



**Doc. 11865 Addendum**  
25 April 2009

## **Communication by the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to the Bureau of the Parliamentary Assembly**

### **President's activities between the first and the second part of the 2009 Ordinary Session**

#### **Communication**

President of the Assembly

#### **1. Past meetings and visits**

##### ***1.1. Official visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina (2-5 February 2009)***

In response to an invitation from the Bosnian Parliament, I carried out an official visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to assess the country's progress in democratic development and prospects for the constitutional reform. This visit took place a few months after the Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina addressed our Assembly and the Assembly debated the honouring of obligations and commitments by Bosnia and Herzegovina ([Resolution 1626 \(2008\)](#) was adopted on 30 September 2008).

During the visit I met members of the Collegium of the Parliamentary Assembly – Beriz Belkić, Mladen Ivanić, Milorad Živković, Niko Lozančić and Sulejman Tihić – and the country's delegation to the Assembly. I also held meetings with members of the Presidency Željko Komšić and Haris Silajdžić, the Prime Minister Nikola Špirić, the Minister for Foreign Affairs Sven Alkalaj and High Representative and EU Special Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina Miroslav Lajčak. Following meetings with parliamentarians, I took part in the launching of my book on "International Parliaments" in Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian languages.

Moreover, I had the opportunity to highlight our Organisation's work for the protection of human rights and, in particular, minorities at the "Parliament for Europe" session, which is part of an EU project aimed at fostering public debate about the challenges and rewards of European integration, not least in the light of the country's recent engagement in the stabilisation and association process with the European Union. Speaking at the session, I stressed the importance of political will to overcome inter-ethnic divisions that hamper Bosnia-Herzegovina's nation-building, efforts to improve the functioning of democracy and the state, as well as a smoother integration and stronger voice in European structures.

In that respect, our Assembly's recommendations set out a roadmap for vital reforms. I therefore urged Bosnian politicians to ensure a more rapid implementation of the country's international commitments and to employ adequate resources – human and financial – towards this end. At the same time, our Assembly's Monitoring Committee could explore how to help the Bosnian Parliament optimise its procedures for decision making.

My discussions with the highest representatives of the state focused on the ways of breaking the stalemate on the constitutional reform. Despite the Prud agreement of 8 November 2008 and the Banja Luka agreement of 26 January 2009 (both signed by the three strongest parties), there were still no concrete proposals on the negotiation table and hence no basis yet for the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice



Commission) to work on. Whilst acknowledging the complexity of the political situation, I stressed the prime responsibility of Bosnian politicians for generating viable decisions for the future of their country. Strengthening the state authority and improving the functioning of the state was paramount. My attention was drawn to the need to assist Bosnia and Herzegovina in creating a new partnership with Europe, in particular with a view to easing current constraints on the free movement of persons in relation to travel to EU countries.

My meeting with Mr Lajčák took place against the backdrop of his imminent departure from Sarajevo to assume new duties as the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Slovakia. Mr Lajčák will assure essential caretaking duties for the international community until his successor is chosen. Our discussion centred on the problems encountered by the state institutions and the need to mobilise wider public support for reforms. I pointed out, in this context, the importance of parliamentary diplomacy tools and further improvements in the country's educational system.

### **1.2. Official visit to Andorra, 20 February 2009**

My visit began at the Parliament, where I was received firstly by the Speaker (Síndic General), Mr Joan Gabriel, and then by the members of the Bureau. The discussions focused on the forthcoming parliamentary elections due to be held on 26 April 2009, the political situation in the country (the Prime Minister having announced that he would not be standing again) and the recent comments by President Sarkozy of France about the need to do away with the tax havens in Europe, in which he had been critical of Andorra. On the latter point, there is some discontent in Andorra on the ground that the French President is also Co-Prince of Andorra and that he showed more understanding towards Monaco.

During the talks with the Andorran parliamentarians, I noted their intention to hold ceremonies in autumn 2009 to mark the 15th anniversary of Andorra's accession to the Council of Europe. I therefore pointed out that the Council of Europe is celebrating its 60th anniversary this year and the European Court of Human Rights its 50th anniversary. I also referred to the recommendations which the Assembly made to the Andorran authorities in June 2006, following the first progress report by the Monitoring Committee ([Resolution 1515 \(2006\)](#)), concerning the signature and ratification of a number of conventions. The latest reports by MONEYVAL, GRECO, the CPT and ECRI were also mentioned. I referred to the participation by the Andorran delegation in the work of the Assembly and underlined the need to ensure a degree of continuity when appointing the new delegation after the elections. In addition, the Mayor, Maria Rosa Ferrer, said that, as a member of parliament, she had been the contact parliamentarian during the campaign to combat violence against women. The municipality was willing to take part in the celebrations to mark the 15th anniversary of Andorra's accession to the Council of Europe.

The meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ms Meritxell Mateu, and the Minister of Justice and Home Affairs, Mr Antoni Riberdaygua, mainly focused on the recommendations set out in [Resolution 1515 \(2006\)](#). The two ministers indicated Andorra's willingness to ratify some of the conventions mentioned by the Assembly, in spite of the difficulties sometimes posed by conventions which require reform of existing legislation and regular follow-up such as the submission of reports on implementation in English or French.

The talks with the Prime Minister, Mr Albert Pintat, and the Minister of the Presidency and Economy, Ms Conxita Marsol, again addressed the political situation in Andorra in the light of the forthcoming elections. The French President's comments about Andorra were also mentioned. The feeling of being discriminated against in the area of banking secrecy compared with certain other countries (Monaco, Luxembourg and Liechtenstein) seems to be very widespread in Andorran political circles.

During my visit to the "Farga Rossell" pre-industrial forge, I noted Andorra's strong commitment to the Council of Europe's cultural routes, in this case, the cross-border Pyrenean Iron Route.

Ms María Venegas, Counsellor at the Spanish Embassy, took part in some of the meetings as the representative of the Chair of the Committee of Ministers.

### **1.3. Official visit to Morocco, 26-27 February 2009**

By invitation of the Speaker of the House of Councillors in Rabat, delivered to me by the Moroccan delegation on the occasion of the first part of the Parliamentary Assembly's session, I made an official visit to Morocco. This visit came within the context of enhanced co-operation with the Maghreb countries – as recommended by [Resolution 1598 \(2008\)](#) – which is one of the priorities of my presidency.

During the visit I had meetings, in chronological order, with the Speaker of the House of Councillors, Mr Mâati Benkaddour, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Mr Moustapha Mansouri, the Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Borders, National Defence and the Occupied Zones, Mr Lahbib Eleulj, and members of this committee, the Minister of Justice, Mr Abdelwahed Radi, the Chairman of the Human Rights Advisory Council, Mr Ahmed Herzenni, the Prime Minister, Mr Abbas El Fassi, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Co-operation, Mr Taïb El Fassi El Fihri.

Our discussions primarily concerned the possibility of stepping up relations between the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and Morocco on a more formal, firmer basis than at present (currently they are confined to the national delegation's attendance of Parliamentary Assembly sessions pursuant to an invitation issued to the parliaments of the Maghreb countries in advance of each part-session, in accordance with [Resolution 1598](#)). I confirmed that a different status for Morocco with the Parliamentary Assembly was possible and desirable, since the Assembly is currently considering the introduction of a Council of Europe "neighbourhood policy" covering a very broad area, from the Mediterranean to Central Asia. In view of its close links with Europe and the progress it has made concerning respect for human rights, Morocco could be the first example of this new policy's application.

As the authorities with whom I spoke pointed out, in recent years Morocco has launched a number of initiatives aimed at promoting human rights and social cohesion. It can also be noted that the country has gradually tightened its ties with the European institutions by acceding to the Venice Commission and to other Council of Europe agreements and by obtaining "advanced status" under its Association Agreement with the European Union.

I proposed that the country's new status with the Parliamentary Assembly should establish permanent relations between the Assembly and the Moroccan Parliament, the designation and specific substance of which remain to be determined in the course of discussions between the two parties. This process could begin in the very near future and be pursued during the Moroccan delegation's participation in the Assembly's April 2009 part-session. I underlined that this would be an opportunity for Morocco's representatives to gain access to a prestigious debating chamber, where virtually all the countries of Europe are represented, including those which do not have neighbour country relations or historical ties with Morocco and are accordingly not familiar with the country and its situation. I suggested that the Moroccan authorities at the highest level, not least the Head of State, should seize the opportunity to have recourse to the Parliamentary Assembly, in particular in connection with issues of direct relevance to their country.

All the public figures with whom I had discussions referred to the situation in the Western Sahara and to the recent visit to Morocco and Algeria by the United Nations Special Envoy, Mr Ross. Mr El Fassi El Fihri said the Moroccan proposals for the region's autonomy were consistent with the principles underlying the UN Security Council's resolutions on the subject, notably the latest one. I took this opportunity to inform the persons with whom I spoke of the Parliamentary Assembly's official position that a definitive, negotiated solution must rapidly be found under the aegis of the United Nations. I added that the situation in the Western Sahara might be the subject of a Parliamentary Assembly debate, given the time that has elapsed since the last report on the matter.

Mr Luis Planas Puchades Tejada, Spain's Ambassador to Morocco, accompanied me during my meetings with the Prime Minister and the Minister for Foreign Affairs in his capacity as representative of the current Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers.

#### ***1.4. Participation in the Plenary session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 3-5 March 2009***

On the occasion of the plenary session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, I delivered a speech highlighting the role of elected representatives in proposing solutions to the multiple challenges our society was facing in the short and long term. I pointed out to the urgency to restore public confidence in the economic system and overall governance, as well as the need to provide extra help to the most vulnerable members of the society affected by the economic downturn. I insisted though that these immediate preoccupations should not make politicians lose sight of longer term development goals. Solidarity was particularly important – between and within states – in times of hardship. I also presented the latest developments in our Assembly's relations with non-member states in the Mediterranean and eastern-European neighbourhood of the Council of Europe, and explained the Assembly's efforts to stimulate dialogue between Georgian and Russian parliamentarians.

### **1.5. North-South Prize award ceremony, Lisbon, 16 March 2009**

Together with over 250 members of the diplomatic community, highest authorities of Portugal, members of the Portuguese Parliament and representatives of international organisations, I took part in a solemn ceremony to honour Her Majesty Queen of Jordan Rania Al Abdullah and Jorge Sampaio, UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilisations, who received the 14<sup>th</sup> Council of Europe North-South Prize in Lisbon on 16 March 2009. Participants paid tribute to the laureates' engagement in fighting prejudice between peoples and their commitment in favour of human dignity and social cohesion. Speaking at the ceremony, I stressed the importance of joint action for tolerance and peace, building on the memory of fruitful exchanges between civilisations which had marked the Iberian Peninsula over many centuries in the past. Modern society and its political leaders had a lot to learn from the spirit of sharing that had marked a harmonious coexistence of the three monotheistic religions, united in diversity for the wellbeing of all communities.

### **1.6. Meetings of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States (Monitoring Committee) and of the Ad hoc committee of the Bureau on promoting dialogue between the Georgian and Russian Assembly Delegations, Valencia (Spain), 30 March 2009**

In line with one of the priorities of my presidency – to participate in the activities of the Assembly's committees – I took part in the meeting of the Monitoring Committee where I joined the discussions on the situation in various member states and gave an account on my official visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina on 2-3 February 2009.

I also chaired the second meeting of the Ad hoc Committee of the Bureau on promoting dialogue between the Georgian and Russian Assembly Delegations.

### **1.7. Meeting with OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Joao Soares, Madrid, 15 April 2009**

In the framework of our discussions with various partners on election observation, I met Mr Joao Soares, President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. The talks were held in a friendly and frank atmosphere. We agreed that parliamentarians, given their experience, play an essential role in the observation and evaluation of elections. We also agreed on the need to improve election observation missions and that final declarations reflect the points of view of the different partners. It was thought essential that the international community speak with one voice regarding the evaluation of an election process. Some problems encountered in cooperating with ODHIR are a matter of concern for both parliamentary assemblies, in particular when ODHIR appears reticent to take into account the parliamentarians' views.

### **1.8. International Conference on the protection of Minority languages in Europe, Bilbao (Spain), 20-21 April 2009**

I took part in the international conference devoted to problems and challenges related to the ratification and implementation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and its prospects for the future. This conference was organised jointly by the Council of Europe, the Spanish Government, the Basque authorities and the University of the Basque Country, with the Council of Europe Secretary General, Terry Davis, and leading figures from the Spanish government and the Basque regional government taking part.

In addressing the conference at the opening, I contributed my views on the role of European, national, regional and local authorities, as well as parliamentarians, in promoting cultural diversity and the rights of minorities. I reiterated the Council of Europe's commitment to promoting multilingualism in Europe and stressed the importance of language as the foundation of intellectual wealth and personal and collective identity. The right to language is inalienable and the Europeans of tomorrow will hopefully be able to speak several languages.

## **2. Press releases**

1. PACE President makes official visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina (30 January 2009);
2. Guantanamo: PACE President calls on the '47' to take in the detainees who have been cleared (21 January 2009);
3. President welcomes frank discussions with Russian authorities on Assembly demands (26 January 2009);

4. Bosnia and Herzegovina urgently needs constitutional reform, says PACE President in Sarajevo (4 February 2009);
5. Official visit by PACE President to Andorra (18 February 2009);
6. Official visits by the PACE President to Morocco and Tunisia (23 February 2009);
7. Assembly to discuss possible forms of enhanced co-operation with Maghreb parliaments (26 February 2009);
8. Lluís Maria de Puig: with the crisis upon us, protection of social and economic rights has priority (4 March 2009)
9. PACE President reacts to school shooting in Germany (11 March 2009);
10. PACE President lauds 'meeting of civilisations' represented by winners of the North-South Prize (16 March 2009);
11. PACE President welcomes abolition of death penalty in New Mexico (19 March 2009);
12. PACE President calls for access to water to be recognised as a basic human right (20 March 2009);
13. Georgia-Russia: PACE President welcomes the dialogue instituted between the parliamentary delegations (30 March 2009);
14. Lluís Maria de Puig offers his condolences following the earthquake in Italy (7 April 2009);
15. Lluís Maria de Puig: 'The Council of Europe is committed to multilingualism' (21 April 2009);
16. Statement by the President of the Assembly on the Durban Review Conference (22 April 2009).

### **3. Speeches**

1. Speech on European instruments for human rights protection and protection of minorities delivered at the "Parliament for Europe" session (Sarajevo, 3 February 2009)
2. Speech on the role of local and regional authorities in facing cross-border problems, delivered at plenary session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (Strasbourg, 4 March 2009)
3. Speech delivered at the North-South Prize award ceremony (Lisbon, 16 March 2009).