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Activities of the President of the Parliamentary Assembly between the second and the third part of the 2016 Ordinary session

Communication
President of the Assembly

1. Visits and meetings

1.1. Activities of the President between 16 April and 18 May 2016

1.1.1. 2nd part of the 2016 Ordinary session (18-22 April 2016)

During the 2016 2nd part-session, I had the honour of meeting a number of prominent European personalities, in particular, the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of Austria, Heinz Fischer, the Prime Minister of Turkey, Ahmet Davutoğlu, the Prime Minister of Georgia, Giorgi Kvirikashvili, two Foreign Ministers – the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers, Daniel Mitov from Bulgaria, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Co-operation of my own country, Spain, José Manuel García-Margallo – as well as the Italian Minister of Constitutional Reforms and Relations with the Parliament, Maria Elena Boschi. Inter alia, we discussed issues relating to Europe's response to the refugee crisis, the need to intensify counter-terrorist co-operation while preserving human rights and fundamental freedoms, the raise of extreme political forces and the dangers of populist and intolerant rhetoric in the political discourse, as well as the role of parliamentary diplomacy in the search of solutions to conflicts among member States.

I was encouraged by the commitment of all interlocutors to supporting the Council of Europe's efforts on all these fronts. The challenges we are facing require a multilateral, pan-European response.

I have noted in particular the interest of all interlocutors in the idea of launching a "NO FEAR" -the right to live without fear- initiative during the Assembly's June part-session.

The issue of the conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region was in the focus of my discussions with the chairpersons of the Armenian and of the Azerbaijani delegations, whom I met separately during this part-session. I urged both leaders of delegations to reduce tensions and refrain from divisive rhetoric. I shall continue to talk with the two leaders of the delegations and I hope that during our June part-session session, we will manage to decrease the level of tensions in the debates.

Furthermore, I met during this session, Sir Robert Neill, Chair of the Justice Committee of the House of Commons, and Ms Harriett Harman, Chair of the United Kingdom Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights. We discussed the issue of implementation of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights in the United Kingdom and the ways in which the Assembly could support this process. I am ready to pursue contacts at parliamentary level, as may be necessary and appropriate, in order to address the issues raised by United Kingdom parliamentarians and eventually contribute to finding solutions together.



Finally, the situation of our colleague and member of the Assembly, Nadiya Savchenko, was in the focus of my discussions during the session week. At the opening of the session, I issued a statement calling for her release. I am relieved by the recent developments: Ms Savchenko was released on 25 May 2016. I am looking forward to welcoming her in our Chamber during the June part-session.

1.1.2. Exchange of views with the Ministers' Deputies (Strasbourg, 3 May 2016)

On 3 May 2016, I participated in the exchange of views with the Ministers' Deputies, focusing on the results and outcomes of the Assembly's 2016 2nd part-session.

1.1.3. Official visit to Ukraine (12-14 May 2016)

On 12-14 May 2016, I paid an official visit to Ukraine, at the invitation of the Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. During this visit, I met the President of the Republic, Petro Poroshenko, the Prime Minister, Volodymyr Groysman, the Vice-Prime Minister for European Integration, Ivanna Klymush-Tsintsadze, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Pavlo Klimkin, and the Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada, Andriy Parubiy. Moreover, I met the Ukrainian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly and held exchanges of views with representatives of the diplomatic community and international organisations working in Ukraine, as well as civil society.

At the end of the visit, I welcomed the strong commitment of the Ukrainian authorities and of the new government, to move towards European values and standards. I assured my interlocutors of the Assembly's strong support, in confronting the challenges Ukraine is facing, both on its external borders and on the internal reform front. In this context, I reiterated the Assembly's position in support of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine.

Speaking about the reform agenda, I stressed that Ukraine needs strong and stable institutions and democratic structures and called on the new government to devote even more energy and political resources to the constitutional reform process.

With all my interlocutors, I underlined the importance of fighting against corruption, carrying out effective decentralisation and completing reform of the judiciary. I urged all political forces, belonging to both the majority and the opposition, to be more united and engage in a constructive dialogue so as to find common ground to allow reforms to go through.

The situation of Assembly member Nadiya Savchenko was also raised in all meetings. I expressed hope to be able to welcome her in Strasbourg soon.

I would like to thank the Ukrainian authorities and the parliamentary delegation for the excellent organisation of my visit.

1.1.4. 126th session of the Committee of Ministers (Sofia, 18 May 2016)

On 18 May 2016, I participated in the 126th session of the Committee of Ministers. In my address, I called upon member States to reaffirm their commitment to upholding the European Convention on Human Rights and Council of Europe Convention system, and to realising our common objectives, as established in the Statute of the Organisation. In this context, I expressed the Assembly's support for the idea of a new Summit of Heads of State and Government stressing our readiness to develop this idea further, as may be appropriate.

1.2. Activities of the President between 18 May and 16 June 2016

1.2.1. 44th session of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States (St Petersburg, 19-20 May 2016)

At the invitation of Ms Valentina Matvienko, Speaker of the Council of the Federation of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation and President of the Council of the Inter-parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States (IPA CIS), I travelled to St Petersburg to participate in the meeting of the Council of the IPA CIS and in the 44th plenary session of the IPA CIS. Speaking at the IPA CIS's plenary session, I praised the role that parliamentary assemblies can play in promoting dialogue and co-operation between states in tackling the global challenges of combating international terrorism, addressing the refugee crisis and the wider migration phenomenon, tackling hate and intolerance, and counteracting the dangerous rise of populist and extremist movements in politics.

In my speech I also suggested that international parliamentary assemblies should join efforts to combat terrorism and hate. I informed the IPA CIS about the Assembly's new hash-tag initiative #NoHateNoFear which will be launched on 20 June 2016.

Referring to the 20th anniversary of the co-operation agreement between the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the IPA CIS which we will celebrate in 2017, I supported the idea of holding joint events devoted to topics of common interest for our parliamentary assemblies. Counteracting terrorism could be one of such topics and I look forward to continuing discussions with Ms Matvienko and the IPA CIS Secretariat about this initiative.

On the side-lines of the IPA CIS session, I held a number of bilateral meetings, in particular with the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Mr Ilkka Kanerva, the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Mr Saber Chowdhury, the Speaker of the Parliament of Azerbaijan, Mr Ogtay Asadov, the Deputy Speaker of the Parliament of Belarus, Mr Anatoly Rusetsky, as well as the Speaker of the State Duma of the Russian Federation, Mr Sergey Naryshkin, and the Speaker of the Council of the Federation of the Russian Federation, Ms Valentina Matvienko.

1.2.2. Assembly meetings in Tallinn (26-27 May 2016)

On 26-27 May 2016, I travelled to Tallinn to participate in the meetings of the Assembly's Presidential Committee, Bureau and Standing Committee. This was an opportunity to hold a first exchange of views with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia and Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers, Ms Marina Kaljurand, as well as with the Speaker of the Parliament of Estonia, Mr Ekki Nestor. I expressed the Assembly's support for the priorities and activities of the Chairmanship. In particular, I welcomed Estonia's intention to ratify the Lanzarote Convention during the Chairmanship and to move ahead with the preparations for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention foreseen for 2017.

1.2.3. Meeting of the Ad hoc committee of the Bureau on the situation of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Greece (30-31 May 2016)

On 30-31 May 2016, I participated in the Assembly's Bureau's Ad Hoc Committee on the situation of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Greece. I would like to thank the Greek authorities and parliamentary delegation for the excellent organisation of this visit.

On 30 May, I joined the Ad Hoc Committee for visits to refugee reception facilities in Athens and held bilateral meetings with the Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament, Mr Nikolaos Voutsis, and the Prime Minister of Greece, Mr Alexis Tsipras; on 31 May I was part of a smaller delegation that visited the island of Lesbos, including the Moria hotspot.

The purpose of our visit was to raise awareness of the challenges Greece is facing in relation to the inflow of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Our meetings and discussions focused in particular on the living conditions of these people and their access to international protection.

At the end of the visit, I pointed out that Greece was doing a great deal to provide sufficient reception places and that the country and the Greek authorities needed our full support and solidarity. I stressed that providing care for refugees and asylum seekers was a European responsibility that needed a European response, calling for a fairer sharing of this responsibility among European States, which must meet their obligations on relocation.

During my meeting with Prime Minister Tsipras, I discussed the visit of the Prime Minister to Strasbourg, during the Assembly's 2016 third part-session. His visit to the Assembly, as well as the debate on Ms Strik's report on "Refugees at risk in Greece", will be an opportunity for the Assembly to examine issues relating to the implementation of the EU-Turkey refugee deal, the related human rights concerns, as well as the ways to provide further support to Greece and to Turkey to tackle the refugee issue.

1.2.4. Official visit to Turkey (Ankara, 6-7 June 2016)

At the invitation of the Speaker of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, I paid an official visit to Turkey on 6-7 June 2016. During the visit, I held meetings with Turkey's President, Mr Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Prime Minister, Mr Binali Yıldırım, Foreign Minister, Mr Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister for EU Affairs, Mr Ömer Çelik, as well as the Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, Mr İsmail Kahraman.

Moreover, I met the Chief Ombudsman and held talks with the members of the Turkish delegation to the Assembly and the Chairperson of the parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee.

I would like to thank the Turkish authorities and the Turkish delegation to the Assembly for the excellent organisation of my visit.

As I was holding meetings in Ankara, a terrible terrorist attack took place on a police station in Istanbul. I immediately condemned this attack, in the strongest possible terms, in all official meetings, expressing solidarity and support with the people and authorities of Turkey and conveyed our sympathies to the families of the victims.

Against this background, my discussions in Ankara were dominated by the issue of counteracting terrorism. I assured the Turkish authorities of our strong support and stressed that our best response to terrorism must be to make our institutions stronger, to uphold the values that unite us, and to step up our co-operation, on the basis of our legal standards.

Turning to the issue of the refugee crisis and the EU – Turkey refugee deal, I praised Turkey's generosity and commitment to tackling this unprecedented challenge. Turkey is hosting three million refugees and these efforts deserve our full appreciation. But the refugee flow is not likely to stop as instability on Europe's southern borders increases. Turkey alone cannot cope with this challenge – all European countries have to take their share of responsibility. In this context, the implementation of the EU-Turkey deal is of crucial importance. I stressed that Turkey has taken up important commitments and called on all member States of the Council of Europe to do their part of the job too, in particular by honouring their commitments relating to relocation and resettlement.

Speaking about the co-operation between Turkey and the Council of Europe, I encouraged the authorities to continue making full use of the Organisation's instruments and co-operation mechanisms. I praised Turkey for strengthening its engagement with the Council of Europe since January 2016. This offers new opportunities to enhance our co-operation and I expressed support for on-going initiatives relating, *inter alia*, to the implementation of the standards of the European Convention on Human Rights and the case-law of the Court in Turkey. I pointed out that the Council of Europe could provide legal standards and expertise on a wide range of issues, including those relating to Turkey's EU integration agenda, encouraging the authorities to make full use of our expertise.

2. Press Releases

1. PACE President, ahead of debates on migration and asylum: 'They are still dying out there' (18 April 2016)
2. President Agramunt calls for release of PACE member Nadiya Savchenko (18 April 2016)
3. The President expresses concern at the decision to ban the Mejlis of Crimean-Tatar people (27 April 2016)
4. PACE President encourages Ukraine to press ahead with reform agenda (14 May 2016)
5. PACE President warns of Convention collapse if states 'pick and choose' Strasbourg Court rulings (18 May 2016)
6. President to CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly: 'Let us work together to tackle global challenges' (20 May 2016)
7. PACE President welcomes the decision of Azerbaijan's Supreme Court to release Khadija Ismayilova (25 May 2016)
8. President warmly welcomes release of PACE member Nadiia Savchenko (25 May 2016)
9. 'Greece needs our full support' (30 May 2016)
10. PACE President calls on Ukrainian parliament to pass judges' reform (31 May 2016)
11. Istanbul bomb attack: PACE President condemns terrorists' blind fanaticism (7 June 2016)
12. President ends official visit to Turkey, condemns new terrorist attack (08 June 2016)
13. Orlando: President condemns the attack and expresses solidarity with victims and the LGBT community (13 June 2016)

3. Speeches

1. Opening speech of the Second part of the 2016 Ordinary Session (Strasbourg, 18 April 2016)
2. Speech for the Council of Europe Museum Prize Ceremony 2016 (Strasbourg, 19 April 2016)
3. Exchange of views with the Ministers' Deputies (Strasbourg, 3 May 2016)
4. Address at the 126th session of the Committee of Ministers (Sofia, 18 May 2016)
5. Statement at the meeting of the Council of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States (St Petersburg, 19 May 2016). Topic: Outlook for international parliamentary co-operation: topical issues on the current international political agenda
6. Statement at the 44th Plenary session of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States (St Petersburg, 20 May 2016)
7. Opening speech of the Standing Committee meeting in Tallinn, Estonia (27 May 2016)
8. Introductory speech during the meeting at the Hellenic Parliament (30 May 2016) in the framework of the visit of the Ad hoc Committee on the situation of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Greece (Athens, 30 May 2016)

4. Personalities met

4.1. 2nd part of the 2016 Ordinary session (18-22 April 2016)

- Mr Nils Muižnieks, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights
- Mr Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission
- Mr Ahmet Davutoğlu, Prime Minister of Turkey
- Mr Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe
- Mr Heinz Fischer, President of Austria
- Mr Daniel Mitov, Chairman of the Committee of Ministers, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria
- Mr José Manuel García-Margallo, Minister of Foreign Office and Co-operation of Spain
- Sir Robert Neill, Chair of the Justice Committee of the House of Commons, and Ms Harriett Harman, Chair of the UK Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights
- Ms Maria Elena Boschi, Minister of Constitutional Reforms and Relations with Parliament of Italy
- Mr Giorgi Kvirikashvili, Prime Minister of Georgia

4.2. Official visit to Ukraine (12-14 May 2016)

- Mr Andrii Parubiy, Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada
- Mr Petro Poroshenko, President of Ukraine
- Mr Volodymyr Groysman, Prime Minister of Ukraine
- Mr Pavlo Klimkin, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine
- Ms Ivanna Klymush-Tsintsadze, Vice-Prime Minister for European Integration

4.3. 126th session of the Committee of Ministers (Sofia, 18 May 2016)

- Mr Daniel Mitov, Chairman of the Committee of Ministers, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria
- Mr Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey

4.4. 44th session of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States (St Petersburg, 19-20 May 2016)

- Mr Ogtay Asadov, Speaker of the Milli Mejlis, Azerbaijan
- Ms Valentina Matvienko, Chairperson of the IPA CIS Council, Speaker of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation
- Mr Sergey Naryshkin, Speaker of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation
- Mr Alexey Pushkov, Head of the State Duma Committee on International Affairs
- Mr Ilkka Kanerva, President, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
- Mr Anatoly Rusetsky, Vice-Speaker, Council of the Republic of the National Assembly of Belarus
- Mr Saber Chowdhury, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

4.5. Assembly meetings in Tallinn (26 and 27 May 2016)

- Mr Eiki Nestor, President of the Riigikogu
- Mr Marin Mrčela, President of the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO), and
- Mr Daniel Thelesklaf, Chairman of the Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures and the Financing of Terrorism (MONEYVAL) of the Council of Europe
- Ms Marina Kaljurand, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, Estonia

4.6. Meeting of the Ad hoc committee of the Bureau on the situation of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Greece (30-31 May 2016)

- Mr Alexis Tsipras, Prime Minister of Greece
- Mr Nikolaos Voutsis, Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament
- Exchange of views at the Hellenic Parliament with the participation of, *inter alia*. Mr Yiannis Mouzalas, Alternate Minister for Migration Policy, Mr Nikolaos Toskas, Alternate Minister of Citizen protection, Mr Dimitris Vitsas, Deputy Minister of National Defense, Mr Andreas Xanthos, Minister of Health, Ms Theano Fotiou, Alternate Minister of Social Solidarity
- Exchange of views at the Town Hall of Lesvos with *inter alia* Mr Spyridon Galinos, Mayor of Lesvos, Mr Kampouris, Representative of the Governor of the North Aegean region

4.7. Official visit to Turkey (Ankara, 6-7 June 2016)

- Mr Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs
- Mr İsmail Kahraman, Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey
- Mr Nihat Ömeroğlu, Chief Ombudsman
- Mr Binali Yıldırım, Prime Minister
- Mr Ömer Çelik, Minister of EU Affairs
- Turkish Assembly delegation and the Committee on Foreign Affairs (President, Mr Taha Özhan)
- Mr Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, President of Turkey