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Activities of the President of the Parliamentary Assembly between the First and the Second part of the 2017 Ordinary Session

Communication
President of the Assembly

1. Visits and meetings

1.1. President's activities between 21 January and 2 March 2017

1.1.1. 1st part of the 2017 session of the Parliamentary Assembly (23-27 January 2017)

During the 2017 first part-session of the Assembly, I held bilateral meetings with the Assembly's guests – Mr Nicos Anastasiades, President of Cyprus, Mr Klaus Werner Iohannis, President of Romania, Mr Ioannis Kasoulides, Chairman of the Committee of Ministers and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Cyprus, and Mr Johannes Hahn, European Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations. We discussed a number of issues, including the major challenges that the process of European construction has to face, the refugee crisis and the management of mixed migratory flows, the human rights and the rule of law challenges in our member States, as well as the prospective of holding a 4th Summit of Council of Europe Heads of State and Government.

Moreover, I met a number of Chairpersons of national delegations to the Assembly. In particular,

– On 24 January 2017, I met – individually – the Chairpersons and members of the delegations of Serbia and of the Assembly of Kosovo with a view to seeking their views on the implementation of Resolution 2094(2016) regarding the participation of the delegation of the Assembly of Kosovo in the work of the Assembly. The Chairpersons of both delegations explained their positions and agreed to hold a joint meeting with me during the April 2017 part-session to continue the discussions.

– During the session, I met representatives of several NGOs who raised the issue of allegations of corruption within the Parliamentary Assembly. I assured the NGO representatives that the Assembly would not tolerate any form of corruption, inside or outside of the Assembly, and informed them of the steps taken by the Bureau and, subsequently, the Assembly's Committee on Rules of Procedure and Institutional Affairs.

– On 23 January 2017, I met Mr Georg Link, Director of the OSCE-ODIHR. We discussed the co-operation between the Assembly and the OSCE-ODIHR in the field of election observation as well as the ways to develop co-operation further.

On 1 February 2017, I held an exchange of views with the Ministers' Deputies and informed them of the debates and Assembly activities during the January 2017 part-session. During the exchange of views a number of Ambassadors raised the question of the allegations of corruption. I informed the Ambassadors of the steps taken by the Assembly and in particular the 3-point plan endorsed by the Bureau of the Assembly on 27 January 2017.

1.1.2. Other activities

– On 9 February 2017, in Madrid, I met Mr Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, during his working visit to Spain. We discussed the recent developments in Turkey as well as topical issues on the European political agenda, including counteracting international terrorism and addressing the refugee crisis.

– On 11 February 2017, in Madrid, I met Mr Antonio Tajani, President of the European Parliament, in the margins of his participation in the 18th Congress of the Spanish Popular Party. We discussed the co-operation between the Parliamentary Assembly and the European Parliament, as well as Europe's response to transnational political challenges, including the fight against international terrorism, the refugee crisis, as well as the search for solutions, through parliamentary diplomacy, to Europe's active and frozen conflicts.

1.2. President's activities between 4 March and 21 April 2017

1.2.1. Assembly meetings in Madrid (Presidential Committee, Bureau and Standing Committee, 9-10 March 2017)

Within the framework of the commemorations of the 40th anniversary of Spain's accession to the Council of Europe and at the invitation of the Spanish Parliament, the Parliamentary Assembly held meetings of its Presidential Committee, Bureau and Standing Committee in Madrid, on 9-10 March 2017.

I would like to express our gratitude to the Spanish authorities and to the Parliament of Spain for their generous hospitality and the excellent organisation of our meetings. The Standing Committee, in particular, was an opportunity to hold exchanges of views with Mr Christian Ahlund, Chairperson of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), and with representatives of the Russian Parliament on modalities of co-operation between the Parliamentary Assembly and the Russian Parliament in 2017.

It was a great honour for the members of the Standing Committee to be received by His Majesty the King of Spain. His Majesty's commitment to the values that the Council of Europe supports as well as his endeavours to keep the spirit of co-operation, collaboration and commitment alive in Europe are an important message of support for our Organisation.

On 11 March 2017, the members of the Assembly's Standing Committee had the opportunity to participate in the ceremony organised to commemorate the European Day of Remembrance of victims of terrorism, in Madrid's Parque del Retiro. I am extremely grateful to all those who joined this event.

1.2.2. Official visit to Montenegro (16-17 March 2017)

At the invitation of the Speaker of the Parliament of Montenegro, Mr Ivan Brajović, I paid an official visit to Montenegro, on 16-17 March 2017. During the visit, I met Mr Duško Marković, Prime Minister of Montenegro, Mr Ivan Brajović, Speaker of the Parliament of Montenegro, Mr Zoran Janković, State Secretary for Political Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr Andrija Nikolić, President of the Committee on International Relations and Emigrants, as well as Mr Predrag Sekulić, Chairman of the delegation of Montenegro to the Assembly and the members of the delegation.

At the end of my visit, I congratulated the authorities on the excellent co-operation with the Council of Europe expert and monitoring bodies and on the progress Montenegro has made in the implementation of commitments and obligations to the Council of Europe during its 10-year membership of the Organisation. I encouraged the authorities to continue their work in key reform areas, such as the judiciary, the fight against corruption and organised crime, non-discrimination and the media. The implementation of these reforms, in line with the Council of Europe standards, will contribute to Montenegro's strategic political priority of advancing on the path of European integration.

With my interlocutors in Parliament, I discussed the domestic political challenges the country is facing. I emphasised the responsibility of the majority and of the opposition to engage in constructive political dialogue, within the country's democratic institutions. Constructive co-operation on key laws and strategic reform priorities is the responsibility of both, the majority and the opposition. This is essential for the stability and solidity of the country's democratic institutions, for the effectiveness of the reforms, as well as – above all – for the citizens of Montenegro. I stressed that the non-participation of some parliamentary parties in the work of

the Parliament results in the fact that the views of the voters which supported them are not reflected in the democratic parliamentary debate. I urged all political stakeholders across the board to intensify efforts in the search for a political solution to the current parliamentary crisis.

Turning to regional and Pan-European co-operation, I praised Montenegro for maintaining good neighbourly relations with the countries of the region as well as for its support for the Council of Europe's action in addressing major political challenges, in particular, combating terrorism and radicalisation, addressing the refugee crisis and the migration phenomenon, as well as counteracting populist trends on the right and on the left of the political spectrum.

Finally, I thanked the authorities of Montenegro and the political actors for their support to the Assembly's #NoHateNoFear initiative.

1.2.3. 46th Plenary session of IPA CIS, and Conference on combatting international terrorism co-organised by IPA CIS and OSCE PA (St Petersburg, 27-28 March 2017)

At the invitation of Ms Valentina Matvienko, Chairperson of the Council of the Inter-parliamentary Assembly of Member Nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States, I travelled to St Petersburg, on 26-28 March 2017 to participate in several events as follows:

– 46th Plenary session of IPA CIS,

– International conference on combatting terrorism co-organised by IPA CIS and OSCE Parliamentary Assembly,

– Joint meeting of the ad hoc Sub-Committee of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy and the IPA CIS Permanent Commission on Political Issues and International Co-operation.

Addressing the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of Member Nations of the CIS, I welcomed the close co-operation developed during the last 20 years between the two bodies. I emphasised that our Assemblies pursue the same objectives, in particular building a common legal space for our Continent, based on shared principles and standards, and promoting parliamentary dialogue. We should continue and develop further our co-operation, focusing on concrete issues and initiatives of common interest such as counteracting international terrorism and managing migration and the refugee crisis.

Speaking at the International conference on combatting terrorism, I highlighted four areas of action where parliamentarians should concentrate their efforts to defend democratic societies against the terrorist threat: reaffirming publicly and in the strongest possible terms the absolute condemnation of all acts of terrorism, combating it while respecting human rights and the rule of law standards, developing further our legal tools to combat terrorism and addressing the root causes that lead to violent extremism and radicalisation. In all these areas – I stressed – the Council of Europe has developed legal instruments and standards that are open to non-member states of the Organisation and I encouraged our partners to take them fully into account.

In the margins of these events, I held a number of bilateral meetings, including with the Speakers of the Parliaments of Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic and Russia.

In particular, with Mr Vyacheslav Volodin, Chairman of the State Duma of Russia, we shared the positive assessment of the results of the recent exchange of views in the Assembly's Standing Committee held in Madrid. Our discussion there showed that there are many issues of mutual interest and concern which we have to discuss and on which we have to work together, as a Pan-European Parliamentary Assembly. I also reiterated the disagreements that exist between the Parliamentary Assembly and the Russian Parliament, in particular, regarding the conflict in and around Ukraine, and stressed that we had to address these through frank, open and mutually respectful dialogue.

In my discussions with the Russian Parliamentarians, I also raised the issue of the anti-corruption protests and demonstrations that took place in a number of Russian cities on 26 March 2017, as well as the mass detentions of protestors, including minors. I joined the concerns expressed in particular by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, stressing that the rights to freedom of expression and assembly are essential in a democracy and the need to strictly abide by the standards of the European Convention on Human Rights and the case law of the Strasbourg Court.

1.2.4. Official visit to Malta (29-30 March 2017)

At the invitation of the Speaker of the Maltese Parliament, I paid an official visit to Malta on 29-30 March 2017. During the visit, I held bilateral meetings with Malta's President, Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, Prime Minister, Mr Joseph Muscat, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr George Vella, and Speaker of Parliament, Mr Anglu Farrugia. I also had an exchange of views with members of the Maltese delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly.

Speaking at the end of the visit, I praised Malta's commitment to the Council of Europe's values and standards and for being a strong voice for the human rights of the most vulnerable.

I was particularly impressed by the President of Malta's firm commitment towards the protection of the rights of unaccompanied migrant children and tackling violence against women. I have shared with the President information on the Assembly's initiatives on these and other priority areas, and I am glad we were able to identify concrete ways to co-operate closely in the future.

I also praised the priorities identified for the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the European Union – in particular social inclusion and migration. Noting that these priorities largely correspond to the Assembly's current main areas of activity, I called for an increased co-operation on issues of mutual interest.

Turning to migration and refugee crisis, I supported Malta's approach focused on finding a pan-European solution based on the greatest solidarity possible and mutual understanding of each country's perspective and concerns.

Furthermore, I welcomed the Maltese President and Prime Minister's support to the idea of a Fourth Summit of Council of Europe Heads of State and Government which would strengthen the Organisation's mission and define a clear and strategic vision for our activities in the years to come.

Finally, I thanked the authorities of Malta and the political actors for their support for the Assembly's #NoHateNoFear initiative.

The visit to Malta was also an opportunity to attend the Congress of the European People's Party and to hold bilateral meetings with a number of officials, including the Federal Chancellor of Germany, Ms Angela Merkel, Hungary's Prime Minister, Mr Viktor Orbán, and European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, Mr Christos Stylianides.

1.2.5. Conference on "The interaction between the political majority and the opposition in democracy", Bucharest, Romania and working visit to Romania (6-7 April 2017)

At the invitation of the President of Romania, I attended the above-mentioned conference and highlighted the Assembly's work on the issue of interaction between the political majority and the opposition. I emphasised the crucial role of the parliamentary opposition which, through its oversight, reinforces the system of checks and balances and contributes to the transparency of the political process. In addition, I recalled the efforts deployed by the Assembly to help political forces in several member States overcome the protracted boycott which has stalled the work of parliament and delayed the introduction of essential reforms.

In the margins of the conference, I met the President of the Republic and held bilateral meetings with the Speaker of the Senate, the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, and members of the Romanian delegation to the Assembly.

2. Press releases

– President: "We will not let terrorism take our hope that we can live together without hate" (11 March 2017)
– "Montenegro is making steady progress on the path of European integration" (17 March 2017)
– President reacts to terrorist incident at Westminster (22 March 2017)
– President addresses the CIS Assembly: 'We pursue the same objectives' (27 March 2017)
– 'We must continue our dialogue, focusing on issues of mutual interest', President says in Saint Petersburg (27 March 2017)
– 'Inclusion and integration are the key to combat radicalisation' (28 March 2017)

- Malta: 'a strong voice for the human rights of the most vulnerable' (31 March 2017)
- PACE President condemns the bombing on the Saint Petersburg metro (3 April 2017)
- Interaction majority-opposition: a litmus test of the good functioning of a democracy (6 April 2017)
- Stockholm attack: President condemns heinous act (7 April 2017)
- President condemns the terrorist attacks against the Coptic Churches in Egypt (9 April 2017)

3. Speeches

- Statement at the opening of the 1st part of the 2017 Session of the Parliamentary Assembly (Strasbourg, 23 January 2017)
- Speech at the Ceremony to mark the International day of commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust (Strasbourg, 24 January 2017)
- Speech delivered at the ceremony of celebration for the 40th anniversary of the accession of Spain to the Council of Europe (Madrid, Spain, 9 March 2017)
- Address to the Standing Committee (Madrid, Spain, 10 March 2017)
- Speech during the Audience with His Majesty the King of Spain (Madrid, 10 March 2017)
- Address at the Solemn Plenary Session of the Inter-parliamentary Assembly of Member Nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States (St Petersburg, 27 March 2017)
- Speech at the International Parliamentary Conference on Combating Terrorism co-organised by the Inter-parliamentary Assembly of the CIS Member States and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (St Petersburg, 28 March 2017)
- Address to the EPP Congress (Valetta, Malta, 29 March 2017)
- Opening Speech at the International Conference on "The interaction between the political majority and the opposition in democracy" (Bucharest, Romania, 6 April 2017)

4. Personnalities met

4.1. 1st part of the 2017 session of the Parliamentary Assembly (23-27 January 2017)

- Mr Ioannis Kasoulides, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cyprus
- Mr Georg Link, Director of the OSCE-ODIHR
- Mr Aristotelis Pavlidis, former Chairperson of the Greek delegation, currently municipal counsellor in Kos, Greece
- Mr Alejo Vidal-Quadras, President, ISJ (In Search of Justice) International Committee
- Mr Dimitris Christopoulos, President, FIDH (Worldwide movement for Human Rights)
- Mr Tuur Elzinga, former member of the delegation of the Netherlands
- Mr Ögmundur Jonasson, former member of the delegation of Iceland
- Ms Meritxell Mateu, former member of the delegation of Andorra
- Mr Nicos Anastasiades, President of Cyprus
- Mr Johannes Hahn, European Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations
- Ms Aleksandra Djurović, Chairperson of the delegation of Serbia
- Ms Tamar Chugoshvili, Chairperson of the delegation of Georgia
- Ms Milena Santerini, Member of the Italian delegation
- Mr Xhavit Haliti, Chairperson, and members of the delegation of the Assembly of Kosovo
- Mr Joseph Debono Grech, Chairperson of the delegation of Malta

– Mr Anwar El Sadat, Egyptian Parliamentarian

– Mr Samad Seyidov, Chairperson of the delegation of Azerbaijan

– Mr Klaus Werner Iohannis, President of Romania

– Mr Philippe Dam, Advocacy Director for Europe and Central Asia, Human Rights Watch

– Ms Valentina Buliga, Chairperson of the delegation of the Republic of Moldova

– Ms Anna Rurka, President of the Conference of INGOs (International Non-Governmental Organisations)

– Mr Mato Franković, Chairperson of the Croatian delegation

– Mr Zolt Nemeth, Chairperson of the Hungarian delegation

– Mr Abdelaziz Benazzouz, Mr Abdelali Hamidine and Mr Abdesselam Lebbar, members of the delegation of Morocco

– Ms Sahiba Gafarova, member, and Mr Samad Seyidov, Chairperson of the delegation of Azerbaijan

– Ms Radhia Toumi, Ms Ben Harrath El Khansa, Mr Abderraouf El May Al Horra, Members of the Tunisian Parliament, Mr Brahim Daagi Daagi Brahim (Directorate of External Relations), Mr Mohamed Trabelsi, Consul of Tunisia

– Ms Elena Centemero, Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination

– Mr Axel Fischer, Chairperson of the German delegation

– Mr Predrag Sekulić, Chairperson of the delegation of Montenegro

– Mr Héctor Larios, Senator, member of the Mexican delegation and Mr Santiago Oñate Laborde, Permanent Observer of Mexico to the Council of Europe

– Mr Gonzalez-Andrío, Mr Angel Pintado and the Spanish delegation

– Ms Milica Marković, member of the delegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

– Mr Johannes Ullrich, The Concert for Europe

– Dr Khaled Albakkar, Head of the Jordanian delegation, Mr Ibrahim Alquran, Member of Parliament, Mr Kais Zayadin, MP, Dr Reem Abudalbouh, MP, Members of the delegation of Jordan, Mr Hassan Al Tarawneh, Director of International Parliamentary Relations

– Mr Ertugrul Kurkcu, Ms Filiz Keresteciogluand Mr Hişyar Ozsoy, members of the HDP Party, Turkey

– Mr Mehmet Çağlar and Mr Erdal Özcenk, representatives of the Turkish Cypriot community

– local journalists

4.2. Assembly meetings in Madrid (Presidential Committee, Bureau and Standing Committee, 9-10 March 2017)

– Mr Pio Garcia-Escudero, Speaker of the Senate, Spain

– Mr Christian Ahlund, Chairperson of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, Council of Europe

– His Majesty the King of Spain

– Mr Pyotr Tolstoy, Mr Leonid Slutsky, Mr Leonid Kalashnikov, Mr Konstantin Kosachev and Mr Vladimir Lukin, Russian parliamentarians

4.3. Official visit to Montenegro (16-17 March 2017)

– Mr Ivan Brajović, Speaker of the Parliament of Montenegro

– Mr Duško Marković, Prime Minister of Montenegro

– Mr Zoran Janković, State Secretary for Political Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

– Mr Andrija Nikolić, President, and members of the Committee on International Relations and Emigrants

– representatives of parliamentary Groups in the Parliament of Montenegro
– the Committee on Human Rights and Freedoms of the Parliament of Montenegro
– Mr Predrag Sekulić, Head of Delegation, and the delegation of the Parliament of Montenegro to the Parliamentary Assembly

4.4. 46th Plenary session of IPA CIS, and Conference on combatting international terrorism co-organised by IPA CIS and OSCE PA (St Petersburg, 27-28 March 2017)

– Mr Vyacheslav Volodin, Chairman of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation
– Mr Chynybay Tursunbekov, Speaker of the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic
– the IPA CIS Permanent Commission on Political Issues and International Co-operation (together with the ad hoc Sub-Committee of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy)
– Mr Mikhail Myasnikovich, President of the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus
– Mr Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Speaker of the Senate of Kazakhstan
– Mr Ogtay Asadov, Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Azerbaijan
– Ms Valentina Matvienko, Chairperson of the Council of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the CIS Member Nations, Chairperson of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation

4.5. Official visit to Malta (29-30 March 2017)

– Mr George William Vella, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malta
– Dr Anġlu Farrugia, Speaker of the Parliament of Malta
– Ms Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta
– Mr Joseph Muscat, Prime Minister of Malta

In the margins of the EPP Summit:

– Ms Angela Merkel, Federal Chancellor of Germany
– Mr Viktor Orban, Prime Minister, Hungary
– Mr Christos Stylianides, EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid & Crisis Management
– Mr Joseph Daul, President of the European People's Party
– Mr Antonio Tajani, President of the European Parliament

4.6. Working visit to Romania and participation in the International Conference organised by the European Commission for Democracy Trough Law (Venice Commission) in cooperation with the presidential administration in Romania: "The interaction between the political majority and the opposition in democracy" (Bucharest, 6-7 April, 2017)

– Mr Klaus Iohannis, President of Romania
– Mr Nicolae-Liviu Dragnea, President of the Chamber of Deputies of Romania
– Mr Calin Popescu-Tariceanu, President of the Senate