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Activities of the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe between the first and the second part of the 2015 Ordinary session

Communication
President of the Assembly

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1. Visits and meetings

1.1. Activities of the President between 25 January and 1st March 2015

1.1.1. First part of the 2015 plenary session of the Assembly

1. During the January 2015 part-session, I held a series of bilateral meetings, in particular with Mr Michael D. Higgins, President of Ireland, Mr Didier Reynders, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belgium and Chairman of the Committee of Ministers, Mr Guy Ryder, Director General of the International Labour Organisation, as well as with the chairpersons and members of a number of member states' delegations to the Parliamentary Assembly. Moreover, I met several groups of civil society representatives (including from Azerbaijan and Ukraine) as well as the lawyer of Ms Nadiia Savchenko, member of the Ukrainian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly, currently in detention in Russia.

2. Following up on our debates during the January 2015 part-session, I participated, on 4 February 2015, in an exchange of views with the Ministers' Deputies.

1.1.2. Situation in Ukraine

3. The situation in Ukraine remained in the focus of my activities during this period.

4. During the January 2015 part-session, I met Mr Volodimir Ariev, Chairman of the Ukrainian delegation to the Assembly, to discuss in particular developments in the East of Ukraine and the situation of Ms Nadiia Savchenko.

5. During our meeting, I also raised the issue of the attack on two members of the Russian delegation to the Assembly, allegedly involving Ukrainian MPs, that occurred during the Assembly session on the forecourt of the Palais de l'Europe. This incident was subsequently discussed by the Presidential Committee and the Bureau. I have to point out that Mr Ariev apologised for this incident at the meeting of the Bureau of the Assembly on 30 January 2015. Following up on the discussion in the Bureau, I addressed a letter to the Speaker of the Ukrainian Parliament, Mr Volodimir Groysman, asking him to investigate this matter further as well as to take appropriate action, as required.

6. On 30 January 2015, I spoke over the telephone with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Mr Pavlo Klimkin, and briefed him on the debates during the 2015 first part session of the Assembly.

7. Regarding the situation of Ms Nadiia Savchenko, member of the Ukrainian delegation to the Assembly currently in detention in Russia, following up on the Bureau's discussions of 30 January 2015, I addressed a letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Mr Sergey Lavrov, confirming Ms Savchenko's immunity granted on the basis of the General Agreement on Privileges and Immunities of the Council of Europe and of the Additional Protocol thereto, as well as requesting that the Russian authorities take the necessary steps to ensure unhindered participation of Ms Savchenko in the Assembly's activities.

8. Welcoming the signing in Minsk, on 12 February 2015, of the Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements, I called on all sides to stop violence and act responsibly to preserve and implement the Minsk agreements. Moreover, I expressed hope that this opportunity for peace be seized so as to allow Ukraine to move forward with the necessary reforms, including changes to the constitution and decentralisation.

9. However, as the fighting continued after the 15 February deadline, I condemned, on 18 February 2015, the hostilities in the Debaltseve area, as a flagrant violation of the cease-fire agreement.

10. Moreover, I expressed support to the calls of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Ms Federica Mogherini, and Assembly's Rapporteur on the political consequences of the crisis in Ukraine, Ms Kristýna Zelienková, for a safe passage for those who wish to leave Debaltseve.

11. Regarding the implementation of paragraph 17 of Resolution 2034 (2015) on Challenge, on substantive grounds, of the still unratified credentials of the delegation of the Russian Federation[1], following the Bureau decision of 30 January 2015, I addressed letters to the Speakers of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and of the State Duma of the Russian Federation to seek their initial reactions concerning the proposal to establish a special working group. I have not yet received any reaction from the Speakers.

12. I will continue to follow the developments in Ukraine, with a view to contributing, in particular, to the implementation of Assembly Resolution 2034(2015).

1.1.3. Response to the recent manifestations of extremism and anti-Semitism in Denmark and in France

13. On 15 February 2015, I expressed shock at the deadly shootings in Copenhagen that occurred during the debate on freedom of expression and at a synagogue. This yet another terrorist attack targeting our basic values and freedoms calls for urgent action by all democratic political forces to counteract manifestations of hate and intolerance.

14. In a letter to the Speaker of the Danish Parliament, Mr Mogens Lykketoft, I expressed sincere condolences to the people of Denmark, the victims and their families for this terrible attack and loss of life, as well as called for continuing our fight against intolerance and anti-Semitism.

15. On 17 February 2015, I attended an official ceremony at the Jewish cemetery in Sarre-Union, France, where hundreds of tombs were damaged on the night of 14-15 February. High-level political representatives of the French authorities participated in this ceremony, including the President of the French Republic, Mr François Hollande, the Presidents of both chambers of the French Parliament and the Interior Minister. Representatives of local authorities, as well as religious leaders attended the ceremony too. On the sidelines of the ceremony, I had a brief exchange with the President of France, Mr François Hollande, expressing the Assembly's solidarity with the French people and authorities and reiterating our invitation to address the Assembly during one of our forthcoming part-sessions.

1.1.4. Official visit to Croatia (19-20 February 2015)

16. At the invitation of the Speaker of the Croatian Parliament, I paid an official visit to Zagreb on 19-20 February 2015. During this visit, I met Croatian President, Ms Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, Prime Minister, Mr Zoran Milanović, the Speaker of the Croatian Parliament, Mr Josip Leko, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Ms Vesna Pusić, the chairpersons and members of the parliamentary committees on human and minority rights, legislation, and judiciary, as well as the members of the Croatian delegation to the Assembly. Moreover, I addressed the Croatian Parliament and delivered a lecture at the University of Zagreb.

17. I would like to thank the authorities as well as the Croatian delegation to the Assembly for the excellent organisation of this visit as well as for their hospitality.

18. Summing up the results of my discussions, I praised the excellent co-operation between Croatia and the Council of Europe, in particular, as regards the ratification of Council of Europe conventions and the use of Council of Europe expertise in the implementation of reforms in the field of judiciary and fighting corruption. I welcomed the support of the Prime Minister and of the Speaker of Parliament for the prompt ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on combating violence against women and domestic violence, and expressed hope that the necessary legal procedures would be completed soon.

19. Praising Croatia's contribution to regional co-operation, both as a member State of the Council of Europe and, since 2013, a member of the European Union, I encouraged the authorities to share their best practices with neighbouring countries.

20. At the same time, I encouraged the authorities and the political stakeholders to maintain the momentum of reform and offered Council of Europe support to improve further the efficiency of the judiciary, raise judges' awareness of the standards of the European Convention on Human Rights, promote minority rights protection, and effectively combat corruption.

21. Speaking about the co-operation with the Croatian Parliament, I welcomed the Croatian delegation's activities aiming at giving a follow up to Assembly resolutions and monitoring the execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights.

22. As regards the combating of hate speech and counteracting manifestations of extremism and terrorism, I supported the view of the Croatian Speaker Josip Leko that our answer to hate-speech should be to make our democratic institutions stronger, stressing that politicians bear a special responsibility to promote inclusiveness, tolerance and respect.

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1. Paragraph 17 of Resolution 2034 (2015) reads "The Assembly invites the Bureau of the Assembly to consider setting up, pending the agreement of the parliaments concerned, a special working group with the participation of the Speakers of the Russian State Duma and the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada, or their representatives, to contribute to the realisation of all the propositions made in this resolution and to formulate further possible action by the Parliamentary Assembly in support of the implementation of the Minsk protocols".

23. My discussion with the President of Croatia, Ms Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, focused in particular on regional co-operation and on the Council of Europe's response to the crisis in Ukraine. I saluted the President's commitment to European values and standards and invited her to address the Assembly during one of our forthcoming sessions.

24. Turning to regional co-operation, I encouraged the countries of the region to continue their efforts to promote dialogue and reconciliation, addressing in particular the issues of refugee return and integration, as well as co-operation in the field of prosecution of war crimes.

1.1.5. Other activities

25. On 4 February 2015, I met Mr Nils Muižnieks, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights. We held an exchange of views on developments in a number of member States, in particular, in Ukraine, in Azerbaijan and in Russia.

26. On 11 February 2015, I met the First Vice President of the European Commission, Mr Frans Timmermans. Among other issues, we discussed the accession of the European Union to the European Convention on Human Rights and to other Council of Europe conventions, in particular, the Istanbul Convention on Combating violence against women and domestic violence, the situation with human rights in a number of our member States, as well as our action to counteract manifestations of populism and extremism in politics.

1.2. Activities of the President between 1st March and 16 April 2015

1.2.1. Visits to Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Belgrade and Novi Sad, 9-11 March; Sarajevo, 11-13 March 2015)

27. For the second year of my mandate as President of the Assembly, I decided to focus my activities more specifically on the countries of South-East and Eastern Europe, as well as on the Southern Neighbourhood. It is within this context that I travelled in February 2015 to Croatia for an official visit (please see my previous communication to the Bureau).

28. At the beginning of March, I paid official visits to Serbia (9-11 March 2015) and to Bosnia and Herzegovina (11-13 March 2015), upon the invitation of the Speakers of the Parliaments of these countries.

29. It became clear in my discussions that European integration was the main driving force to democratic reforms in the region. This offers an excellent opportunity for joining efforts between the Council of Europe and the European Union in supporting domestic reforms, in particular, in areas relating to democracy, human rights and the Rule of law.

30. In Serbia, I welcomed the progress achieved in the implementation of commitments and obligations to the Council of Europe and encouraged the authorities to keep the momentum of reforms in a number of priority areas. I particularly stressed the need to reform further the judiciary, strengthen media pluralism and transparency of media ownership, as well as uphold minority rights. In this context, I called all stakeholders to combine their efforts to achieve a common goal: making Serbia's democracy stronger, upholding the rule of law, and guaranteeing the protection of human and minority rights to the highest European standards, emphasizing the need for parliamentarians from both the majority and the opposition to exercise political control over the executive and scrutinise government action.

31. As some reforms require a change in the Constitution, I encouraged the authorities to take full advantage of the expertise of the Venice Commission for this reform process.

32. Meeting with the representatives of the minority communities in Vojvodina, I welcomed the good legal framework for the protection of minority rights as well as the spirit of dialogue and co-operation that exist between the representatives of the minority communities and the authorities. I stressed the importance of dialogue to address unresolved issues, emphasising that the National Councils of National Minorities were a good mechanism for finding solutions together.

33. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, I welcomed the commitment of all institutions and political stakeholders to the European agenda. In my discussions I could feel the broad consensus of all actors of society around reforms and European integration. I was encouraged by the fact that an agreement was reached about the formation of governments at the State level as well as in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina during my visit. Therefore, I called the political stakeholders to shoulder their responsibilities, be ready for compromise in the interests of all citizens, and agree on a reform agenda.

34. Welcoming the approval of the EU integration declaration by the Presidency, the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the main political parties, I called on the authorities and the key political stakeholders to seize this opportunity to implement a comprehensive reform agenda, including fulfilling the outstanding commitments and obligations to the Council of Europe, in particular, the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights in the Sejdic and Finci and Zornic cases.

35. Turning to the forthcoming chairmanship of Bosnia and Herzegovina of the Committee of Ministers, I expressed support for the proposed activities and encouraged the authorities to seek synergies with regional partners. The fact that during this year Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia are chairing, respectively, the Council of Europe and the OSCE offers an ideal opportunity to bring a regional dimension to the action of our Organisations in addressing Pan-European challenges, such as counteracting manifestations of extremism, promoting living together, inter-cultural dialogue and its religious dimension, as well as fostering democratic participation of youth. I understand that discussions on this front are ongoing and look forward to supporting possible joint actions in my capacity as President of the Assembly.

36. Naturally, in addition to the Council of Europe's co-operation with Serbia and with Bosnia and Herzegovina, my discussions in both countries focused on the regional political agenda, including the issues of reconciliation and dialogue and the situation of refugees and IDPs. In this context, I stressed the role that all countries of the region have to play to ensure regional stability, once again emphasising that European integration was an opportunity for further consolidating peace and promoting co-operation. Ensuring that justice is served for the past and searching – together – for common solutions to common problems is a must. Dialogue is the only way to move forward and I praised the authorities of the countries of the region for their commitment and their willingness to develop personal contacts.

37. Speaking about Pan-European co-operation, I highlighted the special role of politicians in combating intolerance, hate speech, as well as all manifestations of populism and extremism in politics, calling upon the Parliamentarians of Serbia and of Bosnia and Herzegovina to actively participate in the "No Hate Parliamentary Alliance".

1.2.2. Visit to Italy (Rome, Sicily, 30 March-2 April 2015)

38. During my official visit to Italy, the human rights challenges of migration, as well as the situation of refugees and asylum seekers arriving to Italy's southern shores, was the main focus of the discussions. I particularly welcomed the enormous effort made by the Italian authorities to save hundreds of lives in the Mediterranean.

39. Focusing on migration issues, I stressed that Italy faced a particular challenge as a front-line State in the mixed flows of irregular migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. While problems persist, including in terms of delays in registering and processing persons arriving by boat on Italy's shores, it is clear that Italy cannot stand alone in its efforts to deal with wave after wave of boat people. Greater responsibility-sharing is needed with other European countries.

40. In this context, I highlighted the need to change the Dublin system which, in my opinion, is not only antiquated and unable to deal with today's challenges but is also unfair for first entry countries and for asylum seekers alike.

41. While in Sicily, it was clear to me that asylum seekers accommodated in Mineo were well provided for, but the time they have to wait in the center for a decision on their asylum claims remains too long. I was pleased to note the commitment and efforts of all those involved, governmental and non-governmental, in looking after the asylum seekers. The center in Mineo is managed in an excellent manner and could serve as an example to other centers. I was also heartened by the authorities' intention to continue their policy of reducing the size of the different centers in general, and the decentralisation of these across Italy.

42. Turning to co-operation between Italy and the Council of Europe, I highlighted in particular the country's contribution to constitutional reform in Council of Europe member States through the work of the Venice Commission for Democracy through Law, its efforts to tackle violence against women and its catalytic role in re-launching the European Social Charter as a means of protecting social rights in Europe.

43. Speaking about domestic reforms, I highlighted two other important issues needing urgent attention.

44. Firstly, recent corruption cases confirm that the fight against corruption must continue to be on top of the agenda for all political forces.

45. Secondly, I highlighted the excessive length of judicial proceedings. Notwithstanding recent progress, this still remains a major problem for Italy, including under the European Convention on Human Rights. In this context, I raised in a number of meetings the issue of implementation of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and encouraged the setting up of a parliamentary body to deal with this matter.

1.2.3. Visit to Turkey (Ankara, Gaziantep, Istanbul, 7 to 10 April 2015)

46. The issue of migration was also in the focus of my official visit to Turkey. In my meetings, I stressed that Turkey has always been a bridge between Europe and Asia, and is now facing enormous challenges in view of its geographical position. Two million refugees from Syria and Iraq have fled across this bridge, been welcomed in Turkey and provided with asylum. I would like to praise the Turkish authorities not only for their reception of these refugees – which I witnessed with my own eyes at the Elbeyli Camp in Kilis – but also for the way in which they are developing a longer-term strategy to integrate them in Turkey.

47. Turkey has invested 5.5 billion dollars to provide for these refugees, while the international community has, by contrast, donated a meager 250 million dollars. The international community, and Europe in particular, must now step up and help Turkey and the refugees in what has become a hugely complicated and protracted refugee situation, with much at stake for both Europe and the people affected.

48. Turning to the issue of the domestic political agenda, I expressed my horror at the recent terrorist attack which led to the killing of prosecutor Mehmet Selim Kiraz in Istanbul. I supported the Chair of the Constitutional Court in his statement that the first way to tackle terrorism is to guarantee human rights.

49. Turkey has come a long way in recent decades economically, but also in terms of how it protects and guarantees human rights. Some issues remain, however, which I raised with the President, the Prime Minister and other interlocutors. The most sensitive of these was the question of freedom of expression and freedom of the press, as well as the proportionality of some recent restrictive decisions, including in relation to social media. I did however make it clear that freedom of expression cannot be unlimited, and that social media now bring new challenges which we have yet to find answers for.

50. I also had the opportunity of putting forward, with the Speaker of Parliament, a proposal for a body in Parliament to assess the implementation of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, and highlighted to different partners the role that the Council of Europe's Venice Commission could play in providing advice on controversial legislation and issues, such as recent security measures, the role of the majority and the opposition, and also the 10 % threshold for parties in elections.

51. Finally, in my meeting with President Erdogan, I welcomed the steps he had taken to find solutions to the long-running and bitter Kurdish conflict and encouraged him, and all sides, to take further measures to solve remaining tensions and problems.

1.2.4. Visit to Armenia (13-14 April 2015)

52. At the invitation of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, I travelled to Yerevan on 13 and14 April, for an official visit.

53. During this visit, I met the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the National Assembly and the Foreign Minister. Meetings were also held with the Chairs of the Human Rights and Foreign Affairs Committees, the leaders of parliamentary groups in the National Assembly, the Armenian delegation to Parliamentary Assembly, representatives of civil society and students from Yerevan State University. Speaking at the end of my visit, I welcomed the steady advancement of Armenia on the path of implementing the commitments and obligations it undertook when joining the Council of Europe.

54. At the same time, while acknowledging the progress made in the 14 years of membership in the Organisation, I drew the authorities' attention to the need to address a number of remaining issues, in particular, as regards the independence of the judiciary, the administration of justice, as well as the fight against corruption. In this context, I welcomed the good co-operation between Armenia and the Council of Europe within the framework of the Action Plan 2012-2014 and encouraged the authorities to develop new co-operation programmes.

55. Two issues were in the centre of my discussions with all interlocutors: constitutional reform and combating domestic violence.

56. As regards the constitutional reform, while welcoming positive co-operation with the Venice Commission, I stressed the need to organise a wide political debate about the reform proposals, with the participation of all political and civil society stakeholders. The amendments to be drafted should comply with European standards and be adopted on the basis of a large consensus within society.

57. Turning to combating domestic violence and violence against women, I referred to the recent report of the Human Rights Commissioner, which highlights a number of serious problems in this field in Armenia. Therefore, I called upon all my interlocutors to take urgent action on all fronts to address it, including by acceding to the Council of Europe Convention on combating violence against women and domestic violence. I understand that preparatory work has been launched and look forward to Armenia's joining this Convention soon.

58. As far as regional issues are concerned, I raised the issue of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as well as relations between Armenia and Turkey.

59. When joining the Council of Europe, Armenia and Azerbaijan committed themselves to continue efforts to settle the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by peaceful means only. Our Assembly has consistently expressed support for the settlement efforts, in particular by the Co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group. I would like to thank all my Armenian interlocutors for having explained to me – in a very frank and open manner – their views on the Assembly's activities on issues relating to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. I agree that this issue is very complex and has to be examined without haste and taking into account all factors. All Assembly reports must be balanced and take into account the views of all sides. As President, it is my duty to guarantee the implementation of decisions taken by Assembly bodies.

60. Turning to the relations between Armenia and Turkey, I stressed that both countries share a common history and, as members of the Council of Europe, adhere to the same values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. I am confident that these very values, which unite all Council of Europe member States, will help both countries make – together – peace with the past and build a shared future. In this context, during my visit I paid tribute to the victims of the 1915 massacres and highlighted the role that the Council of Europe should play in preventing such atrocities from happening again. It is the Council of Europe's mission to uphold our values and promote the principles of respect and tolerance. We must learn the lessons of Europe's history and stay united to vigorously combat manifestations of hate and intolerance, as well as promote dialogue and living together.

1.2.5. Other activities

1.2.5.1. Participation in the International March Against Terrorism (Tunis, 29 March 2015)

61. On 18 March 2015, I strongly condemned the terrorist attack on the Bardo museum in Tunis, stressing that there can be no justification for terrorism. Condemning in the strongest possible terms those who through violence and fear want to threaten peace and stability, I emphasised that our response to extremism should be to make our democracies stronger.

62. Expressing our full support to the Tunisian authorities, I took part, on 29 March 2015, in the international march against terrorism in Tunis, marching alongside Tunisian President Beji Caid Essebsi, French President François Hollande, Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi and many other international political leaders who came to Tunis, including Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian National Authority. I emphasised that Tunisian society has clearly shown that any attempt to intimidate this young democracy would not succeed. Tunisia will remain on its path of democratic reforms and will continue to have our full support.

1.2.5.2. High-level conference on "Implementation of the European Convention, our shared responsibility", organised in the framework of the Presidency of the Committee of Ministers by Belgium

63. On 26 March 2015, I attended the opening session of the high-level conference on the "Implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights: our shared responsibility" organised within the framework of the Belgian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers. In my opening presentation, I reaffirmed the key role of the Parliamentary Assembly and its members in safeguarding the central role of the European Convention on Human Rights, as a constitutional instrument of European public order, as well as in ensuring that the standards of the Convention are effectively protected and implemented domestically.

64. In my statement, I focused on the contribution of the Parliamentary Assembly to implementation of the standards of the European Court of Human Rights. This includes monitoring of the execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, as well as providing targeted training to parliamentarians and parliamentary staff on the standards of the European Convention on Human Rights.

1.2.5.3. Bilateral meetings with the members of the European Parliament

65. In the margins of my participation in the high-level conference on the "Implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights: our shared responsibility", I met Mr Elmar Brok, President of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament, Mr Claude Moraes, President of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home affairs, Ms Elena Valenciano, President of the Sub-Committee on Human Rights of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, as well as the leaders of the EPP and Social-Democrat Groups, Mr Manfred Weber and Mr Gianni Pittella. Our discussions focused on the complementarity between the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly in addressing current political challenges, in particular, the crisis in Ukraine and the rise of populism, extremism and terrorism. Stressing the need to support the Ukrainian authorities in implementing reforms, including the Constitutional reform and decentralisation, I highlighted the contribution that the Venice Commission could make to this process. Turning the threat of extremism, I stressed the need to promote tolerance, dialogue and living together, calling for co-operation between the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly on this front, including through the "No Hate Parliamentary Alliance".

66. Moreover, I held an exchange of views with the representatives of main human rights NGOs following Council of Europe activities, organised in co-operation with the Council of Europe Liaison Office in Brussels.

1.2.5.4. Participation in the Conference devoted to the 25th anniversary of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT)

67. Speaking at the opening of the Conference devoted to the 25th anniversary of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), I stressed that the absolute prohibition of torture, enshrined in Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights, is undoubtedly the cornerstone of the system of protection of human rights in Europe. This prohibition may not be suspended, or waived, even in time of war or other public emergency threatening the life of the nation. Today, at a time when the fear of terrorism resurfaces, it is our shared responsibility to resist any temptation to dilute this rule.

68. Praising the outstanding work of the CPT, I recalled that parliamentarians also had the responsibility to open up these opaque places where people are detained and to denounce inhumane conditions and abuses. The work of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons is fundamental in this regard: it has developed a guide seeking to raise awareness of the right and responsibility of parliamentarians to visit detention centers for irregular migrants and asylum seekers and it actively encourages MPs in carrying out these visits.

69. I seized this opportunity to promote the Assembly's initiative to organise simultaneous visits by Parliamentary Assembly national delegations to immigration detention centers in our 47 member States on the International Migrants Day (18 December).

1.2.5.5. Visit to a detention center for immigrants in Luxembourg

70. Immediately after the above-mentioned conference, I carried out a visit to a detention center for irregular migrants in Luxembourg, together with members of the Luxembourg delegation. This visit allowed me to make further comparisons between the different centers existing in Europe and to be aware of the challenges that detained persons in Luxembourg, and the authorities running this center face.

1.2.5.6. Joint meeting between the Presidential Committee and the Enlarged Bureau of the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), and participation in the 102nd Plenary session of the Venice Commission

71. The participation in these meetings allowed us to discuss a range of issues including Ukraine and constitutional changes and priority reforms, as well as the challenges to freedom of association brought about through various "foreign agents laws" in countries such as Russia and Azerbaijan. We also looked at the issue

of how to tackle recurrent boycotting by the opposition in parliament, compared notes on our co-operation during election observation missions, and looked at the ongoing perspectives for co-operation in the Southern neighbourhood.

72. As always this exchange of views with members of the Venice Commission was extremely interesting and important for our ongoing work and co-operation.

1.2.5.7. Participation in meetings of Assembly committees

73. On 23 March 2015, I attended a meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons. In my speech I focused on the importance of genuine European migration policies, with shared responsibility and greater solidarity, and stressed the crucial role of the dialogue with non-European countries in addressing current migration challenges. I welcomed the activities to be launched by the committee, for instance the Campaign on Ending Immigration Detention of Children and the programme of coordinated visits by parliamentarians to migrant detention centers on the occasion of the International Migrants Day (18 December 2015). I also stressed that the rise of racism and intolerance in Europe is a cause of concern for the Migration Committee and encouraged a closer co-operation with the no hate parliamentary alliance.

1.2.5.8. Situation of Ms Nadiia Savchenko, member of the Ukrainian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, currently in detention in Russia

74. During this period I continued to follow, with great concern, the situation of our colleague, Ms Nadiia Savchenko, member of the Ukrainian delegation to the Assembly, currently in detention in Russia. On the basis of information I received from Ms Savchenko's lawyers, I made several calls upon the Russian authorities to free the Ukrainian pilot and Parliamentary Assembly member who is on hunger strike in a Moscow prison, including on humanitarian grounds.

2. Press releases

1. PACE President reiterates call on all sides to respect Minsk Cease-fire Agreement and Protocol (24 January 2015)
2. Václav Havel Human Rights Prize: the dream is not over (4 February 2015)
3. Lampedusa: another tragedy that should have been avoided by all means (11 February 2015)
4. Anne Brasseur welcomes announcement of ceasefire in Ukraine (12 February 2015)
5. Copenhagen terrorist attack targets our values and freedoms (15 February 2015)
6. 'We must stand united against intolerance' says Anne Brasseur at Sarre-Union ceremony (17 February 2015)
7. PACE President condemns flagrant violation of cease-fire agreement (18 February 2015)
8. PACE President praises the excellent co-operation between Croatia and the Council of Europe (20 February 2015)
9. PACE President reacts to shooting of Boris Nemtsov in Moscow (28 February 2015)
10. PACE President calls for release of PACE member arrested in Moscow (1 March 2015)
11. 'We must resist the temptation to dilute the absolute ban on torture' (2 March 2015)
12. Anne Brasseur shocked at conditions in Yarl's Wood detention center (3 March 2015)
13. PACE President: 'Time is running out for Nadiia Savchenko' (3 March 2015)
14. PACE President salutes women and men who fight for women's rights (6 March 2015)
15. Anne Brasseur: 'Serbia is a full member of our Pan-European community of values' (12 March 2015)
16. Bosnia and Herzegovina: PACE President welcomes commitment to European agenda (13 March 2015)
17. Crash of a helicopter carrying a sick child for treatment in Belgrade (14 March 2015)
18. PACE President strongly condemns the terrorist attack in Tunis (18 March 2015)

19. Day Against Racism: education has a key role to combat prejudices (20 March 2015)
20. PACE President extends her condolences to the German and Spanish peoples (25 March 2015)
21. Implementing the European Convention on Human Rights: a shared responsibility (26 March 2015)
22. Tunis: PACE President at the international march against terrorism (29 March 2015)
23. PACE President calls for greater support for Italy in dealing with boat people (2 April 2015)
24. Istanbul court-house attack: PACE President sends message of sympathy to Turkish Speaker (2 April 2015)
25. PACE President, ending visit: Turkey is more essential than ever (10 April 2015)
26. PACE President welcomes Armenia's steady advancement on path of reform (15 April 2015)

3. Speeches

– Opening speech of the 1st part of the Ordinary session of 2015 (26 January 2015)
– Speech of the occasion of the commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the Camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau (26 January 2015)
– Exchange of views on "Young people as a key to conflict resolution and peace building in Europe" at the meeting of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media (28 January 2015)
– Speech delivered on the occasion of the launch of the No Hate Parliamentary Alliance (29 January 2015)
– Exchange of views with the Ministers' Deputies (Strasbourg, 4 February 2015)
– Address to the members of the Croatian Parliament (Zagreb, 20 February 2015)
– Lecture at the University of Zagreb (Croatia, 20 February 2015)
– Opening address on "The CPT at 25: taking stock and moving forward" (Strasbourg, 2 March 2015)
– Lecture at the Faculty of Political Sciences (Belgrade, Serbia, 9 March 2015)
– Address to the Members of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia (Belgrade, 10 March 2015)
– Lecture at the Sarajevo University (Bosnia and Herzegovina, 11 March 2015)
– Exchange of views with the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons (Paris, 23 March 2015)
– Opening address at High-level Conference on the "Implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights: our shared responsibility (Brussels, 26 March 2014)
– Lecture at the University of Catania (Italy, 1 April 2015)
– Lecture at the Bilkent University (Turkey, 7 April 2015)
– Lecture at the Yerevan State University (Armenia, 14 April 2015)

Appendix 1 – Activities between 26 January and 1st March 2015

Meetings (in chronological order)

1. First part of the Ordinary session of 2015 (Strasbourg, 26-30 January 2015)

– Mr Sergey Naryshkin, President of the State Duma of the Russian Federation
– Mr Joseph Daul, President, EPP
– Ms Ida Grinspan, survivor to the Holocaust
– Mr Didier Reynders, Minister for Foreign and European Affairs of Belgium, Chairman of the Committee of Ministers
– Mr Paul Arkwright, Director Multilateral Policy, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and MM. Matthew Johnson and Lucy Ahad, Europe and Democracy Team Leader, Multilateral Policy Department, FCO
– Mr Michael D. Higgins, President of Ireland, and Mrs Higgins
– Representatives of the Open Dialog Foundation : Ms Lyudmyla Kozlovska, President, Ms Anna Koj, Head of the EU Office and Mr Mark Feygin, lawyer of Ms Nadiia Savchenko
– Ms Dinara Yunus, Human rights activist, Azerbaijan
– Mr Michel Aguilar, President, Human Rights Committee, INGO Conference
– Mr Guy Ryder, Director General of the International Labour Organisation
– Ms Gulnara Akhundova, International Media Support and Mr Zohrab Ismayil, Assistance to Free Economy, International Media Support and Human Rights House Foundation
– Mr Pavlo Klimkin, Minister for Foreign Affairs for Ukraine (telephone conversation)

Parliamentary Assembly Members

– Mr Volodymyr Ariev, Chairperson of the Ukrainian delegation
– Members of the delegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
– Mr Margus Hanson, member of the Estonian delegation (in absence of Mr Saar, Chairperson of the delegation)
– Mr Reha Denemeç, Chairperson of the Turkish delegation
– Mr Michele Nicoletti, Chairperson of the Italian delegation
– Members of the Moroccan delegation
– Mr José Maria Beneyto, Chairperson of the Spanish delegation
– Chairpersons of national delegations
– Mr Tedo Japaridze, Chairperson of the Georgian delegation
– Mr Gvozden Srećko Flego, Chairperson of the Croatian delegation
– Ms Inese Libina-Egnere, Chairperson of the delegation of Latvia
– Mr Andriy Lopushanskyy, member of the Ukrainian delegation
– Ms Aleksandra Djurović, Chairperson of the Serbian delegation
– Ms Hermine Naghdalyan, Chairperson of the Armenian delegation
– Mr Mehmet Çağlar, Representative of the Turkish Cypriot community

2. Strasbourg (3-4 February and 10-11 February 2015)

– Mr Frans Timmermans, First Vice-President, European Commission
– Mr René Rouquet, Chairperson of the French delegation (telephone conversation)

– Mr Olemic Thommessen, President, Parliament of Norway (telephone conversation)

3. Ceremony at the Jewish cemetery in Sarre-Union (France) (17 February 2015)

Participation in the ceremony, in presence of:

– Mr François Hollande, President of the French Republic
– Mr Gérard Larcher, President of the French Senate
– Mr Claude Bartolone, President of the French National Assembly
– Mr Bernard Cazeneuve, Interior Minister of France
– Representatives of local authorities
– Religious leaders

4. Official visit to Croatia (18-20 February 2015) (in chronological order)

– Professor Gvozden Srećko Flego, Head of the Croatian Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and members of the Croatian Delegation to the Assembly
– Mr Josip Leko, Speaker of the Croatian Parliament
– Mr Furio Radin, Chairperson, and members of the Committee on Human and National Minority Rights, Croatian Parliament
– Professor Josip Kregar, Chairperson, and members of the Judiciary Committee, Croatian Parliament
– Ms Ingrid Antičević Marinović, Chairperson, and members of the Legislation Committee, Croatian Parliament
– Mr Zoran Milanović, Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia
– Professor Damir Boras, PhD, Rector of the University of Zagreb
– Ms Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, President of the Republic of Croatia
– Ms Vesna Pusić, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affaires of the Republic of Croatia

5. Meetings with Council of Europe personalities (in chronological order)

– Mr Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General
– Mr Nils Muižnieks, Commissioner for Human Rights
– Ms Snežana Samardžić-Marković, Director General, DG II, Directorate General of Democracy
– Mr Philippe Boillat, Director General, DG I, Directorate General Human Rights and Rule of law
– Heads of Secretariats of the Parliamentary Assembly Committees

6. Meetings with the diplomatic community (in chronological order)

– Mr Dirk Van Eeckhout, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of Belgium
– Mr Manuel Jacoangeli, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of Italy
– Mr Rolands Lappuķe, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of Latvia
– Ms Gea Rennel, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of Estonia
– Mr Almir Šahović, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina

– Mr Miroslav Papa, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of Croatia

– Mr Zoran Popović, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of Serbia

– Mr Rudolf Lennkh, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of Austria

– Ms Jocelyne Caballero, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of France

7. Contacts with media between 26 January and 1st March 2015

MEDIA	TYPE	PAYS
Parliamentary channel	TV	Luxembourg
Rain TV + Russia today	TV	Russia
Russian journalists (study visit)		Russia
RT TV Russia Today	TV	Russia
Deutsche Welle	TV	Germany
Le Journal	Council of Europe Internet	
Mediabox	internet	
Annual meeting with local journalists	Various	Representatives of local media and international journalists based in Strasbourg.
Press conference at the opening of the 2015 1st part-session		

Appendix 2 – Activities between 1st March and 16 April 2015

Visits and meetings

1. Visit to a detention center for migrants in Luxembourg (3 March 2015)

– Mr Vincent Sybertz, Director and Ms Sophie Rodesch, Deputy Director

2. Official visit to Serbia (9-11 March 2015) (in chronological order)

– Mr Ivica Dacić, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs
– Representatives of the civil sector
– Ms Maja Gojković, Speaker of the National Assembly
– Heads of Parliamentary Groups of the National Assembly
– Chairperson and members of the Committee on Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality of the National Assembly
– Members of the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Serbian Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly
– Members of the Culture and Information Committee of the National Assembly
– Mr Tomislav Nikolić, President of the Republic of Serbia
– Mr Aleksandar Vucić, Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia
– Ms Ana Tomanova Makanova, Deputy President of the Assembly of Autonomous Province of Vojvodina
– Representatives of the National Councils in the Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina

3. Visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina (12-13 March 2015) (in chronological order)

– Mr Vjekoslav Bevanda, Chairman of the Council of Ministries of Bosnia and Herzegovina
– Zlatko Lagumdzija, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina
– Members of the Collegium of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Parliamentary Assembly:
  - Mr Sefik Džaferović, Speaker of the House of Representatives
  - Mr Bariša Čolak, Speaker of the House of Peoples
  - Ms Borjana Krišto, First Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives
  - Mr Mladen Bosić, Second Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives
  - Mr Ognjen Tadić, First Deputy Speaker of the House of Peoples
  - Mr Safet Softić, Second Deputy Speaker of the House of Peoples
– Representatives of the Parliamentary committees:
  - Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives
  - Constitutional-Legal Committee, House of Representatives
– Mr Mladen Ivanić, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia of Herzegovina
– Members of the Delegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Parliamentary Assembly
– Representative of NGO's

4. Meetings in Brussels and Conference on "Implementation of the European Convention, our shared responsibility" (25-26 March 2015) (in chronological order)

– Ms Elena Valenciano, President, Sub-Committee on Human Rights of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, European Parliament

– Mr Manfred Weber, President of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) in the European Parliament

– Mr Claude Moraes, President, Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, European Parliament

– Representatives of Non-Governmental Organisations (Amnesty International, PICUM, International Federation for Human Rights, Open Society European Policy Institute)

– Mr Gianni Pittella, President of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament

– Mr Elmar Brok, President, Committee on Foreign Affairs, member of the European People's Party Group in the European Parliament

– Mr Bogdan Lucian Aurescu, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Romania

5. Visit to Tunisia (28-29 March 2015)

– Mr Mohamed Ennaceur, President of the Assembly of People's Representatives

6. Official visit to Italy (30 March–2 April 2015) (in chronological order)

– Mr Roland Schilling, Deputy Director UNHCR Rome

– Mr Pietro Grasso, Speaker of the Senate

– Ms Laura Boldrini, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies

– Mr Domenico Manzione, State Secretary, Ministry of Interior

– Mr Benedetto della Vedova, State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

– Mr Rocco Buttiglione, Member of the Committee on Justice and of the Committee on European Affairs, Chamber of Deputies

– Mr Sandro Gozi, State Secretary for European Affairs

– Mr Francesco Paolo Sisto, Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, Chamber of Deputies

– Mr Mario Marazziti, Chair of the Permanent Committee on Human Rights, Chamber of Deputies

– Joint hearing with the Foreign Affairs Committees of the Chamber of Deputies and of the Senate

– Mr Alessandro di Battista, Vice-Chair of the Committee on Foreign affairs, Chamber of Deputies

– Ms Donatella Ferranti, Chair of the Committee on Justice, Chamber of Deputies

– Mr Andrea Orlando, Minister of Justice

– Mr Armando Gradone, Prefect of Syracuse

– Mr Mario Caggegi, Police superintendent, Province of Syracuse

– Mr Enzo Bianco, Mayor of Catania

– Mr Marcello Cardona, Police superintendent, Province of Catania

– Directors of the center for unaccompanied minors "Papa Francesco" in Priolo Gargallo, Syracuse; center for unaccompanied minors and families "La Zagara" in Melilli, Syracuse; center for asylum seekers in Mineo, Catania.

7. Visit to Turkey (7 to 10 April 2015) (in chronological order)

– Representatives of Non-Governmental organisations

– Prof Dr Zühtü Arslan, President of the Constitutional Court

– Mr Reha Denemeç, Head of the Turkish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly, and members of the Turkish delegation

– Representatives of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP)

– Mr Volkan Bozkir, Minister for European Union Affairs
– Mr Cemil Çiçek, Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey
– Mr Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister for Foreign Affairs
– Dr Fuat Oktay, President of the Prime Ministry Disaster and Emergency Management Authority
– Representatives of the Republican People's Party (CHP)
– Representatives of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP)
– Mr Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, President of the Republic of Turkey
– Mr Karim Atassi, Representative ad interim of the UNHCR
– Prof Dr Ahmet Davutoğlu, Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey
– Ms Fatma Şahin, Mayor of Gaziantep
– Archbishop Aram Ateshian, General Vicar (Acting Patriarch) of the Armenian Patriarchate
– His Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I

8. Visit to Armenia (13-14 April 2015) (in chronological order)

– Joint meeting with Parliamentary Factions of the National Assembly
– Ms Elinar Vardanyan, Chair of the Standing Committee on Protection of Human Rights and Public Affairs
– Mr Artak Zakaryan, Chair of the Standing Committee on Foreign Relations
– Mr Galust Sahakyan, President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia
– Mr Edward Nalbandian, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia
– Representatives of Civil Society and NGOs
– Mr Hovik Abrahamyan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia
– Mr Serzh Sargsyan, President of the Republic of Armenia
– Members of the Armenian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly

9. Meetings with the diplomatic community (in chronological order)

– Representatives of the diplomatic community in Serbia
– Representatives of the diplomatic community in Bosnia and Herzegovina
– Ms Janine Finck, Ambassador of Luxembourg in Rome
– Ms Arlette Consemius, Ambassador of Luxembourg in Ankara and members of the diplomatic community in Ankara

10. Contacts with media between 1st March and 16 April 2015 (in chronological order)

MEDIA	TYPE	PAYS
Local newspaper	Written press	Luxembourg
Ria Novosti	Agence d'information	Russian Federation
TVS	Television	Serbia
Press Conference in Serbia		
N1	Television	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Press conference in Bosnia and Herzegovina		
Local newspaper	Written press	Italy (Catania)
NTV	Television	Turkey
Association of journalists		Turkey
Aravot Daily Newspaper	Written press	Armenia

MEDIA	TYPE	PAYS
Armenian Public TV	Television	Armenia
A1plus	Television	Armenia