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

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Doc. 13312
30 September 2013

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

Communication
President of the Assembly

1. Visits and meetings

1.1. Meetings with political personalities during the third part session of the PACE

– Mr Hovik Abrahamyan, President of the Parliament of Armenia
– Mrs Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, Minister for Women's rights of France
– Mr Karim Ghellab, President of the Chamber of Representatives of Morocco
– Mr Nikolai Samoseiko and Mr Aleksandr Zozulya, Belarus
– Mr Ali Ahani, Ambassador of Iran in Paris

1.2. Meeting with the Heads of national delegations (26 June 2013)

In April 2013, I decided to initiate, within the framework of this meeting, an informal consultation exercise on how to optimise the Assembly's monitoring procedure, so that it could become an even more effective co-operation instrument, asking the heads of delegations to forward to me in writing their observations and comments on this issue. I was delighted that this consultation aroused considerable interest among national delegations, and I received many written contributions with a number of practical suggestions. The discussion, which lasted almost two hours (as compared with the one hour that was originally scheduled), also provided some valuable input.

Without wishing to turn this note into an exhaustive list of the conclusions of that meeting, I would nevertheless like to highlight three points which, in my opinion, could make a useful contribution to our discussions.

First, all those who expressed their views highlighted the need to ensure optimum co-ordination between the monitoring carried out by the PACE and the activities of the other monitoring bodies. This ties in perfectly with the broader reflection led by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe. I think there is room for more synergies in this area.

Second, it is clear that the monitoring procedures currently in progress should be completed under the best possible conditions, to enable our member states to implement, fully and promptly, the commitments entered into upon accession. To optimise this process we need, first of all, to have more targeted co-operation programmes in order to support the commitment-related reforms, and second, set down a clear framework for specific monitoring and the post-monitoring dialogue, in order to set precise objectives for member states.

Third, in order to ensure a genuinely European-wide impact, we could give some thought to the methods we could implement for thematic monitoring of current issues in all our member states, without distinction.

I hope these ideas will provide input to the discussions taking place in our Monitoring Committee in preparation for its activity report for 2012-2013.

1.3. Meeting of the delegations of Armenia and Azerbaijan (26 June 2013)

This meeting, the first since the accession of these two countries to the Council of Europe 12 years ago, took place in an atmosphere of courteous and respectful dialogue. I would like to congratulate all the members of both delegations for their constructive attitude and their readiness to engage in dialogue. Of course, there are many areas of disagreement between the two delegations, and certain sensitive issues still give rise to considerable emotion. However, the fact that the members of both delegations agreed to raise these issues shows their wish to make progress, despite their differences of opinion.

We agreed to meet again in the margins of the next part-session, along the same lines. I will, of course, continue to lend my personal support to this process.

1.4. Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Elysée Treaty (Mannheim, 28 June 2013)

I participated in the celebrations in Mannheim commemorating the 50th anniversary of signature of the Elysée Treaty and made a speech on this occasion. I met with the representatives of this municipality, the President of the Alsace region as well as with the Ambassador of France to Germany.

1.5. Meeting with the Ministers' Deputies (Strasbourg, 3 July 2013)

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

1.6. Exchange of views with the Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group of the European Parliament (Strasbourg, 4 July 2013)

At the invitation of the co-Chairs of the Democracy Support and Election Co-ordination Group, Mr Brok and Ms Joly, I held an exchange of views with the members of this group. In my presentation, I mentioned several practical means of intensifying our co-operation.

In particular, I emphasised the need for a regular exchange of information between the EP and PACE rapporteurs on issues related to human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The participation of our rapporteur on "Protection of media freedom in Europe", Mr Flego, in the meeting of the European Parliament's Sub-Committee on Human Rights could serve as an example of good practice in this area and we might consider appointing contact parliamentarians in the corresponding PACE and EP committees in future to co-ordinate our work on questions of mutual interest.

As to election observations, we stressed during this exchange of views how essential it was for information to be exchanged between our respective delegations after pre-election missions and before delegations were sent into the field, for example through contacts between the chairs of the delegations.

We also discussed the possibility of stepping up our co-operation in the sphere of parliamentary support programmes. The European Parliament has far greater resources in this area than we do and I believe that there may be some potential for co-operation here that could be explored.

A number of practical proposals were made during this meeting, which the Bureau may wish to follow up on:

– establishing closer contacts between the PACE's pre-election missions and the European Parliament, which does not organise such missions;

– establishing more regular contacts to exchange information on future EP and PACE activities. As a first step, one of the co-Chairs of the EP's Democracy Support and Election Co-ordination Group could take part in a meeting with PACE in January 2014;

– making joint efforts to dispel the tensions arising out of the internal conflicts at the OSCE;

– enriching the World Forum for Democracy through the addition of a panel on the parliamentary aspects of building democracy. PACE would take the lead on this subject and would ensure that a theme on which both parliamentary assemblies agreed would figure on the agenda of the forum;

– holding an event in Brussels, for example in the framework of the International Day of Democracy;

– holding an annual meeting at political level to discuss potential synergies between the EP and PACE before final adoption of both institutions' programmes;

– seeking ways of getting MEPs more closely involved in PACE activities in the European Union's enlargement zone.

1.7. Official visit to Bulgaria and Plenary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Co-operation (Sofia, 9-11 July 2013)

I was in Sofia from 9 to 11 July 2013 in order to pay an official visit to Bulgaria and to attend the Plenary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Co-operation.

During this visit I met with Mr Rosen Plevneliev, President of the Republic of Bulgaria, Mr Mihail Mikov, President of the National Assembly and the PABSEC, Mr Plamen Oresharski, Prime Minister, Mr Christian Vigenin, Minister for Foreign Affairs, members of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Assembly, representatives of the various parliamentary groups and students from Sofia University.

At the time of my visit, the demonstrations were still going on in the streets of Sofia. In view of the prevailing political situation in the country, I called on the main political forces in Bulgaria to enter into serious and constructive dialogue so that Parliament could begin functioning normally again, with the participation of the main opposition party, which came out ahead in the parliamentary elections last May. I stressed the vital need for parliament to resume control of the political debate and for the concerns of Bulgarian citizens, including those taking to the streets every day, to be heard by their representatives in parliament. If the current deadlock persisted, it would only further radicalise the political situation in the country and encourage the rise of extremist parties, notably during the European elections next May.

I offered the Assembly's assistance in seeking a solution to the current crisis, particularly by means of the current post-monitoring dialogue procedure. In this connection, I consider it essential that a new rapporteur be rapidly appointed to replace Mr Volontè, to begin work without delay.

In this context, I welcomed the clear determination of the Bulgarian authorities to honour the outstanding commitments under this procedure as soon as possible. I greatly appreciated their positive attitude and their desire to continue the reforms on the basis of Council of Europe expertise and mechanisms, notably the Venice Commission and GRECO.

During our meeting, the President of the Bulgarian Republic said that he would very much like to address the Parliamentary Assembly at one of our part-sessions in 2014, and I personally am wholly in favour of his coming to Strasbourg.

On 10 July I addressed the Plenary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Co-operation (PABSEC). In my statement I particularly stressed the need for increased co-operation among the various regional assemblies in Europe and the PACE on issues of common interest.

1.8. Selection panel of the Václav Havel Human Rights Prize (Prague, 26 August 2013)

In Prague I participated in the first selection panel of the Václav Havel Human Rights Prize in order to establish a list of three candidates following the call for applications launched last spring. The second meeting of the panel will be held in Strasbourg on 29 September and will decide on the winner to receive the Prize at an official ceremony in the Council of Europe Assembly Chamber on 30 September 2013.

1.9. Official visit to Croatia (3-4 September 2013)

Following the meetings of the Presidential Committee and the Bureau of the Assembly in Dubrovnik, I made an official visit to Zagreb. During that visit, I met the Speaker of Parliament, the first Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Foreign and European Affairs, as well as members of the Foreign Affairs Committee and the European Affairs Committee. I also held talks with the Chair of Zagreb Municipal Council and with representatives of the Croatian Youth Network.

I took the opportunity to congratulate Croatia on its recent accession to the European Union, which is a great success for this country as well as for the Council of Europe, which was the first European institution to accept Croatia as a member in 1996.

I emphasised that Croatia played an essential role in reinforcing stability and reconciliation in the region and also in the regional cooperation process. I praised the Croatian authorities' readiness to work closely with the region's countries to help them progress along the path to European integration on the basis of the experience gained in the European Union accession procedure.

My discussions with the Croatian authorities also focused on parliamentary cooperation in the areas of human rights, the rights of minorities, protection of the rights of the most vulnerable groups in society, gender equality and the fight against corruption. I stressed that, in all these matters, it is vital to ensure good cooperation and complementarity between the European Union and the Council of Europe, and I received the Croatian authorities' assurance of support in this connection. We also broached topical issues in international politics, including the situation in Syria and the southern Mediterranean.

I made special mention of Croatia's signature of the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) and expressed the hope that the ratification process would shortly be completed.

1.10. Visit to Geneva (10 September 2013)

I travelled to Geneva on 10 September 2013 for a series of meetings with representatives of the United Nations institutions in Geneva. I met in particular the Director General of the UN Office in Geneva, Mr Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr Antonio Guterres, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms Navanethem Pillay. I also met the Vice-President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Ms Christine Beerli and the Secretary General of the Interparliamentary Union, Mr Anders Johnsson.

Furthermore, I gave a lecture at the Diplomatic Club of Geneva on the theme "Challenges and opportunities for human rights in Europe: role of the Council of Europe".

During this visit I raised various subjects linked to international current affairs with my UN partners. On the subject of the war in Syria in particular, I urged all member states of the Council of Europe to ensure that international humanitarian law is respected by all sides in the conflict. I said that the possibility of placing Syria’s chemical weapons under international control was an encouraging step while stressing that this process should be based on a resolution by the United Nations Security Council.

My discussion partners in Geneva unanimously recognised that the Parliamentary Assembly constitutes an important ally in promoting our common values. Reinforced co-operation in matters of joint interest, such as the search for a solution to the conflicts in the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgia, would send a strong signal regarding convergence between the United Nations and the Council of Europe. In this context, I informed the Director General of the UN Office in Geneva, Mr Tokayev, about Assembly’s work on the issue of seeking solutions to frozen conflicts.

I also welcomed the determination shown by all my contacts to enhance synergies so as to reinforce the impact in the field. I particularly welcomed the procedure for the universal periodic review of human rights compliance by all United Nations member states conducted by the Human Rights Council, while drawing attention to the need for greater complementarity between the various monitoring processes implemented at the Council of Europe and the United Nations. I believe that we can draw on the example of existing procedures at the United Nations when reforming our own monitoring procedures.

I supported the proposal by the High Commissioner for Human Rights to set up a joint data base making it possible to "cross-reference" the human rights case-law of the United Nations and the Council of Europe. I also supported the idea of a joint event with the High Commissioner for Refugees to mark the 60th anniversary of the Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons. Our Committees concerned should now work with the High Commissioner’s offices to establish the conceptual framework for this conference.

1.11. Official visit to Switzerland (Berne, 11 and 12 September 2013)

On an invitation from the President of the Swiss National Council, Ms Maya Graff, I made an official visit to Berne on 11 and 12 September 2013. During the visit, I exchanged views with the Presidents of the National Council and the Council of States, the Head of the Federal Foreign Affairs Department and members of the Swiss delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly.

During these discussions, I raised various issues linked with current international political agenda and the Council of Europe's priority action areas, particularly the reform of Council of Europe monitoring and the monitoring procedure of the Parliamentary Assembly, neighbourhood co-operation and the search for solutions to frozen conflicts.

I also raised the question of the preparations for the Swiss and Serbian chairmanships of the OSCE with the Head of the Federal Foreign Affairs Department, so as to investigate means of strengthening our co-operation with the OSCE in areas covered by the priorities of the two future chairmanships. The question of possible solutions to frozen conflicts could become one of the priority areas of our co-operation.

1.12. Meetings in Bucharest (17 September 2013)

I made a visit to Bucharest, where I met the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, Mr Valeriu Zgonea. Among the subjects we referred to during our discussion – and expressed satisfaction with – was the stability of the political situation in Romania since the summer of 2012. Afterwards, I met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Titus Corlatean. Together we carried out an overall survey of the situation in Europe.

1.13. Working visit to Moldova (17-19 September 2013)

On an invitation from the Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, I travelled to Chisinau from 17 to 19 September 2013 for a working visit. During my stay, I met the President of the Republic of Moldova, the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister in charge of Reintegration, the Speaker of the Parliament, the members of the Moldovan delegation to the Assembly, as well as representatives of the political parties in parliament.

The aim of the visit was to explore means of strengthening the co-operation between the Council of Europe and the Parliamentary Assembly and the Moldovan authorities, particularly with regard to the fulfilment of accession commitments. I stressed that I fully supported the Republic of Moldova's European aspirations, asserting that in my view the Association Agreement with the European Union was a "win-win" agreement for the European Union, the Council of Europe and the Republic of Moldova.

Because the European Union and the Council of Europe pursue the same goals where it comes to defending our standards in the spheres of human rights and democracy, the continued implementation of the obligations and commitments entered into by the Republic of Moldova on joining the Council of Europe is essential.

I acknowledged the progress made by the country in this area since 1995, while emphasising the need for increased efforts in key areas, based on the findings of the Assembly's monitoring report, which is to be debated at the October 2013 part-session. This report provides a good basis from which to take forward the country's reforms in the areas of justice, the public prosecution service, the fight against corruption, media pluralism and anti-discrimination measures.

I also highlighted the need to offer the Republic of Moldova and its population practical support to take full advantage of the benefits offered by Europe. In this connection, I noted that visa liberalisation was a strong and tangible motivation for the country and its citizens and expressed the hope that there would be progress in this area soon.

With regard to the search for a solution to the conflict in the Transnistrian region, I reaffirmed our attachment to full respect for the Republic of Moldova's territorial integrity. My discussion partners in Chisinau and Tiraspol confirmed that they would like to establish dialogue between elected representatives from both sides of the river Dniester. I reiterated my proposal to encourage this dialogue using the Assembly as a platform. In consultation with all the partners concerned, particularly those of the 5+2 Group, I intend to propose that an initial informal meeting between elected representatives should be held shortly.

On the subject of the functioning of parliamentary democracy, I encouraged all the political parties to engage in continued constructive dialogue, aimed especially at identifying solutions and making progress on strategic reform. I pointed out that it was essential to establish proper constitutional safeguards against any repeat of the institutional impasses which had paralysed the Republic following the failure to elect a President of the Republic, stressing that the Parliamentary Assembly, the Council of Europe and the Venice Commission were on hand to help the Moldovan authorities seek out appropriate solutions.

1.14. Conference on "Legal safeguards for the execution of judgments and implementation of practice of the European Court of Human Rights" (Odessa, Ukraine, 20 September 2013)

On an invitation from the Chair of the Committee on Justice and the Rule of Law of the Verkhovna Rada, I took part, on 20 September 2013, in the opening of the second academic conference entitled "Legal safeguards for the execution of judgments and implementation of practice of the European Court of Human Rights", held under the patronage of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe by the Odessa Law Academy and the Committee on Justice and the Rule of Law of the Verkhovna Rada.

In my speech, I focused in particular on the Assembly's work on monitoring the execution of Court judgments, while emphasising the need for national parliaments to play an increased role in this process.

On the sidelines of the Conference, I met Mr Andrii Deshchytsia, the Special Representative for Conflicts of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs. This meeting was an opportunity for me to take stock of the measures taken by the Ukrainian Chairmanship of the OSCE to seek solutions to frozen conflicts. I especially endorsed Ukraine's efforts to organise a direct meeting between the Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova, Mr Leanca, and the leader of the Transnistrian region, Mr Chevchuk – this meeting took place on 23 September. I also note that the Ukrainian Chairmanship of the OSCE supports my plan to organise a meeting between elected representatives from both sides of the Dniester and I hope to work in close co-operation with our Ukrainian colleagues on this subject.

1.15. Meetings in Paris (23-24 September 2013)

1.15.1. Meeting with Mr Dominique Baudis

In Paris, I met Mr Dominique Baudis, Rights Defender. His office and duties have now been included in the French Constitution and his responsibilities overlap in many respects with those of the Council of Europe, including issues such as the fight against discrimination, the rights of women and children and employment for older people. Mr Baudis and I agreed to try to increase our co-operation on specific issues and capitalise on the relationship that had already been established between our Organisation and the Rights Defender.

1.15.2. Meeting with Ms Jocelyne Caballero and Mr Xavier Lapeyre de Cabanes

On Tuesday 24 September I received the new Permanent Representative of France in Strasbourg, Ms Jocelyne Caballero, and the new French Ambassador in Sofia, Mr Xavier Lapeyre de Cabanes, with whom I discussed the situation in Bulgaria in the light of my recent visit. On the same day I also met the Iranian Ambassador in Paris, at his request. I welcomed his proposal to open dialogue on subjects of common interest.

2. Press releases

1. PACE President opens summer part-session in Strasbourg (24 June 2013)

2. PACE President to make visit to Bulgaria (8 July 2013)

3. PACE President calls for Bulgarian parliament to begin functioning normally again (11 July 2013)

4. PACE President strongly condemns the murder of Tunisian opposition leader Mohamed Brahmi (25 July 2013)

5. Rail tragedy in Galicia: PACE President extends his condolences to the Spanish people (25 July 2013)

6. Coach accident near Naples: message from PACE President to the families of the victims (29 July 2013)

7. PACE President: an 'unacceptable' death toll in Egypt (14 August 2013)

8. PACE President to make official visit to Croatia (30 August 2013)

9. 'Croatia's accession to the EU is a great success for the country and the Council of Europe' (4 September 2013)

10. PACE President to make official visit to Switzerland (9 September 2013)

11. The United Nations and the Parliamentary Assembly: genuine allies in protecting human rights (10 September 2013)

12. Improving the co-ordination of monitoring and co-operation activities with UN bodies (10 September 2013)

13. 'Democracy requires constant action' (13 September 2013)

14. President to make visit to the Republic of Moldova (16 September 2013)

15. Full support for the European aspirations of the Republic of Moldova (19 September 2013)

3. Speeches

1. Opening statement at the third part of the 2013 ordinary session (Strasbourg, 24 June 2013)

2. Welcome words to Mr Edward Nalbandyan, President of the Committee of Ministers, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Armenia (24 June 2013)

3. Laudatio for Ms Renate Wohlwend (Liechtenstein), Mr Evangelos Meimarakis (Greece), Ms Rodoula Zissi (Greece) and Mr Monsieur Konstantinos Vrettos (Greece) (26 June 2013)

4. Speech on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Elysée-Treaty (Mannheim, 28 June 2013)

5. Exchange of views with the Ministers' Deputies, Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (3 July 2013)

6. Exchange of views with the Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group of the European Parliament (Strasbourg, European Parliament, 4 July 2013).

7. Speech before the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (Sofia, 10 July 2013)

8. Speech to the Diplomatic Club: "Challenges and opportunities for Human rights in Europe: the role of the Council of Europe. (Geneva, 10 September 2013)

9. Speech delivered at the opening of the second scientific conference entitled "Legal guarantees for the effective execution of judgments and the implementation of the practice of the European Court of human rights», co-organised by the Committee on justice and rule of law of the Verkhovna Rada and the National University "Odessa Law Academy" (Odessa, Ukraine, 20 September 2013).