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23 January 2010

President's activities between the Fourth part of the 2009 Ordinary Session and the First part of the 2010 Ordinary Session

Communication
President of the Assembly

1. PAST MEETINGS AND VISITS

1.1. Official visit to Turkey (10-14 October 2009)

On 10 October 2009, I presented the Mayor of Ankara with the [Europe Prize](#), the highest distinction that can be bestowed on a European town for its actions in the European domain. On this occasion, I addressed the Ankara Municipal Council as well as the opening ceremony of the Dikmen Canton urban transformation project.

I was impressed by the efforts made by Ankara to develop and modernize the city. Under the current Mayor of Ankara, Mr. Melih Gökcek, the city has already been awarded a Flag of Honour in 2001 and the Plaque of Honour in 2003.

During my official visit, I met the President of the Republic, Mr. Abdullah Gül; the Prime Minister, Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdogan; the Speaker of Parliament, Mr. Mehmet Ali Sahin; the Minister for European Affairs and Chief negotiator with the EU, Mr. Egemen Bagis; members of the Turkey's parliamentary delegation to PACE and representatives of different political groups in Parliament.

I expressed my appreciation for the democratic reforms accomplished by Turkey and encouraged the authorities to continue these in order to reinforce democratic institutions in the country, especially constitutional reform. In this connection, I called for the creation of the institution of an Ombudsman and a further extension of minority rights. I was also informed about the new initiatives of the government on the Kurdish issue.

During my stay, the Foreign Ministers of Turkey and Armenia signed in Geneva an agreement to normalize relations between Turkey and Armenia. I welcomed this important step in improving relations between these two Council of Europe member states and called for the ratification and implementation of this agreement by both countries as soon as possible.

I also took this opportunity to express my personal support for Turkey's accession to the European Union and my conviction that the continuation of democratic reforms will help the country achieve this objective. In this connection, I stressed that the image of Turkey as a European state, and a member of the democratic family that is the Council of Europe, will be highlighted by its Chairmanship of the Organisation's Committee of Ministers, which begins in November 2010.



1.2. Official visit to Ukraine (Kiev, 22-23 October 2009)

My official visit to Ukraine took place on the occasion of the Council of Europe's Forum for the Future of Democracy entitled "Electoral systems: strengthening democracy in the 21st century", in which I participated together with other members of the Parliamentary Assembly. I chaired the closing session of the Forum and presented the closing remarks on behalf of the Council of Europe (www.coe.int/democracy).

During my visit, I held meetings with the President of Ukraine, Mr. Viktor Yushenko; the Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada (Parliament), Mr. Volodymyr Lytvyn; the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Hryhoriy Nemyria; the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Petro Poroshenko, as well as representatives of political groups in the Parliament.

The central issue of our discussions was the forthcoming **presidential election** to be held on 17 January 2010. In this connection, I welcomed the willingness of the authorities to take into consideration the opinion of the Venice Commission on the "law on amending some legislative acts on the election of the President of Ukraine", as well as their readiness to provide support and assistance to the work of the PACE observer delegation. The observation by the Assembly is considered as a very important element to confirm the legitimacy of the election results, which is crucial to enable the newly elected President to carry out the needed reforms in the country with sufficient authority.

On my side, I stressed that the Council of Europe will consider this election as an important test to confirm the democratic achievements in Ukraine. Therefore, I have exhorted the authorities to do the utmost to ensure that the election is free and fair.

My interlocutors underlined that the Council of Europe was a necessary partner for the **continuation of democratic reforms** and improving the functioning of democratic institutions, especially constitutional reform. As regards the latter, there does not seem to be at present an agreement among the Ukrainian political forces on the contents of the constitutional changes, so that this important task will have to be continued after the presidential election. I underlined the willingness of the Council of Europe and its Assembly to help Ukraine implement these reforms.

I also put emphasis on the importance of Ukraine as an indispensable **partner to help bring lasting peace and stability to the European continent**. With the Minister of Foreign Affairs and, in particular, with President Yushenko, we discussed the contribution of Ukraine to promoting the Council of Europe policies in Belarus, Georgia and Moldova. As regards the situation in **Belarus**, President Yushenko considered that some positive developments have recently taken place in the country, in particular concerning political prisoners, the Polish minority and the EU diplomatic mission in Minsk. According to him, it would be important for the Council of Europe to engage more actively with Belarus to encourage these developments. In this respect, I informed the President about the Resolution on Ukraine adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly in June 2009 and the Assembly's demand that a moratorium on the execution of the death penalty should be decreed as a condition for lifting the suspension of the special guest status for the Parliament of Belarus.

During our meeting, President Yushenko also expressed his gratitude to the Council of Europe for organizing the Forum in Kiev, which is seen as an important sign of assistance and support for the democratic developments in Ukraine.

Finally, I was also encouraged by the wish of my interlocutors to continue the **policy of European integration** and I stressed the essential role of the Council of Europe in helping Ukraine to achieve this objective.

1.3. Official visit to Japan (7-13 November 2009)

At the invitation of the Japanese Minister for Foreign Affairs, I paid an official visit to the country from 7 to 12 November. In Tokyo, I met the Speaker of the House of Councillors (the upper house of the Japanese parliament), Mr Satsuki Eda, the Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives (lower house), Mr Seishiro Eto, the first Deputy Minister of Justice, Mr Koichi Katoh, a supreme court judge, Mr Takaharu Kondou, the State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Mr Tetsuro Fukuyama, and the Deputy Director General of the European affairs office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr Noriteru Fukushima. I also met the minister responsible for financial services and reform of the postal services, Mr Shizuka Kamei, who also chairs the league of Japanese members of parliament for the abolition of the death penalty.

I spoke to students of the universities of Waseda and Kobe about the Council of Europe and our shared challenges.

Outside the official programme I had a very interesting meeting with representatives of the Japanese anti-death penalty movement.

At all these meetings, I stressed the close co-operation between the Council of Europe and Japan, which has had observer status with the organisation since 1996. Since 1974, a Japanese parliamentary delegation has taken part in the Parliamentary Assembly's annual enlarged debate on the activities of the OECD. Japan participates in several Council of Europe intergovernmental activities, to which it makes voluntary contributions. It has ratified one convention open to non-member countries, on the transfer of convicted persons, and has signed, but not ratified, the Convention on Cybercrime. Finally, the country has observer status with the Venice Commission.

I encouraged my interlocutors to extend this co-operation still further. This seems to me to be essential in an increasingly interconnected world. It is important therefore for all countries throughout the world, and above all those with major geostrategic significance and which defend the principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, to join forces to face the challenges that concern us all. I also stressed the need for joint approaches to enable us to secure peace and stability in the world, emerge from the economic and social crisis, counter the effects of climate change and combat terrorism.

Those I spoke to agreed with these points and expressed willingness to consider practical proposals.

Among other things, I proposed that the Japanese Diet be given observer status with the Assembly and that, more generally, Japanese members of parliament take part in other Assembly debates of common interest. I also said that it was in both our interests for Japan to become a full member of the Venice Commission and possibly certain partial agreements.

The Speaker of the House of Councillors and the Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives supported closer co-operation between members of the Diet and those of the Assembly, so long as practical ways could be found of securing this objective. The Japanese Diet has numerous plenary sessions, many of which coincide with Assembly sessions. I pointed out that many Assembly members faced the same constraints, but solutions could always be found.

I promised to send those principally concerned, after my return, a memorandum with practical proposals for closer co-operation. I was assured that these would receive close attention and would serve as the basis for further dialogue.

At all my meetings I raised the question of the death penalty. Without wishing to lecture people, I explained why the Council of Europe considered it to be incompatible with its values and principles and why it wanted observer countries to abolish it, as had the members of the Council of Europe. In this context, I recommended the introduction of a moratorium on executions as the first step.

I did not receive any practical undertakings on this subject, the most frequently cited reason for maintaining the *status quo* being that public opinion opposed abolition. However, several senior figures to whom I spoke said that there had been a much more favourable climate in the country since the new government was installed. The Minister of Justice, who had to sign execution orders, was known for her abolitionist sentiments and in the past had been closely associated with Amnesty International. They thought it unlikely that she would sign any orders during her period of office. Mr Kamei has also told the press that the new Prime Minister's watchword is fraternity. He therefore doubts whether such a philosophy would be consistent with the practice of the death penalty. Mr Kamei, and other members of the abolitionist movement, told me that one option under consideration is life imprisonment with no possibility of remission as an alternative to the death penalty.

1.4. Official visit to Hungary (23-25 November 2009)

At the invitation of Mr. Béla Katona, Speaker of the National Assembly of Hungary, I visited Budapest on 23-25 November 2009. I met Mr. László Sólyom, President of Hungary; the Speaker of the National Assembly, Mr. Béla Katona; Prime Minister Mr. Gordon Bajnai and the State Secretary in the Foreign Ministry Mr. Vilmos Szabó, as well as Mrs. Katalin Szili MP, former Speaker of the National Assembly, and the Hungarian delegation to PACE. I addressed the Forum of National and Ethnic Minorities in Hungary and visited the European Youth Centre and the Council of Europe Information Office in Budapest.

During my visit, I discussed, among other issues, the situation of minorities in Hungary. In this connection, I expressed appreciation for the consultation structures put in place in Hungary to strengthen dialogue with representatives of national and ethnic minorities living in the country. The Forum of National and Ethnic Minorities in Hungary, set up in May 2009, aims at providing a regular framework of cooperation at the

legislative level between the Hungarian parliamentary parties and committees and national self-governments of minorities. The President of the Forum is the Speaker of Parliament. 7 parliamentary committees, 12 minority self-governments and 4 political parties take part in the Forum. I was told that the final objective of the reforms in this field is to ensure direct parliamentary representation of minorities in the Hungarian Parliament.

At the same time, I encouraged the authorities to intensify efforts aiming at better integration, in particular of the Roma minority, and to strictly enforce rules of non-discrimination. In particular, I called on the authorities to implement the recommendations of the Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner, made after his October visit to Hungary.

During my meetings, my interlocutors raised the question of the amendments adopted in June 2009 to the Law on the State Language of the Slovak Republic, which they consider as discriminatory with regard to the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. On this issue, I stressed that Council of Europe standards and instruments, including the expertise of the Venice Commission, should be used to settle possible conflicts arising from issues concerning the treatment of minorities. I expressed my satisfaction that the Slovak authorities have requested the opinion of the Venice Commission on this law. I also stressed that, besides this legal framework, the Parliamentary Assembly represents the most appropriate forum to pursue political dialogue on these issues. As a general rule, I declared, Council of Europe member states should always aim at adopting laws in the field of minorities on the basis of the best European practice.

Furthermore, in the course of our meetings, I asked the Hungarian authorities to do their utmost to prevent overlapping and duplication between the activities of the Council of Europe and the European Union in the field of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

1.5. 33rd plenary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (Saint Petersburg, 3 December 2009)

I visited Saint Petersburg on the occasion of the 33rd plenary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) held on 3 December 2009.

During my meeting with Mr Sergei Mironov, Chairman of the Federation Council of the Russian Federation, I stressed that PACE is in fact the most representative pan-European political forum to discuss initiatives and proposals by member states regarding European and world affairs. In this connection, I informed Mr. Mironov about my intention to invite the President of the Russian Federation, Mr. Dmitri Medvedev, to present before Assembly members his recent initiatives concerning the new European Security Architecture as well as the creation of an international tribunal on the acts of piracy.

I took this occasion to call on Mr. Mironov to promote an increased involvement of Russia in the work of the Council of Europe. I expressed my opinion that the future of Europe cannot be built without Russia and that the Council of Europe is an organization for all its member states to work together on an equal footing.

I also stressed that it was of crucial importance that Russia ratifies Protocol No. 14 to the European Convention of Human Rights as soon as possible. Mr. Mironov informed me about the moves in Russia towards ratification and expressed hope that progress on this matter will be achieved early next year.

As regards the possible address of the President of the Russian Federation before PACE members, Mr. Mironov will personally inform Mr. Medvedev about this initiative and explore possibilities for a possible bilateral meeting at which I could personally transmit an official invitation.

During my stay, I also met Mr Mikhail Krotov, Secretary General of the CIS PA, to discuss the preparations for a joint conference on the issues of European security in April next year in Saint Petersburg.

2. PRESS RELEASES

1. PACE President evokes a 'duty of vigilance' to keep the peace (25 September 2009)
2. PACE President calls for strong vote showing significant political support for the future Secretary General (28 September 2009)
3. Lluís Maria de Puig: 'Parity in politics is still a long way off' (30 September 2009)
4. Official visit by PACE President to Turkey (8 October 2009)
5. Joint statement on the imminent execution of Vasily Yusepchuk in Belarus (9 October 2009)

6. PACE President expresses support for Turkey's EU bid (13 October 2009)
7. PACE President invites the EU to join the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (19 October 2009)
8. PACE President: free and fair elections needed to confirm Ukraine's democratic achievements (23 October 2009)
9. Official visit by PACE President to Japan (5 November 2009)
10. European Union accession to the ECHR must be a priority, says PACE President (5 November 2009)
11. PACE President in favour of greater co-operation with Japan (12 November 2009)
12. Official visit by PACE President to Hungary (19 November 2009)
13. PACE President reacts to Russian Constitutional Court decision on death penalty (19 November 2009)
14. Lluís Maria de Puig congratulates new EU President and Foreign Affairs Chief (20 November 2009)
15. PACE President in Hungary: minorities laws should be in line with European best practice (25 November 2009)
16. Russia: PACE condemns terrorist attack (30 November 2009)
17. Minarets in Switzerland – reaction of PACE President (30 November 2009)
18. PACE President to invite Dmitri Medvedev to address Assembly (4 December 2009)
19. Fundamental values and national referenda: statement by PACE President (9 December 2009)
20. Copenhagen political declaration lacks ambition, regrets PACE President (20 December 2009)
21. The legacy of party closures in Turkey remains a source of concern, says PACE President (11 January 2010)
22. The Council of Europe welcomes approval, for ratification, by the Russian State Duma of Protocol No. 14 to the European Convention on Human Rights (15 January 2010)
23. Haiti: 'Council of Europe member states must shoulder their humanitarian responsibilities', says PACE President (15 January 2010)
24. Education should be at the heart of society (19 January 2010)

3. SPEECHES

1. Speech at the inauguration of the Polish exhibition "The Decade of Solidarity" (Strasbourg, 28 September 2009)
2. Speech at the inauguration of the Mexican exhibition « Colores del alma » (Strasbourg, 28 September 2009)
3. Opening speech of the 4th ordinary part-session of 2009 (Strasbourg, 28 September 2009)
4. Welcome speech to Mr Kurt Mazur, maestro (Strasbourg, 29 September 2009)
5. Welcome speech to Dr Rajendra Pachauri, Chairman of IPCC (UN) - Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Strasbourg, 29 September 2009)
6. Speech at the opening of the debate : Green economy : the strategies in Europe and in the United States (Strasbourg, 29 September 2009)
7. Welcome to Mr Samuel Zbogar, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia, Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers (Strasbourg, 29 September 2009)
8. Speech delivered at the award ceremony of the European Prize for Equality between Women and Men of the Parliamentary Assembly (Strasbourg, 30 September 2009)
9. Speech delivered on the occasion of the opening of the exhibition « Ljubljana process, rehabilitating our common heritage » (Strasbourg, 1 October 2009)
10. Speech delivered at the opening conference of the INGO (Strasbourg, 1 October 2009)

11. Welcome speech to Mr Pierre Lellouche, State Secretary for European Affairs of France (Strasbourg, 1 October 2009)
12. Welcome speech to Mr Danilo Türk, President of the Republic of Slovenia(Strasbourg, 1 October 2009)
13. Speech on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Council of Europe (Strasbourg, 1 October 2009)
14. Speech on the occasion of the award of the 2009 Europe Prize to the Turkish Town of Ankara (Ankara, 10 October 2009)
15. Speech delivered on the occasion of the Opening ceremony of the Dikmen Canton Urban 16. Transformation Project (Ankara, 10 October 2009)
16. Speech at the Forum for the future of democracy, Kiev, 23 October 2009
17. Speech at the Waseda university (Tokyo, 11 November 2009)
18. Speech delivered at the opening of the 33rd Plenary session of the Interparliamentary Assembly of the CIS member countries (Saint Petersburg, 3 December 2009)
19. Speech delivered at the ceremony commemorating the 220th anniversary of the Tavricheski Palace (St Petersburg, 3 December 2009)