



Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire

<https://pace.coe.int>

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Doc. 11720 Addendum I

27 September 2008

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 third and the fourth part of the 2008
Ordinary Session**

Communication

President of the Assembly



Contents	Page
1. Past meetings and visits	3
1.1. Official visit to Azerbaijan (1-4 July 2008)	3
1.2. Official visit to Moldova (6-9 July 2008)	4
1.3. Official visit to Armenia (23-24 July 2008)	6
1.4. Meeting of the Conference of Presidents of the European Parliament and the Presidential Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly (Brussels, 28 August 2008)	9
1.5. Colloquy on the Role of Parliaments in Management of Water Resources, meeting of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, and visit of the "Expo Zaragoza 2008" on the theme "Water and sustainable development" (Zaragoza, Spain, 8-9 September 2008)	9
2. Press releases	9
3. Speeches	10

1. Past meetings and visits

1.1. Official visit to Azerbaijan (1-4 July 2008)

In response to an invitation from the Azerbaijani Parliament, I made an official visit to the country from 1 to 4 July 2008, during which I raised the question of the action to be taken on [Resolution 1614 \(2008\)](#) on the functioning of democratic institutions in Azerbaijan, which the Parliamentary Assembly had adopted on 24 June. I focused on preparations for the presidential election in October 2008, freedom of expression and association, alleged political prisoners and peaceful settlement of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

In the course of my visit I met the President of the Republic, Ilham Aliyev, the Speaker of the Milli Mejlis (parliament), Ogtay Asadov, the Prime Minister, Artur Rasizade, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Elmar Mammadyarov. I also met members of the Azerbaijani delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly and representatives of the various political parties, civil society, the opposition not represented in parliament, the media and the diplomatic corps in Baku. I should point out that I did not encounter any obstacles to meeting politicians and journalists who were radically opposed to the party in power.

As the presidential election was to be held shortly, I made that the priority of my visit, particularly as the Parliamentary Assembly considered that there were irregularities on the occasion of the previous election.

During my meeting with President Aliyev, I stressed that the election was a sign of Azerbaijan's commitment to pursuing democratic reforms in accordance with the recommendations the Parliamentary Assembly had made in [Resolution 1614 \(2008\)](#). I drew attention to the recommendations concerning the membership and workings of the electoral commissions, respect for freedom of association and expression and equitable access to the media and to registration for candidates. President Aliyev gave me a personal guarantee that the elections would be fully democratic.

I pointed out in this connection that full respect for freedom of expression was particularly important. Journalists needed to be able to work freely and without fear of persecution in all Council of Europe countries. I stressed that the detention of journalists was therefore completely unacceptable and called for the release of those in prison. This was the most difficult issue to address, because the conception of freedom of expression and opinion and of the role of the opposition is still not consistent with our standards.

The country's highest authorities, namely the President of the Republic, the Speaker of the Parliament and the Prime Minister, asserted that the country's European, democratic approach was the fruit of an irreversible strategic decision and that Azerbaijan was determined to push ahead with democratic reforms in accordance with Council of Europe standards. They undertook to establish conditions that would ensure that the forthcoming presidential election was free and democratic.

While expressing satisfaction with this assertion of the determination to comply with the Assembly's recommendations, I reminded the President of Azerbaijan and the other senior figures that their assurances would need to be borne out by the situation in practice, as ascertained by the Assembly delegation sent to observe the election.

I also called on the authorities to use all legal means to settle the issue of alleged political prisoners and, in particular, to release those who were in poor health without delay, on humanitarian grounds.

Much of my discussions with the authorities concerned the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. I stressed the need for a rapid solution consistent with Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, achieved by peaceful means alone. I drew attention in this connection to the Assembly's position, in particular [Resolutions 1416 \(2005\)](#) and 1614 (2008), and to the support the Assembly had given to the Minsk Group from the time it had been set up. I expressed the view that, in any event, if the conflict persisted it would continue to have adverse effects on the country's democratic progress and on the democratic and economic development of the region as a whole.

I found that the authorities were increasingly impatient with what they saw as a lack of progress with solving this problem. Even though the situation of many refugees and displaced persons had improved, the authorities considered that the only lasting solution to their situation was for them to return to their original homes. It was because of this very noticeable impatience that I referred several times to Azerbaijan's commitment to settling the conflict by purely peaceful means. In taking a stand, however, the Council of Europe and the international community as a whole have a duty to step up their efforts to find a solution as soon as possible. In this connection, I suggested that the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly might play a more active role in future in the conflict-resolution process.

If progress is to be made with solving the problems besetting the country, it is essential to establish a substantive dialogue between the majority in power and the opposition. The rights of the opposition need to be respected if it is to be able to participate fully in the political life of the country. I made this clear both to the authorities and to the representatives of the opposition.

I noticed that most of the representatives of the opposition whom I met were very pessimistic about the country's democratic progress. Some of them accused the Council of Europe of failing to take action to address the problems. I reminded them of [Resolution 1614 \(2008\)](#), which, to my mind, dealt with all the problems raised by the opposition. Despite the difficulties facing them, I urged them to take part in dialogue with the authorities and in the October election.

At the request of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education, I raised the matter of the failure of attempts by the committee rapporteur, Mr O'Hara, to arrange a visit to the region in connection with the cultural heritage of the South Caucasus. I invited the parliamentary delegation to resume discussions with the committee on the subject, in a spirit of open-mindedness, so that mutually satisfactory arrangements for such a visit could be made.

No visitor to the country can fail to notice its rapid economic development, which is the result in particular of oil and natural gas exports. This provides ample opportunity to improve the economic and social situation of the population. There is no doubt that progress has been made in this respect, but the authorities must step up their efforts to ensure that this new-found economic growth benefits all sections of the population. I also warned the authorities that economic development would not lead to long-term stability and prosperity unless it went hand in hand with consolidation of democratic institutions.

The people I spoke to stressed Azerbaijan's European vocation and its intention of joining the European Union in due course. I said I was in favour of this, while pointing out that if Azerbaijan were really to approach the European Union, the Council of Europe would first have to be able to certify that democracy, the rule of law and human rights were respected in the country, failing which membership of the European Union would be out of the question.

Lastly, I should like to thank the Azerbaijani authorities, in particular the parliament, for being so helpful during the preparations for my visit and in the course of the visit itself, and for their hospitality. I should also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe in Baku, Ms Veronika Kotek, for her invaluable assistance.

1.2. Official visit to Moldova (6-9 July 2008)

At the Moldovan Parliament's invitation, I made an official visit to Moldova from 6 to 9 July 2008. The main purpose of my visit was to encourage Moldova to continue meeting its commitments and obligations towards the Council of Europe, and its efforts towards European integration, and to endeavour to find a solution to the frozen conflict in Transnistria.

During my visit, I held discussions with Vladimir Voronin, the President of the Republic of Moldova, Marian Lupu, the President of the Moldovan Parliament, Zinaida Greceanîi, the Prime Minister, and Andrei Stratan, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and European Integration. I also met members of the Moldovan parliamentary delegation to the PACE, the leaders of parliamentary groups, Dorin Chirtoaca, the Mayor of Chişinău, representatives of the Balti local authorities and of NGOs, and diplomatic representatives based in Chişinău. Finally, I addressed a plenary sitting of the Moldovan Parliament.

Moldova has been a member of the Council of Europe for thirteen years and during this time the country has greatly benefited from the Council of Europe's expertise and standards. Consequently, while talking to the various parties, I reassured them that the Assembly appreciated everything that Moldova had achieved over the past thirteen years, particularly given the difficult circumstances in which Moldova took its first steps towards independence and on the road to becoming a member of the European family.

At the same time, however, I pointed out that thirteen years was a long time for the country to be subject to our monitoring procedure and that it was necessary to speed up the reforms, particularly in the interests of the Moldovan people. I drew attention to the Assembly's concerns with regard to the smooth functioning of the judicial system and the public prosecutor's office, the independence of the media, the need for an effective drive against corruption and for conditions that would enable the free exercise of local autonomy – to give the most obvious examples.

With regard to Transnistria, I reiterated the Council of Europe's position, stressing that the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict must be based on the inviolable principle of full respect for Moldova's territorial integrity and sovereignty. I pointed out that it was necessary to study and discuss any proposed solution carefully with all stakeholders in Moldova and with the international mediators and observers. I also suggested that the "5+2" negotiations should be resumed as soon as possible.

Thirdly, I encouraged our Moldovan friends to continue their efforts towards European integration and said that I personally believed that European integration was the best future for Moldova and that this was an entirely plausible prospect for the country. How soon that might be possible depended, of course, not only on the European Union but also on Moldova and its determination and political will.

My visit took place in the specific context of the forthcoming legislative and presidential elections, which are to take place in spring 2009. Given that this will be the first time elections will be held after five years of relative political stability, I pointed out that they would be a major test of Moldova's democratic achievements over this period.

I am pleased to report that during our discussion, the President of the Moldovan Parliament promised to invite as many Council of Europe representatives as possible to observe the elections.

Although the election campaign had not yet officially started, political life was already dominated by electoral considerations. The representatives of the coalition in power obviously drew attention to the progress made during their term in office. I, for my part, said that the Assembly appreciated the legislative reforms that had been carried out: [Resolution 1465 \(2005\)](#) of the Assembly has served as a basis for much of this work and, according to the Moldovan representatives I spoke to, all the proposed laws have been enacted, except the education code, which should be adopted in the autumn.

The authorities said that a large number of steps had been taken to liberalise the economy and that this had resulted in annual economic growth of approximately 6% over the last few years and in the establishment of an asymmetric trading system that enabled the country to draw full benefit from its position at the trading crossroads between the EU and the CIS. They also said that fresh impetus had been given to finding a solution to the Transnistrian conflict, but did not provide any specific details.

At the same time, the opposition and some NGOs were very critical. The most common criticisms and those that are most worrying are those concerning the independence of the judiciary and the public prosecutor's office, freedom of the media and freedom of expression in general, local autonomy, corruption, economic and social development, and trafficking in human beings. According to those I spoke to, there was a growing number of cases of harassment of the leaders of the opposition through the courts as the elections grew nearer; the main leaders of the opposition still had no access to public television as Tele-Radio Moldova had still not been made a public service; and the local authorities were funded according to their political affiliations; economic growth was due to contributions from Moldovans living in other countries and not to the establishment of an economic climate that really encouraged investment, socioeconomic restructuring, etc.

Many of the discussions concerned recent amendments to the laws that would apply to the forthcoming elections, in particular those concerning the electoral threshold, electoral "blocs" and dual citizenship. The authorities said that the amendments concerning the 6% threshold and the prohibition on electoral "blocs" were necessary to ensure that parliament was made up of political parties that had Moldovans' firm support; they justified the restrictions on dual nationality for those who held certain public offices by the concern to prevent conflicts of interest. The opposition, for its part, believed that this was intentional to prevent some of its leaders from being represented in parliament.

I told them that, on their next visit to Moldova, the co-rapporteurs of the Monitoring Committee would examine all the comments made by both the authorities and the opposition. I also strongly encouraged the authorities to seek the Venice Commission's opinion on its election laws.

I told the authorities that holding successful elections was not only a question of a well-organised election day but of creating a political and social climate in the country that would enable citizens to make a truly free, conscious choice. All aspects of the democratic system had to function properly:

- political parties and stakeholders had to have the opportunity to freely explain their programmes in public to the largest possible number of voters;
- people had to have the possibility of becoming members of a political party without having to justify their choice;

- the media landscape also had to be as diverse as possible to reflect the public's wide range of ideas and opinions and should not be in the hands of only the most powerful groups; the media should have the freedom to provide information, ask questions, investigate candidates' programmes and not be pressurised into showing preference for certain candidates;
- the courts had to do only the work that really concerned them and not be used as a tool for exerting pressure on candidates or excluding them;
- the purpose of institutions of local democracy was to serve the citizens and they should not be deprived of funding according to the political affiliation of those responsible for running them.

In my address to parliament, I also pointed out that it was admittedly very important to enact electoral laws but that even the best laws remained a dead letter if they were not applied on an everyday basis in all good faith. I therefore insisted that it was necessary to foster a democratic culture and that all politicians should give a personal example of this.

Finally, I would like to thank all those whom I spoke to and in particular the Moldovan Parliament for inviting me and the Office of the Secretary General's Special Representative in Moldova for their warm welcome, their hospitality and their efficiency in making my visit a success.

1.3. Official visit to Armenia (23-24 July 2008)

On invitation of the Speaker of the National Assembly, I made an official visit to Armenia on 23 and 24 July. The main objectives of my visit were to deepen the co-operation between Armenia and the Parliamentary Assembly, as well as to encourage implementation of Assembly [Resolutions 1609](#) and [1620 \(2008\)](#) by the Armenian authorities. In addition, I discussed the recent developments with regard to the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and the relations between Armenia and Turkey. The statement I made at the end of my visit is attached to this memorandum.

During my visit, I met with the President of Armenia, the Speaker of the National Assembly, the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, the chairperson and members of the national delegation of Armenia to the Assembly, representatives of the ruling and opposition factions in the National Assembly, the Ad hoc Inquiry Committee into the Events of 1 and 2 March 2008, as well as the Human Rights Defender of Armenia and the Catholicos of All Armenians. In addition, through the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe (SRSG) in Armenia, I met with former President Mr Levon Ter-Petrossian, representatives of the civil society, as well as members of the diplomatic community in Armenia. I wish to thank the National Assembly of Armenia for its generous hospitality and the excellent programme and the Office of the SRSG in Yerevan for the assistance they provided during my visit.

In relation to [Resolutions 1609](#) and [1620](#), which I supported totally and clearly before all my interlocutors, I was heartened by the fact that all representatives of the Armenian authorities, including the President of the Republic, stressed that they intended to fully implement the provisions in these resolutions before the January deadline given by the Assembly. The Armenian authorities, in particular the President of the Republic, stressed that their interest in implementing these resolutions was not only because of Assembly demands, but because these resolutions are very beneficial for the democratic development of the country. This is a positive signal, which highlights the constructive and positive role played by the Assembly in finding a solution for the current political crisis in Armenia.

I welcomed the political will of the authorities to comply with [Resolutions 1609](#) and [1620](#) by stressing to them that their declarations of intent should now urgently be followed by clear and concrete measures, especially with regard to the independent and credible inquiry into the events on 1 and 2 March and the release of persons detained in relation to these events.

In [Resolution 1620](#), the Assembly resolved to give Armenia until January 2009 to comply with the requirements of [Resolutions 1609](#) and [1620](#), but, in that same resolution, also invited the Commissioner for Human Rights to report to the Monitoring Committee in September 2008 on the progress with regard to the inquiry and release of detainees. I made it clear that marked progress with regard to those two issues would be necessary by that date, if the Armenian authorities wished to avoid the possibility of an urgent debate and possible sanctions during the September part-session.

The reaction of the opposition to [Resolution 1620](#) was mixed, some opposition representatives welcomed the fact that the Assembly maintained pressure on the authorities, while others condemned the Assembly for not applying sanctions in June. However, all agree that [Resolutions 1609](#) and [1620](#) form a viable road map for the resolution of the current political crisis. The main concern of the opposition seems to centre on their fears that

the January deadline would allow the continued detention of opposition supporters and avoid the start of a truly independent and credible inquiry into the events on 1 and 2 March. I therefore highlighted the importance of the September meeting of the Monitoring Committee, but also stressed that the Assembly expects the opposition to be ready to engage in a constructive dialogue with the authorities. I received assurances from the opposition, including from Mr Levon Ter-Petrossian, that they are ready to engage in a dialogue as soon as progress is made in relation to the release of detainees and inquiry into the events on 1 and 2 March.

During my visit, I also met with Mr Raffi Hovannisian, who had suspended his participation in the national delegation of Armenia to the Assembly following the June debate on [Resolution 1620](#). I stressed the importance of the participation of the parliamentary opposition in the Armenian delegation, especially in the current political context, and urged him to reconsider his position. Mr Hovannisian clearly understood my point of view and I therefore hope that he will reconsider his position if progress is made on compliance with the demands of the Assembly by September.

In [Resolution 1609](#), the Assembly demanded that the authorities initiate an independent, transparent and credible inquiry into the events on 1 March 2008 and the circumstances that led to them. In response, an ad hoc inquiry committee was constituted by the National Assembly of Armenia. In [Resolution 1620](#), the Assembly noted that the format and composition of this committee do not per se guarantee its independence and impartiality and therefore the credibility of its inquiry.

During his visit to Armenia, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe concluded that the inquiry committee of the National Assembly, which is dominated by the parties belonging to the ruling coalition and effectively boycotted by the opposition supporting Mr Levon Ter-Petrossian, will not have the required impartiality and credibility that is demanded by the Assembly. He therefore suggested that a separate commission should be formed that would be tasked with establishing the facts regarding the events on 1 and 2 March and the circumstances that led to them. The parliamentary inquiry committee could then be tasked with drawing the political conclusions based on the findings of that commission. This commission proposed by the Commissioner should be composed on the basis of parity between opposition and authorities, as well as on mutual consensus on its members. In addition the members of that commission should be experts and not political representatives. Under these conditions international experts could then be invited to participate in the work of this commission. It is my understanding that the Commissioner for Human Rights is willing to provide an expert to help the authorities and opposition to constitute this commission and decide on its mandate and powers.

I strongly supported the proposals of the Commissioner for Human Rights to the Armenian authorities as a means to resolve the stalemate with regard to the inquiry. To my satisfaction, both authorities and opposition, including Mr Levon Ter-Petrossian, informed me that they in principle accepted the compromise formulated by the Commissioner. However, both expressed some doubts about the possibility of finding personalities in Armenia that are considered neutral by all sides. While it is clear that reaching a consensus on the mandate and composition of this commission will not be an easy task, it is my conviction that, with sufficient political will and maturity, it will be possible to constitute this commission before the September meeting of the Monitoring Committee, especially given the possibility of international expertise provided by the Commissioner for the setting-up of this commission.

The question of opposition supporters detained in relation to the events on 1 and 2 March is clearly the most difficult one to resolve and I noticed initially a certain degree of hesitance on the part of the authorities with regard to this issue. It is clear that this is a question of utmost importance to the Assembly – and the Council of Europe as a whole – from which it cannot deviate. I stressed this position to the authorities.

At the time of my visit, 17 people were still under pre-trial detention while their cases are investigated. In [Resolution 1620](#) the Assembly stressed that all cases still under investigation should be closed or promptly brought before the courts. I was therefore unpleasantly surprised by the fact that, in the week after our session, the General Prosecutor of Armenia had requested, and was granted by the courts, a two-month extension of the pre-trial detentions of a number of people. I made it clear to the authorities that the continued pre-trial detention for these people was unacceptable to the Assembly and that this issue needs to be resolved before the September meeting of the Monitoring Committee. The authorities led me to understand that this issue would be resolved in the weeks following my visit.

However, the status of these people cannot be considered solved if their cases are brought before the courts. Many of them – including the three detained MPs – as well as a significant number of people whose cases are currently under consideration by the Courts, are charged with what many consider to be seemingly artificial and politically motivated charges, including under Articles 300 and 225 of the Criminal Code of Armenia. These articles are considered problematic by the Assembly, which asked that all cases under these articles

be dropped, except when there is strong evidence that a person committed serious violent crimes. The Council of Europe should closely monitor the court cases and the Assembly may wish to bring this issue to the attention of the Monitoring Group of the Committee of Ministers. In all my meetings with the authorities, I expressed the concerns of the Assembly with regard to this issue and stressed that even a single detention that is deemed unjustified by the Assembly could have consequences for the position of the Assembly in January.

Like the two co-rapporteurs for Armenia, I am convinced that the detention of opposition supporters in relation to the events on 1 and 2 March will continue to strain the relation between opposition and authorities and will undermine the badly needed process of reconciliation and dialogue in Armenian society. In line with [Resolution 1620](#), I therefore strongly urged the authorities to consider every means available to them to release all those detained in relation to these events, except those responsible for serious violent crimes. While this is clearly a difficult issue for the authorities, I noticed understanding for our position and was assured that marked progress would be achieved before the September part-session of the Assembly. The President of Armenia informed me that a report outlining the progress on these issues would be transmitted to me by early September.

All interlocutors I met in Armenia were clearly concerned with paragraphs 25.1 and 25.2 in [Resolution 1614](#) on “the functioning of democratic institutions in Azerbaijan”, adopted during the June part-session, which deal with the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. In the view of our Armenian counterparts, these two paragraphs only pay tribute to the position of the Azerbaijani side and are detrimental for the peaceful resolution of this conflict.

I clarified that [Resolution 1614](#) does not change the position of the Assembly as outlined in [Resolution 1416 \(2005\)](#) on the conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region dealt with by the OSCE Minsk Conference. I highlighted that for the Assembly, territorial integrity is a fundamental principle for the relations between countries. The Assembly also recognises the principle of self-determination when the expression of self-determination is achieved via a democratic process in line with international norms and principles and not as a result of military action. I therefore expressed the full support of the Assembly for the efforts of the OSCE Minsk Group to find a peaceful solution for this conflict, acceptable to all concerned parties, based on international norms and principles. In this respect, I stressed that any attempts to resolve this conflict by military means would be unacceptable to the Assembly.

My explanations sufficiently clarified the position of the Assembly. However, in my opinion, care should be taken that resolutions adopted in the framework of the monitoring procedure for Armenia and Azerbaijan are in line with the overall position of the Assembly with regard to this conflict, in order not to be seen as promoting the position of one of the parties in this conflict only.

The Assembly has until now only played a limited role with regard to the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. I expressed the readiness of the Assembly to become more involved in helping the Azerbaijani and Armenian parliaments to find a lasting solution to this conflict, if both sides so wish. The Speaker of the National Assembly and chairperson of the Armenian delegation to the Assembly made some suggestions with regard to an increased role of the Assembly that deserve further study and follow-up, always in agreement with both parties.

Recently, there have been some positive developments with regard to the relations between Turkey and Armenia. President Gül of Turkey was one of the first heads of state to congratulate President Sargsyan of Armenia on his election in February, while Prime Minister Erdogan indicated that the doors were open to start a new dialogue between the two countries. For his part, President Sargsyan invited President Gül to join him watching the qualifying match between the Armenian and Turkish soccer teams for the World Cup that will take place in Yerevan and, in an article in the *Wall Street Journal*, expressed his wish to normalise the relations between the two countries.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Armenia informed me that the invitation to President Gül was only one, albeit the most visible one, of a series of initiatives taken by Armenia with a view to normalising relations. He insisted that from the side of Armenia there are no preconditions, including in relation to their historical differences, to the start of negotiations with a view to normalising relations. This is in my opinion a positive and significant development. However, to the regret of the Armenian authorities, no official reaction to their proposals has been received from the Turkish authorities until now. I welcomed these initiatives and I offered the support and assistance of the Assembly, as well as my office, to improve the relations between these two member countries of our Organisation.

The Catholicos of All Armenians, His Holiness Garegin III, informed me of the difficulties faced by the Armenian Church in Georgia. I promised to bring this issue to the attention of the rapporteurs for Georgia in the Monitoring Committee for possible follow-up in the framework of their ongoing monitoring of that country.

1.4. Meeting of the Conference of Presidents of the European Parliament and the Presidential Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly (Brussels, 28 August 2008)

With the President of the European Parliament, Mr Hans-Gert Pöttering, I co-chaired the joint meeting of the Presidential Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly and the Conference of Presidents of the European Parliament. This meeting took place in the framework of the co-operation agreement signed by both institutions in November 2007.

The entire meeting was devoted to the conflict between Georgia and the Russian Federation; the exchange of views between the leaders of the political groups of the Assembly and of the European Parliament was very interesting and useful. President Pöttering presented the key elements of his speech before the European Council planned for 1 September and declared that the EP was in favour of a European Union contribution to Georgia's reconstruction. The participants exchanged views. Several mentioned the responsibilities of both sides and underlined the necessity of greater complementarity and a better exchange of information between the two European parliamentary bodies. The idea was also launched to organise such meetings more frequently, for example twice a year.

The follow-up to this meeting should be thought through carefully by the Bureau, so that the Presidential Committee could issue concrete proposals to the Conference of Presidents as soon as possible.

1.5. Colloquy on the Role of Parliaments in Management of Water Resources, meeting of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, and visit of the "Expo Zaragoza 2008" on the theme "Water and sustainable development" (Zaragoza, Spain, 8-9 September 2008)

I attended the meeting of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs in Madrid and Zaragoza on 8 and 9 September 2008.

In the morning of 8 November, the committee held a Colloquy on the Role of Parliaments in Managing Water Resources, whose participants included Mrs Elena Espinosa, Minister for Environmental, Rural and Marine Affairs of Spain, Mr Juan Fernando López Aguilar, chairperson of the Spanish delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly, and Mr Ian Micallef, President of the Chamber of Local Authorities of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

In my address, I spoke of my concern for environmental issues and said that one of the priorities of my term as President of the Parliamentary Assembly was to incorporate the right to a healthy environment into the European Convention on Human Rights, through an additional protocol.

I also spoke of our Assembly's desire for close cooperation with the countries of the southern Mediterranean. Water and all the problems surrounding this issue were an appropriate subject for such co-operation.

During the colloquy, Mr Pierre Victoria of the "Cercle Français de l'Eau" described the preparations for the 5th World Water Forum (Istanbul, 2009) and it was decided that the Parliamentary Assembly's Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, in conjunction with the "Cercle Français de l'Eau" and the Turkish Parliament, would organise a conference on water, to be held in Strasbourg on 6 November 2008. The conference would be an opportunity to prepare the parliamentary declaration, which would be presented to the 5th World Water Forum in Istanbul.

On 9 September, the committee visited the Zaragoza Expo 2008 on the theme of "Water and sustainable development", where in particular we visited the Spanish and Monegasque pavilions.

2. Press releases

1. Lluís Maria de Puig: "We must provide Turkey with a clear European perspective"
2. The President of PACE on an official visit to Azerbaijan
3. "Azerbaijan's coming presidential election must demonstrate the country's democratic commitment", says PACE President in Baku
4. Lluís Maria de Puig: "The release of Ingrid Betancourt is a victory for freedom"
5. PACE President on official visit to Moldova
6. PACE President calls for acceleration of reforms in Moldova, free and fair elections

7. PACE President makes official visit to Armenia
8. Arrest of Radovan Karadžić: "Now justice can at last be done," says PACE President
9. Death of Lord Russell-Johnston: PACE President pays tribute "to a great defender of moralpolitik in Europe"
10. The President of the PACE condemns the twin bombings in Istanbul
11. Armenia: promises should be followed by concrete measures, says PACE President
12. Decision of Turkey's Constitutional Court: statement by PACE President
13. Opening of the Olympic Games: PACE President reiterates his appeal for fundamental freedoms in China to be respected
14. South Ossetia: PACE President calls for an end to the violence
15. PACE President concerned about the conflict between Georgia and Russia
16. Georgia/Russia: PACE President welcomes peace agreement, but declares that human rights violations must not go unpunished
17. Memorial service for Lord Russell-Johnston
18. PACE President on Kozulin's liberation: "a positive step, but no bargaining over democracy and human rights"
19. Georgia: PACE President calls for immediate and total withdrawal of Russian troops
20. PACE President strongly condemns Russia's recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia
21. Leaders of PACE and the European Parliament to meet
22. Lluís Maria de Puig: "Protecting the environment is a question of human rights, not of principles"
23. Georgia-Russia conflict: statement by PACE President
24. Terrorist attacks in Spain: "There is no possible political justification," according to Lluís Maria de Puig
25. PACE President calls on the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights to keep a close track on the debate on the reintroduction of the death penalty in Latvia

3. Speeches

1. Speech at the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova (Chişinău, 9 July 2008).

For a full text of these press releases and speech, please follow the link <http://assembly.coe.int>.