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Activities of the President of the Parliamentary Assembly between the fourth part of the 2017 Ordinary Session and the first part of the 2018 Ordinary Session

Communication

President of the Assembly



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1. Visits and meetings

1.1. President's activities between 10 October and 17 November 2017

1.1.1. 2017 Fourth Part-session of the Assembly (Strasbourg, 9-13 October 2017)

I was elected President on 10 October 2017, in rather exceptional circumstances following the resignation, exactly 72 hours before the opening of the part-session, of Mr Pedro Agramunt. Therefore, the first and most important priority of my mandate has been to ensure that the Assembly is able to complete its activities planned for this year in a normal fashion, under the best possible conditions.

It is in this spirit that I stressed, upon my election, that it was necessary to restore a calm and normal working atmosphere within the Assembly. We now have to take a deep breath and focus – in a serene working atmosphere – on delivering the concrete results that governments, parliaments and – above all – citizens expect from us as a Pan-European Parliamentary Assembly and one of the Organisation's Statutory Bodies.

To achieve this, I shall continue to work through unity and consensus, closely co-operating with all the Assembly's national delegations and Parliaments, and all political groups. I will continue to foster close and constructive co-operation with the Committee of Ministers, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, the Deputy Secretary General, and the Commissioner for Human Rights.

Restoring the Assembly's credibility and reputation in the face of serious allegations of corruption that have been voiced continues to be a priority. In this context, I met the three members of the Independent External Investigation Body (IBAC-COE) and assured them of our full support. I shall take all necessary steps to help the Investigation Body complete its task under the best possible conditions and within an appropriate timeframe for achieving a comprehensive and high-quality result.

During the October part-session, I met Mr Petro Poroshenko, President of Ukraine. I assured the President of the Assembly's support and encouraged him to carry out planned reforms, taking fully into account the Council of Europe's expertise. It was also an opportunity to discuss the conflict and the situation in Eastern Ukraine and to press for the implementation – by all sides – of the Minsk agreements.

Furthermore, I met the Secretary General of the Council of Europe. We held a comprehensive exchange of views on the various political challenges the Organisation has to face, including the situation regarding relations with the Russian Federation.

I chaired the meeting of the Joint Committee which was an opportunity to exchange views with members of the Ministers' Deputies regarding two important issues for our Organisation: the calendar for the election of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and any possible follow-up to be given to the Assembly's Resolution and Recommendation on a "Call for a Council of Europe Summit to reaffirm European unity and to defend and promote democratic security in Europe".

Regarding the first issue, the Joint Committee concluded that each body should start the procedure for modifying the calendar and that the Secretary General of the Assembly and the Secretary to the Committee of Ministers would co-ordinate on this process.

As regards the Assembly's proposals concerning greater coherence between the two statutory bodies of the Council of Europe on issues that affect the representation and participation of member States in each of the organs, the Assembly and the Committee of Ministers agreed to discuss this matter further, together and within each body, and that the President of the Assembly and the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers would liaise to maintain the channels of communication between the two organs. I look forward to working on this with the Chairman of the Ministers' Deputies.

1.1.2. Exchange of views with the Ministers' Deputies (17 October 2017)

On 17 October 2017, I held an exchange of views with the Ministers' Deputies focusing in particular on two main points: the objectives and immediate priorities of my mandate and the results of the Assembly's Fourth part-session.

In the margins of the exchange of views, I held an informal exchange of views with the Chairman of the Ministers' Deputies and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, to continue the discussions initiated during the Fourth part-session.

1.1.3. Seminar on Children's Mental Health and Child-Friendly Justice, and official meetings in London (United Kingdom, 6-7 November 2017)

On 6-7 November 2017, I participated in and chaired the above-mentioned seminar organised by the Assembly's Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development. The Seminar was an opportunity to hold a comprehensive exchange of views with representatives of NGOs, experts, academics and practitioners.

In my statement, I stressed that the protection and well-being of children was one of the Assembly's priorities. Pointing to the need to protect the rights of the most vulnerable on a permanent basis, I highlighted the Assembly's main contributions in the areas of child mental health and child-friendly justice, including the work of the former Parliamentary network created under the ONE in FIVE campaign. I praised the good co-operation that the Committee of Social Affairs maintains with key stakeholders and stressed the need to have children involved in our co-operation activities. Their voice must be heard if we are to come up with effective and comprehensive solutions.

In the margins of the Seminar, I held bilateral exchanges with Rt Hon John Bercow, MP, Speaker of the House of Commons, Lord Fowler, Speaker of the House of Lords, and Ms Jackie Doyle-Price, MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health. We discussed a wide range of issues including public policies towards children, the ways to address the consequences of the recent institutional crisis in the Assembly and the allegations of corruption, as well as the Assembly's response to the challenges the Council of Europe has to face.

1.1.4. World Forum for Democracy (Strasbourg, 8 November 2017)

On 8 November 2017, I moderated one of the plenary sessions of the World Forum for Democracy.

The session which was entitled "From democracy of parties to democracy of citizens?" provided an opportunity to hold a comprehensive exchange of views with highly experienced and competent panellists. We discussed the evolution of the political landscape following the emergence of new political and civic movements, the dangers of populism, as well as the growing importance of social media.

This year's World Forum for Democracy provided an excellent platform for lively and inspiring debates and I would like to thank all members of the Assembly who have attended it and actively contributed the various Labs and plenary session.

The 2018 edition of the Forum will be held on 19-21 November 2018 and will be devoted to the topic "Citizenship on the move". Therefore, I count on your support next year to ensure an active participation in the preparation of the 2018 Forum and in the debates.

In the margins of my participation in the World Forum for Democracy, I held a number of bilateral meetings with Permanent Representatives of Member States.

1.2. President's activities between 18 November and 11 December 2018

1.2.1. Assembly meetings in Copenhagen (23-24 November 2017)

On 23-24 November 2017, I travelled to Copenhagen (Denmark) to participate in the meetings of the Presidential Committee, Bureau and Standing Committee of the Assembly, held at the invitation of the Danish Parliament (Folketing) within the framework of the Danish Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

The Standing Committee was an opportunity to hold a first exchange views with the Danish authorities about the priorities of the Danish Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers. I expressed the Assembly's full support for the priorities and our availability to contribute to the activities foreseen.

It was also an opportunity to hold an exchange of views with the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE, Mr George Tsereteli. The OSCE PA is our solid partner and the discussions in Denmark allowed us to take stock of our co-operation in the field of election observation. Furthermore, we raised a number of crucial current political issues, including frozen and active conflicts in Europe, the situation in Ukraine, relations with the Russian Parliament, as well as counteracting extremism, terrorism and hatred.

In the margins of the Standing Committee, I held a number of bilateral meetings, in particular, with the Danish authorities.

With Ms Ulla Tørnaes, Minister for Development Cooperation of Denmark, I discussed the priorities of the Danish Chairmanship, important political issues facing Europe at the moment, including relations with the Russian Federation and Turkey, as well as bilateral co-operation between Denmark and the Council of Europe, including the state of ratification of Council of Europe Conventions.

My discussion with Ms Pia Kjaersgaard, Speaker of the Folketing, was an opportunity to express appreciation of Denmark's attachment to fundamental human rights such as freedom of expression, and to touch upon some of the crucial political issues Europe is facing, including relations with the Russian Federation and also the migration and refugee challenges.

Finally, I would like to thank the Folketing and in particular its Speaker, Ms Pia Kjaersgaard, for the kind invitation, hospitality and excellent organisation of our meetings.

1.2.2. Visit to Greece (5-6 December 2017)

At the invitation of the Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament, Mr Nikolaos Voutsis, I visited Greece on 5 and 6 December 2017. During the visit, in addition to the Speaker, I met with the President of the Hellenic Republic, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Migration Policy, the Alternate Minister for Defence, the Alternate Minister of Foreign Affairs for European Affairs, as well as with the Greek delegation to the Assembly and the leaders of political groups in the Greek Parliament. I also visited Eleonas refugee accommodation centre and Praksis accommodation centre for unaccompanied and separated migrant minors.

The migration and refugee crisis was at the centre of my discussions with Greek interlocutors. I praised the progress made since the visit to Greece of the ad hoc Committee of the Assembly's Bureau, in May 2016, in particular, the considerable improvements in the reception conditions of centres located on the Greek mainland, as well as the closure of many of the informal camps. Regarding the situation of unaccompanied migrant minors, I warmly welcomed the efforts made on the mainland to create new shelters and to integrate young girls and boys in the society by, for instance, ensuring access to Greek schools for all.

However, I expressed my sadness at reports of the extremely difficult conditions on the Greek islands, where overcrowding and deteriorating sanitary conditions are a major concern. As winter approaches, there is a risk that the situation on the islands deteriorates further. In this context, I called on the Greek authorities to intensify their efforts to alleviate pressure on the islands by transferring more people to the Greek mainland and by launching and implementing an appropriate plan for the winter.

At the same time, I also highlighted that this was a European problem and not a problem for Greece alone. Nobody wants a Europe where some countries feel "punished" simply because of their geographical situation. I therefore urged all European countries to show unity, solidarity and support. I believe that only by acting in solidarity and by sharing responsibility can Europe be strong, credible and effective.

In my contacts with the Greek authorities, I also focused on the rise of racism and xenophobia, and the importance of taking steps to immunise our societies from hatred and intolerance. I welcomed the zero tolerance approach towards hate, at the highest political level, and encouraged the authorities to continue on this path, by strengthening efforts aimed at building inclusive societies, and by co-operating with relevant NGOs in fostering mutual trust and understanding between members of different communities.

Finally, with the Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament, I discussed the state of ratification of Council of Europe conventions. I was encouraged by his assurances that the process of ratification of the Istanbul Convention is well under way and that it should be finalised by the end of January 2018.

1.2.3. Letter addressed to Mr Dimitris Avramopoulos, European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, and to Mr Christos Stylianides, European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management

It was with great anxiety and concern that I read in the press on Friday 8 December the statement made by the Minister for Migration Policy of the Hellenic Republic, Mr Ioannis Mouzalas, in which he declared that he "is not in a position to rule out the risk of people dying from cold" in the hotspots on the islands.

On the same day, I have therefore decided to send a letter addressed to the European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship and to the European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, asking them to take additional urgent measures in order to prevent a greater humanitarian crisis on the islands.

1.3. President's activities between 12 December 2017 and 19 January 2018

1.3.1. Assembly meetings in Paris (Presidential Committee and Bureau) (Paris, 14-15 December 2017)

1.3.1.1. Meeting of the Bureau (15 December 2017)

The Bureau meeting was an opportunity to examine a number of issues regarding the follow-up to the Assembly's previous activities.

Firstly, as regards the follow-up to the current affairs debate held during the Standing Committee, on 24 November 2017, the Bureau decided to ask the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy to prepare a report entitled "Democracy hacked? How to respond?". I believe that this will be an opportunity to make a comprehensive analysis of the issues raised during the current affairs debate and to propose concrete actions that national Parliaments may take to respond to the challenges our democracies are facing.

Secondly, the Bureau held an exchange of views on the possible follow-up to Assembly [Resolution 2186 \(2017\)](#) adopted on the basis of the report on "Call for a Council of Europe summit to reaffirm European unity and to defend and promote democratic security in Europe". The Rapporteur – Mr Nicoletti – informed the members of the Bureau of his exchange of views with the Ministers' Deputies, on 13 December 2017, and proposed to set up an Ad hoc Committee of the Bureau on "The role and mission of the Parliamentary Assembly". The Bureau supported Mr Nicoletti's proposal and set up the Ad hoc Committee which will have a twofold task, namely:

1. to reflect on, and if possible prepare, proposals aimed at harmonising the rules governing participation and representation of 47 member States in both statutory organs, while fully respecting the autonomy of the two bodies;
2. to prepare proposals as regards the role and mission of the Assembly as a statutory organ of the Council of Europe and a pan-European forum for inter-parliamentary dialogue which aims at having an impact in all member States.

The first meeting of the ad hoc Committee is scheduled to take place on 23 January 2018.

Thirdly, the Bureau took note of a number of decisions, in particular, regarding the forthcoming election of the Human Rights Commissioner, in January 2018, and the European Conference of Presidents of Parliament, to be held in Ankara, on 13-14 September 2018.

Regarding the election of the Human Rights Commissioner, the Bureau took note of and declassified the report drawn up by the Sub-Committee on Human Rights on the hearing of the candidates.

Regarding the European Conference of Presidents of Parliament, the Bureau took note of the agreed themes, i.e. "tackling terrorism: the role and responsibility of national parliaments" and "encountering hate speech, racism and xenophobia: challenges for national parliaments", and decided to ask the Grand National Assembly of Turkey to provide a list of the already invited Parliaments in time for the next Bureau meeting, so that further organisational steps could be taken. Subsequently, I addressed a letter to the Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, seeking to clarify, before the next Bureau meeting, the situation regarding the invitations to the conference that were sent out.

1.3.1.2. Exchange of views between the Presidential Committee and members of the Russian Parliament (14 December 2017)

On 14 December 2017, a group of Russian parliamentarians came to Paris, for an exchange of views with the Presidential Committee of the Assembly. The Russian delegation was composed of:

- Mr Piotr Tolstoy, Vice-speaker of the State Duma,
- Mr Leonid Kalashnikov, Chairman of the State Duma Committee for CIS Affairs, Eurasian Integration and Relations with Compatriots,
- Mr Konstantin Kosachev, Chairman of the Council of the Federation Committee for international affairs,
- Mr Leonid Slutsky, Chairman of the State Duma Committee for international affairs,
- Mr Vladimir Lukin, Vice-chairman of the Council of the Federation Committee for international affairs.

This exchange of views was the first opportunity to meet with Russian parliamentarians since March 2017; the discussion was open and honest.

Among other matters, it was an opportunity to seek the Russian parliamentarians' views on Assembly [Resolution 2186 \(2017\)](#) and its implementation. We agreed that it was important to continue dialogue on this issue, in particular involving parliamentarians from all member States of the Council of Europe. In this context, upon convening the first meeting of the Ad hoc Committee, I addressed a letter to the Speakers of both Chambers of the Russian Parliament, sharing with them the terms of reference of the Ad Hoc Committee and inviting them to participate in its work, irrespective of whether or not a Russian Delegation was put forward for 2018.

1.3.2. Working visit to Strasbourg (9-10 January 2018)

On 9-10 January 2018, I travelled to Strasbourg to hold a number of bilateral meetings, including with Ambassador Arnold de Fine Skibsted, Chairman of the Ministers' Deputies, and Mr Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

2. Speeches

- Inaugural address by Ms Stella Kyriakides, newly elected President (Strasbourg, 10 October 2017)
- Exchange of views with the Ministers' Deputies (Strasbourg, 17 October 2017)
- Introductory remarks to the Seminar on Children's Mental Health and Child-Friendly Justice (United Kingdom, 6 November 2017)
- Introductory remarks to the Plenary Session 1 of the World Forum for Democracy: From democracy of parties to democracy of citizens? (Strasbourg, 8 November 2017)
- Speech delivered at the opening of the meeting of the Standing Committee (Copenhagen, 24 November 2017)

3. Press releases

- Stella Kyriakides elected PACE President (10 October 2017)
- President strongly condemns the murder of Maltese journalist Daphne Caruana (17 October 2017)
- "Lanzarote Convention has contributed to making a difference in children's lives" (26 October 2017)
- President welcomes the release of Crimean Tatar leaders Akhtem Chiygoz and Ilmi Umerov (26 October 2017)
- Stella Kyriakides: "Child protection and well-being must remain our priority" (6 November 2017)
- European Day to Protect Children against Sexual Abuse: PACE President Stella Kyriakides: Keeping children safe online is our responsibility (17 November 2017)
- Sexual violence and harassment of women: wave of testimonies only tip of the iceberg (22 November 2017)
- Attack in Egypt: 'We must stand firm against the threat of terrorism' (24 November 2017)
- Stella Kyriakides: 'Co-operation and dialogue are needed to overcome the problems we are facing' (24 November 2017)
- PACE President, ending visit, calls for greater European solidarity towards Greece (6 December 2017)
- 'Open and honest dialogue with Russian parliamentarians,' PACE President reports (15 December 2017)
- Stella Kyriakides: "bridging the gaps by showing more solidarity" (31 December 2017)

4. Personalities met

4.1. 4th part of the 2017 Ordinary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (Strasbourg, 9-13 October 2017)

- Mr Petro Poroshenko, President of Ukraine

- Mr Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe
- Members of the Investigation Body set up by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to look into allegations of corruption made against certain members and/or former members of the Assembly (IBAC-COE)
- Mr Emil Ruffer, Chairman of the Ministers' Deputies, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to the Council of Europe
- Ms Alma Kasa, Chargée d'Affaires, Permanent Representative of Albania to the Council of Europe, and Mr Ervin Bushati, Chairperson of the Albanian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly
- Mr Spyros Attas, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Cyprus to the Council of Europe
- Mr Mehmet Çağlar, Representative of the Turkish Cypriot Community

4.2. Exchange of views with the Ministers' Deputies (17 October 2017)

- Mr Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe
- Mr Emil Ruffer, Chairman of the Ministers' Deputies, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic to the Council of Europe,

4.3. Seminar on Children's Mental Health and Child-Friendly Justice, and official meetings in London (United Kingdom, 6-7 November 2017)

- Rt Hon John Bercow, MP, Speaker of the House of Commons
- Lord Fowler, Speaker of the House of Lords
- Ms Jackie Doyle-Price, MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health

4.4. World Forum for Democracy (Strasbourg, 8 November 2017)

- Panellists of the Plenary session 1 entitled "From democracy of parties to democracy of citizens?" Mr Reuf Bajrović (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Mr Masazumi Gotoda (Japan), Ms Carmen Perez (United States) and Mr Antonio Martínez Velázquez (Mexico)
- Mr Ivan Soltanovsky, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the Council of Europe
- Ms Aleksandra Djurović, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of Serbia to the Council of Europe

4.5. Assembly meetings in Copenhagen, Denmark (23-24 November 2017)

- Ms Pia Kjaersgaard, Speaker of the Folketing, Denmark
- Ms Ulla Tørnaes, Minister for Development Cooperation of Denmark
- Mr George Tsereteli, President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
- Mr Talip Küçükcan, Chairperson of the Turkish delegation to the Assembly

4.6. Visit to Greece (5-6 December 2017)

- Mr Dimitris Vitsas, Alternate Minister of National Defence of the Hellenic Republic
- Mr Ioannis Mouzalas, Minister of Migration Policy of the Hellenic Republic
- Mr George Katrougalos, Alternate Minister of Foreign Affairs for European Affairs of the Hellenic Republic
- Mr Alexis Tsipras, Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic
- Mr Nikolaos Voutsis, Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament
- Mr Kyriakos Mitsotakis, President of the Parliamentary Group of New Democracy (N.D.)

- Ms Fotini (Fofi) Genimata, President of the Parliamentary Group of Democratic Coalition
- Mr Athanasios Pafilis, parliamentary representative of the Parliamentary Group of the Communist Party of Greece
- Mr George Mavrotas, Secretary of the Parliamentary Group “TO POTAMI” (The River)
- Mr Prokopios Pavlopoulos, President of the Hellenic Republic

4.7. Working visit to Strasbourg (9-10 January 2018)

- Mr Arnold de Fine Skibsted, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Denmark, Chairman of the Ministers' Deputies
- Mr Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe
- Ms Houria Youfsi, Consul General of Algeria