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29 September 2014

## **Activities of the President of the Parliamentary Assembly between the third and the fourth part of the 2014 Ordinary session**

### **Communication**

President of the Assembly

### **1. Visits and meetings**

#### ***1.1. President's activities between 23 June and 2 September 2014***

##### *1.1.1. Situation in Ukraine*

1. During the June 2014 part-session, I met the President of Ukraine, Mr Petro Poroshenko, in a joint meeting together with the Secretary General, the Deputy Secretary General and the former President of the European Court of Human Rights, Sir Nicholas Bratza, who was present in his capacity as Chairman of the International Advisory Panel to oversee judicial investigations in Ukraine. During this meeting we discussed the current situation in the country, the advancement of reforms including the preparation of amendments to the constitution and the electoral law, as well as the humanitarian situation in the Eastern regions of Ukraine.
2. The situation in Ukraine was also one of the main points of my presentation to the Ministers' Deputies, on 2 July 2014. I informed the Ministers' Deputies of the Assembly's initiatives, in particular as regards the humanitarian and political consequences of the conflict in Ukraine, as well as my personal contacts with the Speakers of the Russian State Duma and the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada. The aim of these contacts is to continue the co-operation with the Russian delegation. It is only through direct contacts and dialogue that we can contribute to finding solutions to the current grave crisis situation.
3. Following the tragic crash of the Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17, I offered my condolences and deepest sympathy to the victims' families and relatives. I also addressed letters to the Speakers of the Russian State Duma and of the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada, urging them to do their utmost to ensure that the members of parliament of both countries, as well as the respective authorities, fully co-operate with the international investigation. I also asked the Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada to intervene with the competent authorities in order to accelerate the repatriation of the remains of those who had died.
4. Reacting to the developments concerning the Communist Party of Ukraine and the dissolution of the parliamentary group of the Communist Party in the Verkhovna Rada, I addressed a letter to the Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada asking him to provide further details concerning the effects of this decision, as well as the situation of the deputies of the Rada belonging to the Communist party. I also addressed a letter to the President of Ukraine, stressing the need to ensure that the European Convention of Human Rights and the case law of the Strasbourg Court be respected in the ongoing legal proceedings before domestic courts regarding the banning of this party.



*1.1.2. Relations with the Russian delegation to the Assembly*

5. Following up on my bilateral contacts with Mr Sergey Naryshkin, Speaker of the State Duma, and on the basis of discussions, which leaders of the EPP, ALDE and UEL Groups had in Moscow on 14 July 2014, I decided, after consultations with members of the Presidential Committee, to invite the Speaker of the State Duma for an exchange of views with members of the Presidential Committee.

6. On the basis of a written consultation of the members of the Presidential Committee, I invited Mr Naryshkin for an exchange of views with the Presidential Committee in Paris. This exchange of views is scheduled to take place on 2 September 2014.

*1.1.3. Developments relating to the conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region*

7. During this period, I have been following closely, with great concern, developments relating to the conflict. The escalation of violence on the contact line complicates the already difficult situation in the region and highlights, yet again, the importance of finding a solution to the conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region. In this context, I contacted, on 6 August 2014, the leader of the Azerbaijani delegation to the Assembly, Mr Samad Seyidov, to obtain more information about the situation and discuss the escalation of violence on the line of contact. On 8 August 2014, I met, with the same objective, the Armenian Ambassador to the Council of Europe, Mr Armen Papikyan. Along with current developments, I discussed with Mr Seyidov my visit to Azerbaijan, and with Mr Papikyan my proposed visit to Armenia. I shall use these visits, inter alia, to discuss with the respective authorities, ways in which the Parliamentary Assembly could contribute to defusing tensions and creating an environment of confidence necessary for finding a solution to the conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

*1.1.4. Developments in Azerbaijan*

8. The recent deterioration of the situation in the field of respect of human rights in Azerbaijan has also caught my attention. The worrying developments on the contact line should by no means justify pressure and intimidation of civil society and independent media. In this context, in my telephone conversation with Mr Seyidov (6 August 2014), I expressed serious concerns in relation to the arrest and opening of a prosecution case against the well-known human rights defender Leyla Yunus and her husband, Arif Yunus, as well as of the launch of legal proceedings against them. I would like to thank Mr Seyidov for providing me with an update on the situation on the contact line as well as with copies of official press releases issued by the General Prosecutor's Office concerning the cases of Rauf Mirgadirov, Leyla Yunus and Arif Yunus. I shared this information with the Secretariat of the Monitoring Committee, so that the co-rapporteurs could take it into account.

9. However, as new cases of harassment of civil society activists came up, I contacted, on 8 August 2014, Azerbaijan's Permanent Representative to the Council of Europe, Mr Emin Eyyubov, in order to reiterate serious concerns about the deterioration of the situation, referring in particular to the arrest of another human rights activist, Mr Rasul Jafarov, as well as to the imposition of a travel ban on Emin Huseynov. Following this telephone conversation, I decided to express my concerns in writing, addressing a letter to the President of Azerbaijan, Mr Ilham Alyiev, and copied to the Speaker of the Parliament. Referring to our discussions during the June part-session, I asked for detailed explanations to be provided on all cases and stressed the need to respect the standards of the European Convention on Human Rights in all ongoing legal proceedings. I look forward with interest to receiving the authorities' reply and discussing these matters during my visit to Azerbaijan, which will take place at the end of September.

*1.1.5. Official visit to Moldova (16-18 July 2014)*

10. On 16-18 July 2014, at the invitation of the Moldovan Parliament, I paid an official visit to the Republic of Moldova. I thank the Moldovan authorities, the Parliament and its secretariat, as well as the Council of Europe Office in Chisinau for the excellent organisation of the visit. I met with the President of the Moldovan Parliament, Mr Igor Corman, as well as with most members of the Moldovan delegation to the Assembly and the representatives of all political forces in the Parliament, including the opposition. I also participated in a meeting of the parliamentary Committee on legal affairs, and I had the honour to address the Moldovan Parliament. I was impressed by the pluralism and diversity of views expressed in the debates.

11. In my address to the parliament, as well as during the bilateral meetings, I underlined the need for the Republic of Moldova to move further on its way towards the full respect of Council of Europe standards. We discussed a number of key Council of Europe Conventions that the Moldovan authorities had yet to sign and ratify. During all my meetings I stressed that the fight against corruption and the reform of the judiciary, which

would assure the independence of the Courts and of the Prosecutor's office, should be top priorities for reform. I was glad to see that both the ruling coalition and the opposition seemed aware of the urgency of such reforms and expressed their will to attribute the highest priority to them.

12. Besides parliamentary interlocutors, I met with a number of representatives of the executive, including the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and European Integration and Deputy Prime Minister responsible for the re-integration of the Transnistria region. I had the opportunity to visit Tiraspol. I was told on both sides of the river Nistru/Dniestr that status-neutral inter-parliamentary dialogue between de facto authorities of the Transnistria region and the Moldovan Parliament, with assistance from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, was possible.

13. Nevertheless, I was also told that the context of electoral campaigns, as well as the effects of the conflict in neighbouring Ukraine, made the launching of such a dialogue, in the near future, relatively unlikely. I assured both sides that the attention our Assembly paid to the resolution of frozen conflicts would not weaken, and that we would do everything possible to assist in guaranteeing the protection of human rights for all people of the Republic of Moldova.

14. My visit to the Republic of Moldova took place in the aftermath of the ratification by the country of the Association agreement with the European Union. It gave an important incentive to political progress in the country. Now that the agreement is signed and ratified, the Moldovan authorities need to duly implement it – not only in the economic field, but also in terms of the political standards. This is a tremendous task, and I told my interlocutors that they could count on the support of the Council of Europe and our Assembly, especially through the work of the co-rapporteurs of the Monitoring Committee. I underlined that the monitoring procedure of the Assembly should be seen by the authorities, not as a form of blame, but as an opportunity to introduce much-needed reforms.

15. Finally, I also met with representatives of the OSCE office and diplomatic missions of the EU, the Russian Federation, Ukraine and the USA and discussed with them possible synergies in helping the Republic of Moldova to gain economic strength and to secure strong democratic institutions in a difficult regional geopolitical context.

*1.1.6. Plenary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the International Organisation of La Francophonie (Ottawa, Canada, 6-8 July 2014)*

16. On 3-8 July 2014, as a member of the Luxemburgish section of the Parliamentary Assembly of the International Organisation of La Francophonie, I took part in the Assembly's plenary session in Ottawa, Canada. I used this opportunity to address the Assembly on 7 July in order to promote the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). I encouraged the participants to use their influence for their countries to join and ratify this most advanced and binding international instrument for protection of women from violence, bearing in mind this instrument is open to signature by non-member states of the Council of Europe. During my stay in Ottawa I also had a number of bilateral meetings, including with Mr Abdou Diouf, the Secretary General of the International Organisation of La Francophonie.

*1.1.7. 76th international session of the European Youth Parliament (Barcelona, 31 July – 1 August 2014)*

17. On 28-29 July 2014, I attended the 76th international session of the European Youth Parliament, held in Barcelona. I would like to thank most warmly the hosts and organisers for the excellent organisation of my visit to Barcelona. At the opening of the session, I emphasised that young people are our ambassadors in defending human rights, democracy and the rule of law, stressing the need to stand firmly against hate speech and the manifestations of racism, xenophobia and intolerance.

18. I also participated in an exchange of views with the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Youth Parliament, addressing the issue of the relationship between the Council of Europe and the European Union in the context of EU enlargement. I stressed that the values and standards the Council of Europe is defending are as relevant for the EU accession process as for wider Pan-European co-operation. The implementation of these standards is important for making progress in EU integration for those states willing to engage in this process. I was impressed and inspired by the quality of the discussion and the maturity of the participants. This initiative definitely deserves Council of Europe's support.

19. In the margins of my participation in the European Youth Parliament's meetings, I accepted to meet unofficially the President of the Regional Government of Catalonia, Mr Artur Mas, and the Speaker of the Parliament of Catalonia, Ms Núria de Gispert i Català. I appreciated their initiative to meet with me in the margins of my visit to Barcelona and I would like to thank them for their hospitality.

*1.1.8. First meeting of the Panel for the Václav Havel Human Rights Prize 2014 and official visit to the Czech Republic (Prague, 25-28 August 2014)*

20. I had the privilege to chair on 26 August 2014 the Panel for the Václav Havel Human Rights Prize 2014. There were a total of 56 candidates who fulfilled the criteria for the prize from which the panel decided to retain a short list of 3 nominees, including, in alphabetical order, B'Tselem: Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in Occupied Territories, Jesuit Refugee Service Malta, and Mr Anar Mammadli. The Panel will take a decision on the prize winner on 28 September 2014 in Strasbourg and the award will be presented on 29 September at the 2014 Forth part-session of the Assembly.

21. I combined the meeting of the Panel for the Václav Havel Human Rights Prize with an official visit to the Czech Republic. I would like to thank the Czech authorities, the Parliament and its secretariat for the excellent organisation of the visit. I met with the President of the Czech Republic, the Prime Minister and also with the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies and the President of the Senate. In my various contacts I was able to underline our gratitude for the support of the Czech Republic to the Václav Havel Human Rights Prize, discuss the signature and ratification of further Council of Europe Conventions, co-operation between the Czech Republic and the Council of Europe on monitoring and also the issue of execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights.

*1.1.9. Other activities*

22. During this period, I also paid particular attention to the current political developments in Georgia. Reacting to various pieces of information received from public sources as well as from the members of the Assembly, I decided to call the Speaker of the Georgian Parliament, Mr David Usupashvili, in order to discuss the situation, especially, the ongoing legal proceedings involving former State officials. I appreciated our frank and constructive exchange of views and the information he has provided me with, especially, regarding the political and legal aspects of the cases. After our telephone conversation, I addressed a letter to the Speaker of Parliament stressing that it was essential to ensure that the investigation, as well as the subsequent legal proceedings, meet the standards of the European Convention of Human Rights and of the case law of the Strasbourg Court. I also emphasised the Parliament's special role of exercising political oversight over the Government, guaranteeing the respect of the principle of separation of powers and ensuring that the judicial authorities can function independently and without political interference.

23. I am also grateful to the Chairman of the Georgian delegation to the Assembly, Mr Tedo Japaridze, who wrote to me, at his own initiative, providing detailed explanations. The elements of information I received were most useful to prepare my telephone conversation with the Speaker of the parliament.

**1.2. President's activities between 2 and 29 September 2014**

*1.2.1. Participation of the Russian delegation in Assembly work*

24. As indicated in my previous communication to the Bureau, an exchange of views between the Assembly's Presidential Committee and the Speaker of the State Duma of the Russian Federation, Mr Sergey Naryshkin, took place in Paris, on 2 September 2014. Mr Naryshkin was accompanied by Mr Alexey Pushkov, Chairman of the Russian delegation to the Assembly, and Mr Leonid Slutsky, Vice-chair of the delegation, who also participated in the discussion. I also held a bilateral meeting with Mr Naryshkin, in the margins of the exchange of views with the Presidential Committee.

25. Along with the issue of participation of the Russian delegation in Assembly sessions and activities, we discussed ways to overcome the current crisis in Ukraine. Our discussion was frank and open, although we could not come to an agreement on a number of issues. That being said, we did agreed on some practical steps that the Russian delegation would take to resume its participation in the activities of the Assembly, in particular, a) the members of the Russian delegation acting as Assembly rapporteurs would resume their participation in Assembly work at Committee level (this is particularly important for Ms Kazakova who is the Committee on Equality and Non-discrimination rapporteur for opinion on counteraction to manifestations of neo-Nazism); b) Mr Pushkov and Mr Slutsky would attend the meeting of the Monitoring Committee's ad hoc sub-committee on "Russia's neighbourhood policy" scheduled to be held in Vienna on 22 September 2014.

26. We also agreed to continue discussions in this same format and, possibly, to meet again as appropriate.

27. Moreover, in the margins of the European Conference of Presidents of Parliaments, held in Oslo, on 11-12 September, I met with Mr Ivan Melnikov, Deputy Speaker of the State Duma and member of the Russian delegation to the Assembly, in order to continue discussions on this matter.

### *1.2.2. Situation in Ukraine*

28. During this period, I continued to follow closely the situation in Ukraine. In the margins of the European Conference of Presidents of Parliaments, held in Oslo, on 11-12 September 2014, I met with Mr Oleksander Turchynov, Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. Mr Turchynov informed me of the recent developments, especially as regards the cease-fire agreement and legislative activities of the Verkhovna Rada in key areas of reforms, as well as of the preparation of the 26 October parliamentary elections.

### *1.2.3. Official visit to Romania (3-5 September 2014)*

29. At the invitation of the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies of the Romanian Parliament, Mr Valeriu Ștefan Zgonea, on 3-5 September 2014 I paid an official visit to Romania, travelling to both Bucharest and Craiova. During my visit, I met with the Prime Minister, Mr Victor Ponta, the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, Mr Valeriu Ștefan Zgonea, the Speaker of the Senate, Mr Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu, the President of the National Agency for Roma, Mr Ioan Gruia Bumbu, the members of the Romanian delegation to the Assembly, the representatives of political forces represented in Parliament, as well as the State Secretary for European Affairs, Mr George Ciamba.

30. In Craiova, I met with the Chairman of the Regional Council, the Prefect and the Mayor of the City, and held an exchange of views with students and professors from Craiova University Law Department.

31. I would like to thank the Romanian Parliament and the Romanian delegation for the excellent organisation of this visit, as well as for their active participation in the Assembly's work.

32. At the end of this visit I congratulated the Romanian authorities' on their firm commitment to the European project, as well as their efforts to counter hate speech and exclusion. I paid tribute to the role played by the Romanian Parliament in monitoring the enforcement, at domestic level, of the judgments handed down by the European Court of Human Rights.

33. I also stressed that Romania's approach to preparing for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention was exemplary and expressed the hope that the interministerial working group set up to study Romanian legislation's conformity with the Convention would soon complete its work, so that the Parliament would be able to ratify this important legal instrument.

34. Moreover, I welcomed the Romanian authorities' support for the Council of Europe's action in the fight against cybercrime.

35. On the domestic reforms front, I encouraged the authorities to continue giving priority to reforms to counter corruption and prevent exclusion, to further integrate Roma communities and improve the functioning of the judiciary. At the same time, I encouraged the authorities to continue strengthening the Parliament's role as a legislative body and an arena for political debate.

36. In Craiova, I noted that the representatives of local and regional authorities were committed to ensuring the welfare and the economic development of their communities, and I stressed that these practices developed in Romania, were a good example to numerous local and regional authorities in countries of the region.

37. Finally, I pointed out that Romania was a pillar of stability in the region and welcomed the authorities' and all the political leaders' firm and unanimous commitment to supporting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. We also exchanged views on the situation in the Republic of Moldova and on ways to support the authorities in the implementation of reforms and the search for a solution to the conflict in Transnistria.

*1.2.4. The European Conference of Presidents of Parliament (Oslo, 11-12 September 2014)*

38. Presenting the conclusions of the European Conference of Presidents of Parliament, I stressed that Europe needs strong parliaments to promote its common values – values which go beyond national or cultural specificities – backed up by the “anchor” of the European Convention on Human Rights.

39. Speaking about democratic security in Europe, I reiterated the conclusion reached by many participants that the application of international law and the upholding of human rights could guarantee peaceful coexistence in the long term and prevent the building of a new Wall in the heart of Europe.

40. Furthermore, I stressed the need for politicians to seriously rethink the way we are doing politics: not for short-term political gain, but with a long-term political vision in the interest of future generations.

41. The Speaker of the Norwegian Parliament, Mr Olemic Thommessen, who was co-chairing the conference, underlined that constitutions and laws alone were not sufficient to guarantee democracy – and that it was vital to encourage the involvement and participation of citizens in democratic processes. He added that transparency and accountability on the part of decision-makers was key, as well as the conditions for vibrant opposition, so that there is scrutiny and free debate.

42. He pointed out that parliaments needed to be more in touch with citizens, making use of good practices such as petitions to initiate laws, referenda and consultation of civil society organisations.

43. On the occasion of this conference, I made a joint declaration with the Speaker of the Norwegian Parliament launching the initiative to establish a European Day for the Victims of Hate Crime on 22 July, the anniversary of the horrendous Utøya and Oslo attacks. Both of us strongly support this idea and hope that all Parliaments will follow. The conclusions of this conference are appended to the present communication.

44. In the margins of the Conference, I held a series of bilateral meetings. The details of these meetings are in the Appendix to this communication.

*1.2.5. 13th Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport (Macolin, Switzerland, 17-18 September 2014)*

45. On 17 and 18 September 2014, I attended the 13th Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport held in Macolin, Switzerland.

46. At the opening session, I stressed that sport must not be above the law and that there is a need to fight corruption in sports bodies and to improve the governance of sport, in particular through self-regulation and the development of a culture of transparency.

47. As a former PACE rapporteur on the need to combat match-fixing, I especially welcomed the opening for signature of the new Council of Europe Convention on the manipulation of sports competitions. This convention, which aims at better prevention and prosecution of match-fixing and corruption in sports, is the result of an extensive collaboration process, based on the exemplary cooperation between the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport and the PACE, as well as between the Council of Europe and the world of sport, and with sports betting operators.

48. I was pleased to see that fifteen States signed this new Convention in Macolin.

49. It is now our role, as parliamentarians, to secure the earliest possible ratification and entry into force of this convention. Non-European states, such as the United States or China, and other countries should also be involved.

*1.2.6. Conference “Safe from Fear, Safe from Violence”, celebrating the entry into force of the Istanbul Convention (Rome, 18-20 September 2014)*

50. On 18 and 19 September 2014, I attended the Conference “Safe from Fear, Safe from Violence”, celebrating the entry into force of the Istanbul Convention – a conference co-organised by the Council of Europe, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Italian Chamber of Deputies.

51. At the opening session, I stated that the Istanbul Convention constitutes a blueprint for future society in which violence against women will no longer be justified, excused or minimised.

52. I underlined that the coming into force of this Convention calls on us all to ensure that this vision of the future becomes a reality as soon as possible.

53. I also stressed the crucial role of national parliaments in the form of legislative work to bring national legislation into line with the Convention, but also through their role in procedures for monitoring and reviewing the implementation of the Convention.

*1.2.7. Working visit to Azerbaijan (21-24 September 2014)*

54. At the invitation of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Mr Ilham Aliyev, I paid a working visit to the country on 22-24 September 2014. This visit was organised as a follow-up to my discussions with the authorities in May 2014, in Baku, as well as during the June 2014 part-session, in Strasbourg. The objectives of my visit were three-fold: a) address the growing concerns as regards the respect of human rights especially following the wave of arrests of prominent human rights defenders and civil society activists in August 2014; b) discuss the state of implementation of post-accession commitments and obligations and the ways to accelerate the implementation of reforms; c) in view of the forthcoming parliamentary elections in 2015, discuss the ways to improve the functioning of democratic institutions and establish an environment that would allow for free and fair elections.

55. During this visit, I met the President of the Republic, the Speaker of Parliament, the Minister of Justice, the Prosecutor General, the representatives of political forces in Parliament, as well as members of the Azerbaijani delegation to the Assembly. I also visited civil society activists currently in detention, and held a round table with civil society representatives and human rights defenders. I would like to thank the Azerbaijani delegation and the Council of Europe Office in Baku for the excellent organisation of this visit.

56. In my concluding remarks at the end of the visit I called for a broad dialogue between the authorities, political actors and civil society, stressing that the Assembly was ready to support this process.

57. As far as the implementation of reforms is concerned, I stressed that respecting Council of Europe standards was a political and legal obligation that Azerbaijan had undertaken, highlighting the need to make further progress, in particular, in the field of freedom of expression and freedom of association, as well as the independence of the judiciary. I pointed out that the 2014-2016 Action Plan contained the necessary tools to support these reforms and expressed hope that concrete initiatives would be launched soon.

58. During the visit, I also held an extensive discussion with NGO representatives, praising their commitment and determination, given the difficult conditions in which they have to operate, especially as regards registration, use of foreign grants, and reporting procedures. I raised the concerns expressed by the NGOs with the Minister of Justice calling for the implementation of the recommendations of the Venice Commission concerning NGO legislation.

59. Speaking about the recent arrests of civil society activists, I stressed that this was a source of grave concern and that the recent events had highlighted the need to address systemic deficiencies in the operation of justice, as exemplified in the findings of the European Court of Human Rights in the case concerning the pre-trial detention of Ilgar Mammadov.

60. Speaking about the preparation of the 2015 parliamentary elections, I stressed that reforms of the electoral legislation were crucial in order to increase political pluralism, in line with the recommendations of the Venice Commission. I urged the authorities to start the preparations without delay, especially in the light of the forthcoming municipal elections in December 2014.

61. During my visit, I had the possibility to visit civil society and political activists currently in detention, in particular Ilgar Mammadov, Tofiq Yaqublu and Hilal Mammadov. I would like to point out that I did not go to see them to discuss their conditions of detention. I met them in their capacity as prominent human rights defenders in order to discuss the current situation in Azerbaijan and the ways to improve it. Stressing the need to ensure that the standards of the European Convention of Human Rights are respected in all legal proceedings, I expressed hope that I would soon have another chance to talk to them, as well as to other civil society activists currently in detention, but in a different setting.

62. Finally, speaking about the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, I stressed the Assembly's support for the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. Of course, our Assembly should not interfere in the activities of the OSCE Minsk Group, but we can help the parliamentary delegations of Azerbaijan and Armenia build confidence and develop dialogue.

### 1.2.8. Bilateral meetings

#### *Meeting with Ms Federica Mogherini, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Italy*

63. On 16 September 2014, I met with Ms Federica Mogherini in her capacity as Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy, as well as designated EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. We agreed to meet and exchange views on a regular basis on issues of common interest.

#### *Meeting with Mr Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament*

64. On 17 September 2014, I met with Mr Schulz to discuss current political issues, as well as ways to improve interaction between the Parliamentary Assembly and the European Parliament. In particular, we discussed the crisis in Ukraine and the developments in Azerbaijan. We agreed to meet soon once again, together with the Secretaries General of the European Parliament and of the Assembly, in order to discuss ways of improving the format of regular discussions between our Presidential Committee and the Conference of Presidents of the European Parliament.

65. I also informed Mr Schulz of our intention to launch the initiative to establish a European Day for the Victims of Hate Crime on 22 July which he supported with great enthusiasm.

#### *Participation in the 1206bis meeting of the Ministers' Deputies*

66. I attended this meeting on 16 September 2014 and followed to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe's presentation of his vision and priorities. I congratulated the Secretary General on his election and expressed the Assembly's full support of his action. Subsequently, I met with the Secretary General in his office to exchange views on current political issues.

#### *Meeting with Her Majesty Queen Máxima of the Netherlands*

67. On 17 September 2014, I met with Her Majesty Queen Máxima of the Netherlands, who was in Strasbourg to address the Council of Europe anti-money laundering and counter terrorist financing body MONEYVAL in her capacity as United Nations Secretary General's Special Advocate for Inclusive Finance for Development.

68. We discussed, *inter alia*, that there can be no economic perspective without rule of law and I praised the commendable contribution of Dutch parliamentarians to the work of the Parliamentary Assembly.

69. The details of all my activities and meetings are contained in the Appendices of the present communication.

## **2. Press releases**

1. Anne Brasseur renews the invitation to Pope Francis to address the PACE (20 June 2014)
2. President welcomes the release of Ales Bialiatski (21 June 2014)
3. PACE President meets with Ales Bialiatski upon his release (2 July 2014)
4. Hostilities in the Gaza strip: violence will resolve nothing (10 July 2014)
5. Plane crash in Ukraine: PACE President offers her condolences (18 July 2014)
6. PACE President reminds the Republic of Moldova that the monitoring procedure is here to help (18 July 2014)
7. Plane crash: PACE President urges Ukrainian and Russian Speakers to fully co-operate (22 July 2014)
8. "Truth's onward march continues in the case of the illegal CIA detentions" (24 July 2014)
9. A new Convention for combating domestic violence (28 July 2014)
10. Trafficking in human organs in Kosovo: "Truth's onward march continues also in this case" (30 July 2014)
11. 65th anniversary of the Parliamentary Assembly (8 August 2014)
12. Gaza: President welcomes truce, calling on both sides to live up to commitments (27 August 2014)

13. Concern about reports of growing escalation of the conflict in Ukraine (29 August 2014)
14. PACE President: spirit of Václav Havel lives on in the Czech Republic (29 August 2014)
15. PACE President Anne Brasseur meets with the Speaker of the Russian State Duma (2 September 2014)
16. Anne Brasseur welcomes the Romanian authorities' commitment to the European project (5 September 2014)
17. President pays tribute to PACE member Jim Dobbin (8 September 2014)
18. PACE President and Norwegian Speaker back plan for a European Day for the Victims of Hate Crime (10 September 2014)
19. President urges parliamentarians to speak out on 'dangers' facing the Strasbourg Court (11 September 2014)
20. Europe needs strong parliaments to promote common values (12 September 2014)
21. Anne Brasseur looks forward to promising co-operation with Federica Mogherini (17 September 2014)
22. Sport must not be above the law (18 September 2014)
23. The Istanbul Convention constitutes a blueprint for future society (19 September 2014)
24. Azerbaijan: call for dialogue between President, political actors and civil society (25 September 2014)

### **3. Speeches**

1. Speech on the occasion of the 42nd annual meeting of the General Secretaries of the Episcopal Conference of Europe (Strasbourg, 20 June 2014)
2. Opening speech of the 3rd part of the 2014 Ordinary session (Strasbourg, 23 June 2014)
3. Speech on the occasion of the signature of the Partner for Democracy Certificate with the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic (Strasbourg, 23 June 2014)
4. Speech on the occasion of the Commemoration ceremony of the Centenary of the beginning of the First World War (Strasbourg, 25 June 2014)
5. Exchange of views with the Ministers' Deputies during the 1204th session of the Committee of Ministers (Strasbourg, 2 July 2014)
6. Speech on the occasion of the XXXXth session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Francophone World (Ottawa, 3 – 8 July 2014)
7. Speech before the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova (Chisinau, 17 July 2014)
8. Speech during the opening ceremony of the 76th international session of the European Parliament of the young (Barcelona, 28 July 2014)
9. Lecture to students at Høyskolen on "Challenges to human rights and democracy in Europe" (Østfold, 10 September 2014)
10. Lecture on "Challenges to human rights and democracy in Europe", organised jointly by the Centre for European Studies and the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights (University of Oslo, 10 September 2014)
11. Address at the Opening of the European Conference of Presidents of Parliament (Oslo, 11 September 2014)
12. Conclusions of the European Conference of Presidents of Parliament presented together with the President of the Storting (Oslo, 12 September 2014)
13. Speech on the occasion of the 13th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport (Macolin, Switzerland, 18 September 2014)
14. Speech on the occasion of the Conference "Safe from fear, safe from violence", celebrating the entry into force of the Istanbul Convention (Rome, 18-19 September 2014)

## **Appendix 1 – Activities between 23 June and 2nd September 2014**

### **1. Bilateral meetings (in chronological order)**

#### **PACE Session (22-26 June 2014)**

##### *Political personalities*

- Mr Asylbek Jeenbekov, Speaker of the Kyrgyz Parliament
- Mr Elmar Mammadyarov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan
- Mr Ilham Alivev, President of Azerbaijan
- Exchange of views with AS/Pol on extremism (with the participation of Mr Michel Rocard)
- Representatives of «Open Dialog Foundation», NGO
- Mr Olemic Thommessen, President of the Parliament, Norway
- Representatives of Amnesty International for Turkey and Greece
- Representatives of a group of NGO's working on Human Rights in Azerbaijan
- Representatives of Azerbaijan National Group of International Society for HRs» (ISHR)
- Mr Petro Poroshenko, President of Ukraine
- Mr Rolf Wenzel, Governor of the COE Development Bank
- Ms Rovana Plumb, Minister of work, family, social protection and elderly persons, Romania

##### *PACE Members*

- Mr Samad Seyidov, Chairperson, delegation of Azerbaijan
- Ms Hermine Naghdalyan, Chairperson, delegation of Armenia
- Mr Christoph Strässer, former member of the Assembly, Federal Government Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and Humanitarian aid, Germany
- Ms Liliana Palihovici, Chairperson, delegation of the Republic of Moldova
- Mr Ivan Popescu, Chairperson, and members of the delegation of Ukraine
- Ms Annette Groth, Member, delegation of Germany
- New members of the delegation of Hungary
- Mr Gvozden Flego, Chairperson, delegation of Croatia
- Mr Ionut-Marian Stroe, Chairperson, delegation of Romania
- Ms Dana Váhalová, Chairperson, delegation of the Czech Republic
- Ms Aleksandra Djurovic, Chairperson, delegation of Serbia
- Mr Joe O'Reilly, Chairperson, delegation of Ireland
- Mr Arcadio Diaz Tejera, Member, delegation of Spain
- Mr Michele Nicoletti, Member, delegation of Italy
- Mr Axel Fischer, Chairperson, delegation of Germany

#### **Parliamentary Assembly of the International Organisation of La Francophonie (Ottawa, Canada, 6-8 July 2014)**

- Mr Abdou Diouf, General Secretary of the International Organisation of La Francophonie.

### **Moldova (16-18 July 2014)**

- Mr Igor Corman, Chairman of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, with Mrs Liliana Palihovici, Mr Serghei Sirbu, Mr Oleg Bodrug, Mr Marian Lupu, Mr Valeriu Streleț, Mr Ion Hadarca, Mrs Maria Postoico, Mr Eugen Reveno, Mrs Ala Mirza, Mrs Rodica Iovu
- Mr Jan Plesinger, Deputy Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova; Mr Vsevolod Filipp, Chargé d'Affaires ad interim of the Embassy of the Russian Federation to the Republic of Moldova; Mr Sergey PyrozHKov, Ambassador of the Republic of Ukraine to the Republic of Moldova; Mr Wicher Slagter, Head of the Political and Economic Section, EU Delegation to Moldova; Ms Kara C. McDonald, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of the United States of America to the Republic of Moldova; Responsible of the Council of Europe Office in the Republic of Moldova
- Mr Valeriu Chiveri, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration
- Ms Liliana Palihovici, Deputy Chairwoman of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, Chairperson of the parliamentary delegation to the PACE
- Mr Mikhail Burla, Tiraspol, Transnistrian region
- Members of the Committee on Legal Affairs, Appointments and Immunities of the Moldovan Parliament
- Mr Eugen Carpov, Deputy Prime Minister responsible for reintegration
- Mr Vladimir Voronin, President of the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM), former PACE member

### **Barcelona (28-31 July 2014) (unofficial meetings)**

- Mr Artur Mas, President of the Generalitat of Catalonia
- Ms Núria de Gispert i Català, President of the Parliament of Catalonia

### **Prague (25-28 August 2014)**

Members of the Václav Havel Human Rights Prize panel:

- Mr František Janouch, Chairman of the Board of the Charta 77 Foundation
- Mr Thomas Hammarberg, Former Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe
- Ms Nuala Mole, Senior Lawyer, Founder of the AIRE Centre
- Mr Marek (Antoni) Nowicki, Human Rights Lawyer, President of the UN Human Rights Advisory Panel in Kosovo
- Mr Martin Palouš, Former Ambassador of the Czech Republic, President of Vaclav Havel Library Foundation in New York and Board member of Vaclav Havel Library
- Mr Christos Pourgourides, Former Member of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Cyprus, Former Member of the Parliamentary Assembly
- Mr Miloš Zeman, President of Czech Republic
- Mr J. Hamáček, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies
- Mr Milan Štěch, President of the Senate
- Mr Bohuslav Sobotka, Prime Minister
- Ms Michèle Pranchère-Tomassini, Luxembourg Ambassador to the Czech Republic

## **2. Briefings with Council of Europe departments and bodies**

- Mr Paulo Pinheiro, President, Advisory Council on Youth

### 3. Meetings with the diplomatic community (in chronological order)

- Ambassador Luisella Pavan-Woolfe, Head of the delegation of the European Union to the Council of Europe
- Mr Benedict Gubler, Chargé d’Affaires a.i., Permanent representation of Switzerland
- Ambassador Armen Papikyan, Permanent Representative of Armenia to the Council of Europe

### 4. Contact with the media between 23 June and 31 August 2014 (in chronological order)

Media	Type	Country
Press Conference	various	various
Agency Europe	Press Agency	Europe
France 3	Television	France
International Press Institute and International Peace Bureau + Azerbaijan Journalists Network	Web	Azerbaijan
various		Stand up with Norwegian Speaker
Russia Today RTTV	Television	Russia
Rianovosti	Press Agency	Russia
Avenue Europe: Reuters, dpa, efe, ANSA, Itartass, AzerPress, RTV, ntv, Uradovyy Kuryer, Deutsche Welle	Press agency, written press, radios, televisions	France, United Kingdom, Spain, Italy, Germany, Russia, Turkey, Poland, Ukraine
Newsletter «Uni Tübingen aktuell», University of Tübingen	Web / Newsletter	Germany
Ecole de la Cause Freudienne (ECF)	Web	France

## **Appendix 2 – Activities between 2 and 29 September 2014**

### **1. Bilateral meetings (in chronological order)**

#### **Paris (1-2 September 2014)**

- Mr Sergey Naryshkin, Speaker of the State Duma of the Russian Federation

#### **Bucharest (3-5 September 2014)**

- Mr Valeriu Ştefan Zgonea, President, Chamber of Deputies
- Mr Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu, President of the Senate
- Mr Ioan Gruiu Bumbu, President of the National Agency for the Roma (ANR)
- Leaders of parliamentary groups of the opposition parties
- Mr Victor Ponta, Prime Minister
- Members of PACE Romanian Parliamentary delegation
- The representatives of local authorities, parliamentarians and euro-parliamentarians
- Prorector of Craiova University, representatives of academic and civil society
- Mr Alexander Seger, Executive Secretary, Cybercrime Convention Committee, Head of Cybercrime Programme Office (C-PROG)
- Ms Simona-Maya Teodoroiu, State Secretary, Ministry of Justice
- Ms Christina Schulman, Ministry of Justice, Vice-chair Cybercrime Convention Committee
- Ms Alina Mihaela Bica, Chief Prosecutor of the Directorate for Investigation of Organized Crime and Terrorism Offences within the Prosecution Office attached to the High Court of Cassation and Justice
- Mr George Ciamba, Secretary of State for European Affairs, Ministry for Foreign Affairs

#### **Oslo (9-12 September 2014)**

- Ms Ingjerd Schou, Vice-President of the Storting and Chair of the Norwegian delegation to the PACE
- Mr Olemic Thommessen, President of the Storting
- Mr Vidar Helgesen, Minister of EEA (European Economic Area) and EU Affairs
- Mr Oleksandr Turchynov, President of the Parliament of Ukraine
- Ms Doris Bures, President of the Parliament of Austria
- Mr Yuli-Yoel Edelstein, President of the Knesset
- Mr David Usupashvili, President of the Parliament of Georgia
- Mr Cemil Cicek, President of the Parliament of Turkey
- Mr Ivan Melnikov, Vice-President of the Duma of the Russian Federation
- Ms Hermine Naghdalyan, Vice-President of the Parliament of Armenia
- Mr Ogtay Asadov, President of the Parliament of Azerbaijan
- Mr Pietro Grasso, President of the Italian Senate
- Ms Laura Boldrini, President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies
- Mr Ilkka Kanerva, President, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
- Mr Norbert Lammert, President of the German Bundestag
- His Majesty King Harald V of Norway

### **Strasbourg (15-17 September 2014)**

- Members of the European Parliamentary Association
- Ms Federica Mogherini, Italian Minister for Foreign affairs and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (designated)
- Her Majesty Queen Máxima of the Netherlands
- Mr Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament

### **Rome (18-19 September 2014)**

- Mr Benedetto Della Vedova, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs
- Ms Laura Boldrini, President of the Italian Parliament

### **Baku (21-25 September 2014)**

- Meetings with representatives of Civil Society, media and diplomatic corps
- Mr Samad Seyidov, Chairperson of the PACE delegation of Azerbaidan
- Mr Zakir Garalov, Prosecutor General
- Mr Fikrat Mammadov, Minister of Justice
- Mr Mahmud Mammadgulyev, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs
- Mr Ilham Aliyev, President of Azerbaijan
- Representatives of political parties represented in Milli Mejlis
- Members of Azerbaijani Delegation to PACE
- Mr Ogtay Asadov, Chairman of Milli Mejlis

## **2. Bilateral meetings with Council of Europe departments and bodies**

- M. Thorbjorn Jagland, Secretary General
- M. Alexandre Guessel, Director, Directorate of Political Advice
- Mr Nils Muižnieks, Commissioner for Human Rights

## **3. Meetings with the diplomatic community (in chronological order)**

- Ms Michèle Eisenbarth, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of Luxembourg
- Mr Julius Georg Luy, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of Germany

## **4. Contact with the media between 2 and 29 September 2014 (in chronological order)**

<b>MEDIA</b>	<b>TYPE</b>	<b>COUNTRY</b>
Mlada Fronta Dnes	Newspaper	Czech Republic
CZ1 – Události, komentáře	Public television	
Czech News Agency (CTK) Agence France Presse Pravo Newspaper TV Nova	News agencies	
various	Stand up	COE/Paris
Dutch news and current affairs TV-program Nieuwsuur (Newshour)	TV	Netherlands
Novaya Gazeta Journal	Press correspondent in Paris	Russian Federation
Agence ITAR-TASS	Press correspondent	Russian Federation

<b>MEDIA</b>	<b>TYPE</b>	<b>COUNTRY</b>
Agence ITAR-TASS	Press correspondent	Russian Federation
Agence ITAR-TASS	Head of office	Russian Federation
RIA Novosti	Press agency	Russian Federation
RIA Novosti	Press agency	Russian Federation
Agence Interfax	Press agency	Russian Federation
RIA "RBC"	TV	Russian Federation
Izvestia Journal	Press	Russian Federation
Komsomolskaya Pravda Journal	Press	Russian Federation
Parlamnrnstkaya Gazeta Journal	Press	Russian Federation
Moskovskiy Komsomolets Journal	Press	Russian Federation
Rossiyskaya Gazeta Journal	Press	Russian Federation
Kommerssant Journal	Press	Russian Federation
Russia beyond the Headlines	Press	Russian Federation
"Pervy Canal" (ORT)	TV	Russian Federation
Krasny Kvadrat	TV	Russian Federation
Russian Federation n federation TV	TV	Russian Federation
NTV	TV	Russian Federation
TV-Centre	TV	Russian Federation
TRK "Zvezda"	TV	Russian Federation
REN-TV	TV	Russian Federation
5 Canal	TV	Russian Federation
Parlametsky chas	TV	Russian Federation
Radio Free Europe	Press correspondent	Russian Federation
Channel 5	TV	Russian Federation
AFP	Press agency	France
RFI	Radio	France
Le Monde	Press	France
Le Monde	Press	France
Anadolu Agency	Press agency	Turkey
TV2 Denmark (main news)	TV	Norway
Interview with Universitas.no,	University Newspaper	
Morgendablet	Press / leading weekly newspaper	
France 3	TV	France
various	Press conference	Azerbaijan

### **Appendix 3 – Conclusions of the conference presented by the President of PACE and the President of the Storting**

12 September 2014

*(Mrs Anne Brasseur, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe)*

Excellencies, dear colleagues,

During these two days, we have discussed three specific inter-related subjects, central to the work of national parliaments and interparliamentary institutions:

- fundamental constitutional rights and freedoms – participation, trust and public debate as conditions for democracy,
- democracy, sovereignty and security in Europe,
- majority and opposition – striking a balance in democracy.

It would be simply impossible, and unjust, for Mr Thommessen and for me to try to summarise all that has been discussed over the last two days. Instead, we have decided – each one of us in turn – to provide you with a “photograph” of what, in our view, are the topics which need emphasis. My remarks will concern issues relating to “the strengthening of democratic security in Europe,” while Mr Thommessen will concentrate on “the need to promote participation and inclusiveness.”

Permit me to recall, at the outset, that it was the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe which was at the origin of the idea to draft the European Convention on Human Rights, the Council of Europe’s greatest achievement. Also, it was the founding fathers of the Assembly who committed themselves to the construction, out of the ashes of hatred, of a new Europe, a Europe based on common values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. These values stand above any national or cultural specificities. Today 65 years after the establishment of the Council of Europe, we must continue to focus on what unites us and not on what divides us.

#### **Strengthening democratic security**

We, Europeans, living in prosperous, dynamic, democratic European states, believed that the atrocities of World War I and World War II would never be repeated. And yet, even after the initial euphoria of 1989 and 1990, our continent is now again faced with difficult, serious challenges, new fears and anxieties.

The recent tragic events in Ukraine reminds us of the fragility of ‘democracy’ as perceived by the Council of Europe’s founding fathers. We have not yet been able to prevent major human rights violations which we had mistakenly considered to be confined to the annals of history of our ‘civilised’ continent. Other older and as yet unresolved conflicts still undermine the security architecture of Europe, be it in Cyprus, Transnistria, South-Ossetia, Abkhazia or Nagorno-Karabakh. Similarly, we cannot ignore violations of human rights which pose threats to peace, stability and security at our Mediterranean borders and beyond. We must strive to prevent, or at least limit, the human suffering caused by these conflicts.

I recall, in this context, Resolution 1990 adopted last April by which the Parliamentary Assembly “strongly condemns the violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity by the Russian Federation, and considers that such a flagrant violation by a Council of Europe member State of its obligations and commitments requires a strong signal of disapproval.”

The Council of Europe, with its constitutional expert body, the Venice Commission, as well as the European Union, possess a substantial panoply of legal and other instruments to reinforce democratic institutions, human rights and the rule of law. This institutional architecture creates the framework to ensure freedom, security and prosperity.

We will be soon celebrating the 25 anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain, which marked the emergence of a Europe without dividing lines. A Europe without dividing lines means a Europe based on mutual respect and dialogue. Hopefully, we understand that, across the whole European continent, we have strong common interests which will prevent the building of a new Wall in the heart of Europe.

A further challenge we are facing is the need to redefine the relationship between fundamental freedoms and security. If we cannot downplay the need for reasonable security measures, these must not suppress freedom more than is required for the protection of the public interest. We condemn all forms of terrorism, which must be combatted effectively by means that fully respect human rights and the rule of law.

Participants agreed that democratic security and stability must be built first and foremost on the respect of fundamental human rights and freedoms, including when Europe faces a huge migratory flow.

There can be no balance between majority and opposition if human rights of men and women, minorities and majorities, rich and poor, are not adequately guaranteed and respected.

Dear colleagues,

Against the backdrop of the commemoration of the Norwegian Constitution's bicentenary, our discussions have reaffirmed the key functions that a constitution serves in a modern state:

The symbolic function: the constitution reflects the basic values on which the state, as indeed the society at large is based;

The political function: the constitution should provide guidelines for political bodies in their day-to-day decision-making, to conduct debates and lead the state and society in a direction based on consensus or political compromises;

And last but not least, the legal function whereby the constitution possesses a constraining effect on the legislator and executive authority. Fundamental rights are set forth, and acknowledged, by the Constitution; laws must respect their essential nature at all times.

What is unique in Europe is that constitutional protection of fundamental rights is further reinforced by their international protection by, in particular, the European Court of Human Rights. In this respect, we have a double responsibility to ensure that the European Convention of Human Rights remains the anchor point in this constitutional architecture:

Firstly, the responsibility to speak out on the dangers facing the European Court of Human Rights by the non-implementation of certain judgments of the Strasbourg Court and correct misinformation about its case law appearing in a number of media outlets.

Secondly, we, as parliamentarians, should work together to ensure accession of the European Union to the European Convention of Human Rights – a longstanding commitment – which would put into place a coherent system of human rights protection across our continent.

Europe needs strong parliaments to promote our common values established in our constitutions and legislation.

And we ourselves need to seriously rethink the way we are doing politics: not for short-term electoral gain, but with a long-term political vision in the interest also of future generations.

Finally, before giving the floor to Mr Thommessen, our host, I should like to quote a passage from the speech delivered yesterday evening by the Prime Minister of Norway, Ms Erna Solberg: *"Mistrust and lack of confidence within or between states will never be resolved by violence and aggression. They can only be addressed by respect for international law and human rights. This is a prerequisite for peaceful co-existence between peoples and states. It is crucial that all member states fully respect the United Nations Charter and the Statute of the Council of Europe."*

*(Mr Olemic Thommessen, President of the Storting)*

### **Promoting participation and inclusiveness**

It is the responsibility of national parliaments and parliamentarians themselves to keep an open mind to other points of views and support free public debate.

Our discussions – and indeed history – have shown that, however important formal constitutions based on democratic principles are, they provide no automatic guarantee of a full and vibrant democracy. The values and ideals that form the cornerstone of our constitutional traditions need to be strengthened on a daily basis by encouraging citizens' involvement and active participation.

Democracy is not only a political system whereby constitutional rights and freedoms are guaranteed by the supreme law – the Constitution; it is also a form of society which implies not only delegating and taking decisions, but also debating, participating in the conduct of public affairs and living together in dignity, respect, trust and solidarity.

Access to and transparency of decision-making as well as accountability of the decision makers are of key importance in this respect:

Transparency entails publication of public institutions' budgets and a policy of openness with respect to documents drafted by parliamentary committees of inquiry.

Accountability implies that elected representatives must be held accountable for their actions constantly and not only every four or five years when they seek the citizens' vote.

Democracy is an inclusive process in which all political actors should be able to participate. In this context, the role of the opposition – whether in parliament or outside – shall be addressed. The opposition in democracies guarantees transparent and responsible government in the public interest. More specifically, the opposition's role is to scrutinise the government's decisions and policies; to offer political alternatives by developing its own programmes and solutions; and to represent a credible alternative government.

However, the strength of the opposition primarily depends on the electoral system, and the quality of the opposition depends on parliamentary rules and working practice. Good opposition enhances political debate, it does not hinder it. Keeping the balance between majority and opposition and maintaining a fair parliamentary process imply that there should not be a dictatorship neither of the majority nor of the minority.

The current economic crisis and its severe social impact have led to millions of people – especially the youth – being jobless and lacking social safety-nets. This often results in a feeling of disenchantment, frustration and anger. It is only by reducing the gap between citizens and institutions that the former can regain trust in the latter.

Many of you have expressed deep concern with what you perceive as a crisis of confidence in traditional politics, and a lack of trust in the political system and its representatives. Some of you even highlighted a paradox: the more we increase openness and access to political processes, the deeper the mistrust and disengagement in traditional politics. Such disengagement is expressed, among others, through lower turn-out at elections and lower numbers of party memberships. This only underlines the challenge we are facing, and must overcome, to create a genuine and rich environment of continuous and inclusive participation.

We need parliaments fully “connected” to the people they serve. In this regard, participants mentioned examples of innovative good practices in order to promote increased participation of citizens, of civil society at large: by promoting the right of citizens to initiate legislation and to petition, and to be consulted through referenda, and by encouraging the consultation of NGOs, professional associations and other representative organisations.

The digital revolution of our age offers fresh opportunities but also raises new challenges in this respect. The internet offers a platform for political participation whereby the voice of the general public on a variety of societal matters can be heard. At the same time, it enables us, parliamentarians, to engage in dialogue with citizens on the activities of our parliaments and our committees. More and more parliaments are now present on the social media and this is surely a welcome development.

But, at the same time, we have to be cautious of the risk that social networking and the information flood can turn into a “cacophonous noise” rather than a civilised discussion. It can lead to a fragmented discussion conducted behind closed doors. It can occasionally offer a platform to propagate hate speech or even incite hate crime.

As democratic politicians, we firmly condemn, and stand up against, hate speech, hate crime and all forms of extremism, whatever their grounds and origin.

And as presidents of parliament, we resolve to foster broad and open public debate including on the common values upon which we want to build our future societies.

Both President Brasseur and myself are therefore strong supporters of the initiative to establish a European Day for the Victims of Hate Crimes. We encourage all of you, in your respective parliaments, to support and promote this idea. We also encourage you to support and promote the Council of Europe No Hate Speech Movement and the Parliamentary Assembly's No Hate Parliamentary Alliance.

Strengthening and empowering the civil society should be one of our objectives for the future. Greater participation by civil society in international and national decision making will increase peoples' trust.

At the same time, we need to safeguard the preconditions for representative democracy. Its institutions must interact with civil society but they cannot outsource accountability and responsibility for actual decision making.

Last but not least, we must not forget the young people. Youth represents our greatest potential. Youth parliaments or other innovative practices of involving young people in the decision making process can revitalise our democracies. And political parties should also more actively reach out to young people.

In strengthening democracy today, we should recall the Athenian example and place focus, yet again, on education for democratic citizenship or “education in public affairs” so that effective citizen participation is not an abstract right but a genuine practice put to test on a daily basis.

In conclusion, I am deeply grateful to all the participants who have attended the conference. I think we have had some very interesting interventions and discussions reflecting the many facets of the countries present. The diversity represented by our countries is an incredible asset. It is something we should embrace. But we must never lose sight of the values and principles that bind us, the values and principles to which we are all committed: democracy, respect for human rights, rule of law, and separation of powers of the state.

And we cannot accept the blatant violations of international law that we have seen in recent times in Ukraine.

Once again, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to all of you. Thank you for your contributions during our sessions and for all the knowledge and insights you have shared with us. It has been a great pleasure to have you in Oslo and I hope you have enjoyed your time here. I wish you safe journeys back to your capitals and I hope to see you again in the future.

This European Conference of Presidents of Parliaments has now come to a close.

Thank you.