assembly. I learned that the CEPEJ regularly presents its report to the Committee on Legal Affairs of the European Parliament and I would suggest that a similar practice be introduced in the Parliamentary Assembly, for example, in co-operation with our Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights and the Monitoring Committee.

1.7.3. Meeting with Mr Gianni Buquicchio, President of the Venice Commission

We discussed the situation in Moldova, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Hungary, as well as the issue of possible membership of the European Union to the European Commission for Democracy through law (Venice Commission).

1.7.4. Meeting with Mr Manuel Jacoangeli, Ambassador of Italy

We discussed the possible participation of the President of Italy or of the country's Prime Minister in one of our forthcoming part-sessions, as well as the situation concerning the North-South Centre.

1.8. Official visit to Azerbaijan (26-28 May 2013)

I paid an official visit to Azerbaijan from 26 to 28 May, during which I met with the President of the Republic, the Speaker of Parliament, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the leaders of the political parties in Parliament as well as members of the parliamentary committee on international and inter-parliamentary relations. I also held an exchange of views with NGO representatives.

I underlined that we need to step up co-operation between Azerbaijan and the Council of Europe with a view to preparing for the forthcoming Azerbaijani chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, beginning in May 2014.

I noted that since its independence and accession to the Council of Europe, Azerbaijan had undergone significant changes on its way to building a prosperous society based on European values and focusing on European and transatlantic partnership. In this context, I welcomed the country's progress in honouring the commitments and obligations it entered into upon its accession, and in particular the fact that Azerbaijan had signed and ratified all of the Council of Europe conventions which it had undertaken to accede to, with just one exception. I also noted the progress made in reforming the judiciary and combating corruption.

Nevertheless, I reminded the country's highest authorities that some important reforms are not yet complete and urged them to fully implement all of the Assembly's recommendations set out in [Resolution 1917 \(2013\)](#) on the honouring of obligations and commitments. I stressed that full respect for fundamental freedoms, in particular freedom of expression, assembly and association, was essential, and that legislation and regulations, as well as their application in practice, must be fully consistent with Council of Europe standards.

I also encouraged the authorities to implement more effective co-operation with the Venice Commission by seeking its advice from the outset of the legislative process and taking full account of its recommendations.

On the subject of the presidential elections to be held this year, I called for full respect of European standards in electoral matters, so that these elections could take place in a pluralistic environment and with free and open political debate.

In my various discussions, including with the country's President, I raised the issue of alleged political prisoners. I reiterated the Assembly's position of principle which condemns selective justice and politically motivated prosecutions in all countries. In this context, I called on the authorities to implement the Assembly resolutions on this question, notably [Resolution 1917 \(2013\)](#) on the honouring of obligations and commitments by Azerbaijan. I made particular reference to the charges brought against Ilgar Mammadov, which have raised serious concerns in all European and international organisations. The Azerbaijani courts must decide the case in a completely independent and impartial manner and in full compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights.

With regard to the thorny issue of frozen conflicts, I reiterated the importance the Assembly attaches to Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and encouraged the pursuit of the negotiations taking place within the Minsk Group to resolve the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, while underlining that the Assembly would do everything it could, through parliamentary diplomacy, to facilitate dialogue and establish a climate of trust between parliamentarians from the two countries.

1.9. Official visit to Georgia (28-29 May 2013)

I paid an official visit to Georgia from 28 to 29 May, during which I met with the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, the Speaker of Parliament, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of Education and Science, as well as the Minister of State for Reintegration and representatives of the main opposition party.

I welcomed the democratic transition of power in the country following the parliamentary elections of October 2012, which were generally considered to have been free and fair. I invited all political forces to continue developing a culture of political cohabitation, and called for mutual respect between the different parties to create a climate conducive to the transfer of power, which is necessary for democratic society to work well.

I informed all those I spoke to of the international community's concerns at the recent arrests of former members of the government and of senior officials belonging to the opposition party, in particular that of Vano Merabishvili, former Prime Minister and Secretary General of the "United National Movement", this situation being all the more worrying since it is taking place just a few months before the presidential elections.

The Georgian courts must examine these cases in a fully independent and impartial manner. It is extremely important to avoid any suspicion of selective application of justice; I was therefore encouraged by the proposal made by the Prime Minister and the Speaker of Parliament to step up PACE monitoring activities in Georgia to ensure full compliance with our standards. In my opinion, other Council of Europe monitoring mechanisms and institutions could also increase their activities in Georgia, in keeping with their specific powers and independence.

I reiterated the importance attached by the Assembly to Georgia's territorial integrity and expressed the hope that an easing of relations between Georgia and Russia would help establish a favourable environment for finding solutions to the conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In this context, I called on all parties to abstain from taking unilateral measures, as that might revive tensions on the Administrative Boundary Line.

The Georgian authorities are making great efforts to meet the needs of the many persons displaced by these conflicts, but the humanitarian situation is still a cause for concern. I therefore underlined that it was essential to find a way of ensuring that the Assembly's rapporteur on the humanitarian consequences of the war between Georgia and Russia, Tina Acketoft, could travel to South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This is a very important issue and I will keep on doing my utmost to continue the dialogue with all parties to ensure that Ms Acketoft can carry out her work.

Lastly, I welcomed Georgia's European and transatlantic orientation and said that the Assembly would support it in its move towards European integration, while expressing the hope that the Association Agreement with the European Union could be finalised in time for the European Summit in Vilnius in November 2013.

1.10. PACE meetings in Yerevan and bilateral meetings (30 May-1 June 2013)

First of all, I should like to thank the Armenian Parliament for organising the Parliamentary Assembly's meetings in Yerevan on the occasion of the Armenian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers so efficiently.

At the opening of the Standing Committee meeting, I said that the Parliamentary Assembly shares and supports the priorities of the Armenian Chairmanship, which are fully in keeping with our main lines of action, in particular with regard to action to prevent racism, xenophobia and extremism, and the promotion of intercultural dialogue. In my opinion, the Armenian Chairmanship and the subsequent Azerbaijani Chairmanship in 12 months' time present a unique opportunity for both countries, and for the Council of Europe, to strengthen pan-European co-operation and respect for our values, notably by stepping up the search for solutions to frozen conflicts.

In this context, following the discussions held in the Presidential Committee, the Standing Committee adopted a declaration on the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Alongside our meetings, I had the opportunity to hold bilateral talks with the President of the Republic, the Speaker of Parliament and the Minister for Foreign Affairs. During these talks, I reiterated my hope that the Armenian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe would be a success.

We also mentioned the situation in the southern Caucasus and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and I once again reiterated my desire not to impede in any way the work of the Minsk Group, whose action I fully support.

1.11. Working meetings in Paris (4 June 2013)

1.11.1. Meeting with Mr Jean-Marc Sauvé, Vice-President of the Council of State of the French Republic

During the meeting with Mr Jean-Marc Sauvé, Vice-President of the French Council of State and the major representatives of this high-level body, in particular Mr Bernard Stirn, President of the Administrative Claims Division, two main issues were discussed: the functioning of the panel provided for in Article 255 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which issues an opinion on the candidates for the post of judge to the Court of Justice of the European Union, and the relationship between the Council of State and the European Court of Human Rights.

1.11.2. Meeting with Mr Jacques Faure, French Ambassador and co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group

I met with Mr Jacques Faure, co-chair of the Minsk Group, with whom I discussed the work of the Minsk Group and my recent trip to the South Caucasus.

1.12. Official visit to "the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" (10-12 June 2013)

At the invitation of the Speaker of the Parliament, from 10-12 June 2013 I paid an official visit to "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia". During my visit, I met with the President of the Republic, the Speaker of the National Assembly, the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister responsible for European Affairs and the Deputy Prime Minister responsible for implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. I also met the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, the leaders of the main opposition party and representatives of the international community.

I was most pleased to have been able to make this visit in the company of the Monitoring Committee's rapporteur, Mr Walter. Our aim was to enter into political dialogue with the authorities and all political forces concerning the report on post-monitoring dialogue with "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" so that it would represent a genuinely shared perception of the priorities of our co-operation.

At the end of the visit, we called for intensification of co-operation between the country and the Council of Europe, in order to complete the fulfilment of the undertakings accepted at the time of accession and thus progress more rapidly on the path of European integration.

While acknowledging the progress made by “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” since accession, especially in the fields of justice reform, fighting corruption and protection of minorities, we stressed the need for more efforts to be made to strengthen the independence of justice and restore the population’s confidence in the impartiality of justice, as well as to enhance the pluralism of the media. Implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement must also be continued in order to ensure that all communities, including the smallest, participate fully in public life.

With regard to the functioning of democratic institutions, I issued an appeal to the majority and to the opposition to enter into a normal, constructive dialogue in parliament with all parties’ mutual respect, so that parliament might fully perform its political and institutional role. It is essential in particular to shed all possible light on past events, and I was gratified that an agreement had been reached on the candidature for the chairmanship of the commission of enquiry prescribed by the agreement of 1 March. All the right conditions must now be created for the commission to be able to operate normally in order to discover effective means of preventing a repetition of the events of 24 December 2012. Proper functioning of parliamentary democracy is a joint responsibility of the majority and the opposition.

I welcomed the broad consensus of all parties and all ethnic communities on the question of European integration. I am convinced that the expertise of the Council of Europe can help “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” to make progress in that direction. In this context, I suggested drawing up a plan of action over several years which would make for better targeting of the co-operation priorities and for optimising the use of resources. I hope we shall shortly be able to continue this discussion, together with our European Union partners.

1.13. Official visit to Algeria (17-19 June 2013)

During this official visit, I met with the Prime Minister, the President of the Council of the Nation, the President of the People’s National Assembly, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Minister of the Interior and Local Government, and the Minister for National Solidarity, Family and Women’s Affairs.

I again assured my talking-partners that the Parliamentary Assembly placed a high importance on enhancement of co-operation with the Maghreb countries. In this context, Algeria, at the crossroads of Africa and Europe, is a mainstay of stability in the Euro-Mediterranean region and a major partner of the Assembly. I accordingly invited the Algerian authorities to intensify their exchanges with the Council of Europe, particularly regarding suppression of terrorism, illegal immigration, trafficking in human beings, development of intercultural dialogue and environmental conservation, and I proposed that other agreements be made with specific Council of Europe agencies, in particular the Nord-South Centre, and more benefit derived from the experience of the Venice Commission, of which Algeria has been a member since 2007.

Our discussions also concerned Partner for Democracy status with the Assembly, and I recalled the advantage which this status would have for the Algerian parliamentarians – who already attend the sessions of the Assembly – in particular the possibility of fully participating in the debates on matters of common interest.

I welcomed the commitment of the Algerian President and authorities to gender equality and the advancement of women in political and economic life. In that regard, I noted with satisfaction that women’s representation in Parliament was among the highest in the countries on both sides of the Mediterranean.

Finally, I was heartened by the determination of the Algerian authorities to invite the international observers to monitor the presidential election scheduled next year, and to take account of any comments they might make, and we also discussed the situation in Syria, Libya and the Western Sahara.

2. Press releases

1. PACE President and Rapporteur congratulate Belgrade and Priština on ‘historic agreement’ to normalise relations (19 April 2013)
2. PACE President announces the launch of the Václav Havel Human Rights Prize (22 April 2013)
3. PACE President welcomes the agreement on the accession of the EU to the European Convention on Human Rights (23 April 2013)
4. PACE President visiting Turkey from 13 to 15 May 2013 (24 April 2013)
5. PACE President at the European Parliament in Brussels (2 May 2013)

6. PACE President to take part in a ceremony in Girona in honour of Lluís Maria de Puig (2 May 2013)
7. PACE President calls for compliance with European standards in the Republic of Moldova (6 May 2013)
8. PACE and European Parliament: co-ordination of political messages concerning Council of Europe standards (7 May 2013)
9. PACE President to make official visit to Turkey (10 May 2013)
10. PACE President condemns attacks in Turkey (11 May 2013)
11. Turkey is an indispensable partner for the Council of Europe, says PACE President in Ankara (14 May 2013)
12. PACE President calls for reinforced Council of Europe action on the standards it upholds (16 May 2013)
13. Strengthening the link between PACE and national parliaments (21 May 2013)
14. PACE President to make official visit to Georgia (24 May 2013)
15. PACE President to make official visit to Azerbaijan (24 May 2013)
16. PACE President calls for reinforced co-operation between Azerbaijan and the Council of Europe (27 May 2013)
17. PACE President invites Georgia's political forces to develop a culture of political cohabitation (29 May 2013)
18. PACE fully supports the priorities of the Armenian Chairmanship (31 May 2013)
19. PACE President meets Armenian President and Foreign Minister (3 June 2013)
20. PACE President to make official visit to "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" (6 June 2013)
21. Jean-Claude Mignon welcomes the pro-European commitment of "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" (11 June 2013)
22. PACE President calls for greater co-operation between Skopje and the Council of Europe (12 June 2013)
23. PACE President to make official visit to Algeria (14 June 2013)
24. World Refugee Day; PACE President deplores 'unprecedented' suffering of Syrian refugees (19 June 2013)
25. Jean-Claude Mignon hopes to develop co-operation with Algeria (June 20, 2013)

3. Speeches

1. Opening speech at the second part of the ordinary session of 2013 (Strasbourg, 22 April 2013)
2. Words of welcome to Mr Joachim Gauck, President of the Federal Republic of Germany (22 April 2013)
3. Words of welcome to Mr Bidzina Ivanishvili, Prime Minister of Georgia (23 April 2013)
4. Words of welcome to Mr Didier Burghalter, Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland (23 April 2013)
5. Words of welcome to Mr Victor Ponta, Prime Minister of Romania (24 April 2013)
6. Words of welcome to Mr Antoni Marti, Head of the Government of Andorra (25 April 2013)
7. Words of welcome to Mr Nils Muiznieks, Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe (25 April 2013)
8. Speech on the occasion of the ceremony in honour of the former President of the Parliamentary Assembly, Mr Lluís Maria de Puig (Girona, Spain, 10 May 2013)
9. Speech at the 123rd session of the Committee of Ministers (Strasbourg, 16 May 2013)
10. Speech at the opening of the meeting of the Standing Committee (Yerevan, 31 May 2013)

11. Speech before the members of the National Assembly of “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” (Skopje, 11 June 2013)