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Activities of the President of the Parliamentary Assembly between the second and the third part of the 2017 Ordinary session

Communication
President of the Assembly

1. Visits and meetings

1.1. President's activities between 22 April and 28 May 2017

1.1.1. 2nd part of the 2017 session of the Parliamentary Assembly (24-28 April 2017)

The Assembly's 2017 second part-session was rich in activities. In particular, we were privileged to host distinguished guests – Mr Ioannis Kasoulides, Chairman of the Committee of Ministers and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cyprus, Mr Prokopis Pavlopoulos, the President of the Hellenic Republic, and His Majesty the King of Spain.

Bilateral meetings with our guests were important opportunities to discuss current political challenges Europe has to face and the role of the Council of Europe and of our Parliamentary Assembly in addressing them.

It was a great honour for me to meet His Majesty the King of Spain. In our discussion, I emphasized the symbolic character of His Majesty's visit to Strasbourg which took place within the framework of the celebration of the 40th anniversary of Spain's accession to the Council of Europe. I praised His Majesty's and Spain's commitment to the project of a political Europe built on the values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. This commitment is very important for the Council of Europe, when the values that our Organisation stands for are challenged in many ways.

With the Chairman of the Committee Ministers, I reiterated the Assembly's support to the priorities of the Cyprus chairmanship, in particular, as regards the drafting of a Council of Europe Convention on offenses relating to cultural property. During this part-session, the Assembly adopted its opinion on this draft Convention and the Assembly stands ready to support and promote this new international legal instrument after its formal adoption by the Committee of Ministers.

With the President of the Hellenic Republic, I discussed Europe's response to the refugee crisis and to the management of mixed migratory flows. We agreed that a common Pan-European response was needed, based on solidarity and fair responsibility-sharing. We also discussed the situation in South East Europe and, in particular, the current developments in Turkey which affect not only Turkey but also its neighbours and the member States of our Organisation.

In addition to bilateral meetings with the Assembly's guests, I held a number of bilateral meetings with the representatives of various national delegations to the Assembly.

I would like to highlight in particular the joint meeting with the Chairperson of the Serbian delegation and the Chairperson of the delegation of the Assembly of Kosovo. This meeting was an opportunity to clarify the situation regarding the implementation of paragraph 13 of Resolution 2094(2016). I was able to facilitate a

direct contact between the Chairpersons of both delegations. It has subsequently been agreed between the two delegations that, as from the 2017 June part-Session, the delegation of the Assembly of Kosovo should be given access to the Hemicycle without, however, permanent seats being assigned and the Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly has been invited to implement this agreement.

Furthermore, I held an important meeting with the Chairperson and members of the Turkish delegation to the Assembly. The Chairperson informed me – orally and in writing – that the members of the Turkish delegation from the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) decided to interrupt their participation in the Second Part-session of the Parliamentary Assembly and to leave Strasbourg the day after the adoption of Resolution 2156 (2017). I took note of their position, but expressed hope that the entire delegation will continue co-operation with the Assembly including on the implementation of this Resolution.

Finally, the issue of my visit to Syria, in my private capacity, was at the centre of my discussions during the session week. Regarding the visit, I provided the members of the Assembly with explanations in writing, as well as orally, during a hearing that was held on 25 April 2017.

1.2. President's activities between 29 May and 23 June 2017

1.2.1. Assembly meetings (Presidential Committee, Bureau and Standing Committee) in Prague, (29-30 May 2017)

The Assembly's meetings in Prague, within the framework of the Czech Republic's Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, were an opportunity to hold a first exchange of views with the Czech authorities on the Chairmanship priorities and activities. I would like to thank the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers, Foreign Minister Lubomír Zaorálek, as well as the Speakers of the Chamber of Representatives and of the Senate, Mr Jan Hamácek and Mr Milan Štech, for their most interesting addresses to the Standing Committee. Their statements emphasised Czech Republic's strong commitment to the values that the Council of Europe defends. This is especially important against the background of the many challenges we have to face, including international terrorism, the rise of populist, nationalist and xenophobic rhetoric, as well as the erosion of our democratic standards and institutions.

Turning to the priorities of the Czech Republic's Chairmanship, I expressed support to the ambitious agenda focusing on the protection of human rights of vulnerable people and persons belonging to disadvantaged groups, the strengthening of the rule of law, the promotion of efficient human rights protection mechanisms, local democracy and public administration reforms, as well as human rights education. The Assembly stands ready to provide support to the Chairmanship activities and to make its contribution.

The meeting of the Standing Committee was also an opportunity to hold an exchange of views with Mr Paolo Alli, President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, which is our solid parliamentary partner. We emphasized the complementarity between our Parliamentary Assemblies which pursue a similar objective to uphold democratic principles, human rights and the rule of law within a Pan-European and a Euro-Atlantic geographic area.

The meeting of the Bureau of the Assembly was marked by the appointment of the three members of the independent external investigation body to look into allegations of corruption within the Parliamentary Assembly. I strongly welcome the appointment of the three highly-qualified members

– Sir Nicolas Bratza (United Kingdom), former judge and former President of the European Court of Human Rights
– Mr Jean-Louis Bruguière (France), former judge in charge of investigations in particular on cases related to terrorism, expert with international organisations and States on anti-terrorism issues
– Ms Elisabet Fura (Sweden), former judge at the European Court of Human Rights and former chief parliamentary Ombudsman of Sweden,

and I trust that they will be able to conduct a serious, professional and impartial inquiry into the allegations of corruption and misconduct that tarnish the Assembly's image and reputation. I encourage the members of the Assembly to endorse these appointments during the June part-session, so that the Investigation Body can promptly start its activities.

2. Speeches

– Opening speech of the 2nd part of the 2017 Ordinary Session (Strasbourg, 24 April 2017)

– Speech to the Standing Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly (Prague, 30 May 2017)

3. Personnalities met

3.1. 2nd part of the 2017 session of the Parliamentary Assembly (24-28 April 2017)

– Ms Aleksandra Djurović, Chairperson of the delegation of Serbia, and Mr Xhavit Haliti, Chairperson of the delegation of the Assembly of Kosovo

– Mr Ioannis Kasoulides, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cyprus, Chairman of the Committee of Ministers

– Mr Khalled Albakkar, Chairperson of the delegation of Jordan

– Mr Andrej Hunko (Germany, UEL) and Mr Joseph O'Reilly (Ireland, EPP), Co-Rapporteurs of the Monitoring Committee on Albania

– Mr Iván Arjona Pelado, Correspondent for Spain, Inter-religious Forum for Freedom of Religion

– Mr Prokopios Pavlopoulos, President of the Hellenic Republic

– Mr Adão Silva, Vice-Chairperson of the delegation of Portugal

– Ms Tamar Chugoshvili, Chairperson of the delegation of Georgia

– Mr Ucha Nanuashvili, Public Defender of Georgia

– His Majesty the King of Spain

– Ms Dana Váhalová, Chairperson of the delegation of the Czech Republic

– Mr Nicola Renzi, Minister of Foreign and Political Affairs and Justice of the Republic of San Marino

3.2. Assembly meetings (Presidential Committee, Bureau and Standing Committee) in Prague, (29-30 May 2017)

– Mr Lubomír Zaorálek, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe

– Mr Jan Hamácek, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Parliament

– Mr Milan Štech, Speaker of the Senate of the Czech Parliament

– Ms Dana Váhalová, Chairperson of the Czech delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly

– Mr Paolo Alli, President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly