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Activities of the President of the Parliamentary Assembly between the second and the third part of the 2018 Ordinary session

Communication
President of the Assembly

1. Visits and meetings

1.1. President's activities between 20 April and 24 May 2018

1.1.1. Second part of the 2018 Ordinary Session (Strasbourg, 23-27 April 2018)

The Assembly's 2018 second part-session included several highlights:

- Presentation of the Report of the Independent External Investigation Body on the allegations of corruption within the Parliamentary Assembly (IBAC);
- Visits by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Denmark and “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”;
- Meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Bureau on the role and mission of the Parliamentary Assembly.

Regarding the Report of the IBAC, on Sunday, 22 April 2018, I held a press conference, together with the members of the IBAC, presenting the findings of the Investigation Body and the immediate follow-up that was given to it by the Assembly. In particular, I informed the press of the Assembly's decision to forward the report to the Speakers of parliaments of all Council of Europe member States.

My bilateral meetings with the Ministers of Foreign affairs of Denmark and of “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” were an opportunity to discuss the political challenges that the Organisation is facing as well as the prospects for the future of the Council of Europe. In particular, I informed the Ministers of the advancement of the work of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Bureau on the Role and Mission of the Assembly as well as of the follow-up to be given to the report of the IBAC. Furthermore, I exchanged views with my interlocutors about the Assembly's idea of convening the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government, as well as the preparations of future Chairmanships and the ways in which they would address the political challenges the Organisation is facing. Moreover, the meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” was an opportunity to discuss the situation in South-Eastern Europe, the European perspective of Council of Europe member States in the region as well as the advancement of key reforms.

The Ad Hoc Committee continued to look into the contributions received from national delegations and political groups on the basis of a list of issues circulated in February 2018. The aim of the discussion was to group various ideas and proposals by themes and, for each theme, identify a way forward. During the meeting, the following themes were discussed: the nature and identity of the Assembly; streamlining the Assembly's work and focusing it on core business; implementation of Assembly Resolutions and relations with National Parliaments; the monitoring function of the Assembly. A final deadline of 15 May 2018 was given to all national delegations and political groups to submit their contributions. At its next meeting, the Ad Hoc Committee will discuss the remaining groups of issues, in particular credentials, representation and



participation rights of members of national delegations; and the need to step up the political dialogue between the Assembly and the Committee of Ministers, as well as upgrade the dialogue with the European Union and enhance relations with other international organisations or parliamentary assemblies.

Furthermore, during the part-session, I participated in an exchange of views with the Assembly's Equality and Non-discrimination Committee, on the possibility of setting up academic networks to support Council of Europe conventions, in particular the Istanbul Convention. The aim of academic networks would be to promote knowledge of Council of Europe conventions amongst the European academic community and through them, amongst society at large. Moreover, academic networks could provide valuable expertise for parliamentarians and government officials, thus contributing to improving the domestic implementation of the conventions. The Italian example of a national network to support the Istanbul Convention was presented as a valuable good practice. I shall continue discussions with the competent Assembly's committees and key stakeholders, exploring possibilities of setting up academic networks in other areas, for example Council of Europe conventions against corruption as well as the Council of Europe Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine (the Oviedo Convention).

Finally, I held bilateral meetings with a number of Chairpersons of national delegations (see Section 4 below).

1.1.2. Exchange of views with the Ministers' Deputies (Strasbourg, 2 May 2018)

On 2 May 2018, I held an exchange of views with the Ministers' Deputies, informing them of the outcomes of the second part-session, in particular of the follow-up to be given to the IBAC report as well as the advancement of the discussions in the Ad Hoc Committee of the Bureau on the Role and Mission of the Assembly.

1.1.3. Participation in the 128th meeting of the Committee of Ministers (Elsinore, Denmark, 18 May 2018)

In my statement I emphasised the idea of maintaining European unity in the face of growing divisions in Europe, linked to nationalism and protectionism, populism, democratic crisis, corruption, cultural and religious divide, terrorism and even war and conflict between European States.

In this context, I highlighted three priorities which our Organisation should focus on:

- safeguarding the Continent's unity, with the European Human Rights Convention system at the center;
- concentrating the Council of Europe's activity on our core role which is defending human rights, democracy and the rule of law. We have to build "peace through law" and through all possible ways, old and new, concentrating on our role to protect individuals rather than governments;
- implementation of Council of Europe conventions, focusing in particular on education and awareness raising through academic networks.

1.1.4. Meeting of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy and official visit to Greece (Athens, 21-22 May 2018)

At the invitation of the Hellenic Parliament, I travelled to Greece on an official visit as well as to participate in the meeting of the Committee of Political Affairs and Democracy held at the Hellenic Parliament. During the visit, I met the Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament, Mr Nikolaos Voutsis, the President of the Hellenic Republic, Mr Prokopios Pavlopoulos, and the Prime Minister, Mr Alexis Tsipras. I also exchanged views with the Minister for Migration Policy, Mr Dimitrios Vitsas, and the Alternate Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Affairs, Mr Giorgios Katrougalos.

Speaking at the end of the visit, I warmly welcomed the recent vote by the Hellenic Parliament on the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. Furthermore, I paid tribute to the incredible efforts made by the Greek authorities and the Greek society since the outbreak of the refugee crisis, while stressing at the same time that the situation in the Greek islands required urgent attention, as arrivals were now again on the rise and that overcrowding and deteriorating sanitary conditions continued to be the main challenge. I agreed with the Greek authorities that a new European approach to this issue was needed, and stressed that the Assembly would continue to contribute to the debate on reforming the migration policies.

Speaking about the current political challenges facing the Council of Europe, I stressed the importance of European unity and the role the Parliamentary Assembly could play in bringing people together and contributing to the promotion of good neighbouring relations. In this context, regarding relations between

Athens and Skopje, I noted the genuine will of the Greek authorities to find a longstanding solution which responds to the needs and concerns of both sides, and I ensured the authorities of the Assembly's full support to this process.

During the meeting of the Political Affairs and Democracy Committee, I presented the idea of setting up a European Academic Network on the Council of Europe conventions against corruption. The committee adopted a declaration strongly backing this initiative, and calling on academic institutions, single academics and scholars from overall Europe, to come together and form a European academic network on Council of Europe conventions against corruption. This initiative was also strongly supported by the President of the Hellenic Republic, Mr Prokopios Pavlopoulos.

Finally, I would like to thank the Greek authorities, and the Hellenic Parliament in particular, for the excellent organisation of this visit.

1.1.5. Other activities

1.1.5.1. Conference on the fight against terrorism organised by the Academy of German-Italian Studies (Merano, Italy, 4 May 2018)

The Merano Conference was an opportunity to present the Council of Europe's expertise and activities in the field of combating terrorism. In particular, I focused on the human rights standards developed by our Organisation and the need to respect them in the activities of law enforcement agencies.

1.1.5.2. Participation in the award ceremony of the "Karlspreis" (Aachen, Germany, 10 May 2018)

It was a great honour for me to represent the Parliamentary Assembly at this Ceremony which was organised to pay tribute to the contribution of the President of the French Republic, Mr Emmanuel Macron, to the re-establishment of the European project.

1.2. President's activities between 25 May and 22 June 2018

1.2.1. Participation in the Parliamentary Assembly of the NATO (Warsaw, 25 May 2018)

At the invitation of Mr Paolo Alli, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of NATO, on 25 May 2018, I held an exchange of views with the NATO PA's Standing Committee.

In my address, I stressed the complementarity between the activities of both Parliamentary Assemblies in Europe's overall security architecture, stressing that, although the Council of Europe had no competence to deal with military defence, its contribution to Europe's "democratic security" was substantial. In this context, I pointed out that through parliamentary diplomacy, we should build bridges and promote open and frank discussions, including about the issues that divide us. This is especially true when we have to deal with conflicts among member States. We should concentrate on seeking ways to settle conflicts and diffuse tensions, while firmly defending the fundamental legal obligations that unite us. This includes respecting the European Convention on Human Rights as well as many other Council of Europe conventions that provide a legal framework for our action.

Furthermore, I informed the NATO PA's Standing Committee of the Assembly's priority activities in three particular fields: the fight against terrorism, addressing the refugee crisis on Europe's southern shores as well as tackling its root causes and the idea of setting up academic networks to support key Council of Europe conventions. In particular, I shared with the NATO PA's members the Assembly's most recently adopted reports dealing with these issues. Moreover, I encouraged the NATO PA to join the Assembly in pushing for the establishment of academic networks.

1.2.2. Working visit to Croatia: Bureau, Standing Committee, Ad Hoc Committee meetings of the Assembly and bilateral meetings with the authorities (Zagreb, 31 May-1 June 2018)

The Assembly's meetings in Croatia were an opportunity to hold a first exchange of views with the Croatian authorities on the priorities of Croatia's Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers.

Speaking in the exchange of views with Ms Marija Pejčinović Burić, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, I emphasised the progress Croatia made since accession as a member State of the Council of Europe, as well as its solid advancement on the path of European integration which culminated in Croatia's accession to the European Union in June 2016.

Turning to regional co-operation, I encouraged Croatia to share its experience and good practices with its neighbours so as to support their European aspirations and help move forward the reform agenda.

Furthermore, I expressed the Assembly's support to the priorities of the Croatian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, emphasising that these correspond fully to the Assembly's priorities.

In the margins of the Bureau and Standing Committee meeting, I met Mr Andrej Plenković, Prime Minister of Croatia, and Mr Gordan Jandroković, Speaker of the Croatian Parliament. In addition to the priorities of the Croatian Chairmanship of the Council of Europe, we discussed the ratification by Croatia of the Istanbul Convention and I emphasised that the country's experience in overcoming the obstacles to the ratification process would certainly help the Council of Europe and the Assembly in assisting other countries facing similar obstacles. Furthermore, we addressed a number of important political issues, including the budgetary challenges the Council of Europe is facing, as well as the politically charged atmosphere in relations with the Russian Federation and Turkey.

On 1 June 2018, in Zagreb, a meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Bureau on the Role and Mission of the Parliamentary Assembly was held. During the meeting, the Ad Hoc Committee finished the examination of contributions submitted by political groups and national delegations and decided to declassify a memorandum summarising the contributions prepared by the Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee. As a follow up, I decided to share this memorandum with the Ministers' Deputies. Furthermore, as some of the proposals put forward by the delegations require consultation with the Committee of Ministers, I decided to convene the Joint committee during the June part-session of the Assembly.

Finally, I would like to thank the Croatian authorities and the Croatian Parliament in particular, for their hospitality and excellent organisation of our meetings.

1.2.3. 2018 HELP annual network conference ((Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals): Good training for good judgments (Strasbourg, 21-22 June 2018)

In my keynote presentation I focused on two topics:

- How the HELP Network could provide support to parliamentarians on issues regarding the European Convention on Human Rights, the case-law of the Court, as well as other key Council of Europe conventions;
- The project regarding the setting up of academic networks to support key Council of Europe conventions.

Regarding the first issue, I suggested studying the possibility of using HELP's e-learning platform to make available to the parliamentarians specific training courses on the ECHR and other Council of Europe conventions, tailored to their specific needs and situation.

Regarding the issue of academic networks, I informed the participants of my discussions within the Assembly and the Council of Europe Secretariat regarding the possible setting up of networks on the Istanbul Convention, our conventions against corruption, and the Oviedo Convention. I suggested that, at the initial stage, activities should focus on setting up national networks for each specific convention, encouraging them to come together in a European network. The different European networks to be created could then in the future be grouped within the framework of a Council of Europe Academic Networking initiative to be established as a light umbrella structure to support and co-ordinate the networks.

Because of their link with training centres and academic institutions, I encouraged the members of the HELP Network to participate in this project and participants were enthusiastic and supportive in their response.

1.2.4. Exchange of views with the Working Party of the European Union Council on the OSCE and the Council of Europe (COSCE) (Brussels, 22 June 2018)

On 22 June 2018, I participated in an exchange of view with the European Union Council's Working Party on co-operation with the OSCE and the Council of Europe which brings together representatives of Ministries of Foreign Affairs of European Union member States responsible for co-operation with the Council of Europe.

In my presentation, I referred to the Memorandum of Understanding between the Council of Europe and the European Union, stressing that both are value-based organisations based on multilateral agreements and which share a common goal: to build a Common Home for 830 million citizens where fundamental rights and the rule of law are respected and democratic institutions can flourish.

Speaking about the challenges European construction have to face today, I emphasized that in today's Europe of concentric circles, we see dangerous centrifugal tendencies and emerging divisions which put at risk the Continent democratic stability. It is our shared duty to preserve Europe's substantial unity based on principles and standards enshrined in the European Human Rights Convention System and I appealed to the member States, especially those belonging to the European Union as the most advanced pillar of the European project, to shoulder their responsibilities to the full.

In the discussion I informed the members of the COSCE of the work of the Bureau's Ad Hoc Committee on the Role and Mission of the Parliamentary Assembly, the Assembly's relations with the Russian Federation, its activities regarding Turkey, as well as the follow-up given to the report of the Independent External Investigation Body on allegations of corruption within the Assembly.

2. Speeches

- Opening speech of the Second part of the 2018 Ordinary Session (Strasbourg, 23 April 2018)
- Speech on the occasion of the opening of the exhibition "Centennial Anniversary of the First Democratic Republic of Georgia" (Strasbourg, 23 April 2018)
- Laudatio at the ceremony of awarding the title of "Honorary Associate" to Ms Gisela Wurm (Strasbourg, 23 April 2018)
- Speech on the occasion of the opening of the exhibition marking the 50th anniversary of the Prague Spring (Strasbourg, 24 April 2018)
- Introductory remarks at the exchange of views on Children's Mental Health and Child-friendly justice, organised by the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development (Strasbourg, 24 April 2018)
- Speech on the occasion of award of the Museum Prize to The War Childhood Museum in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Strasbourg, 24 April 2018)
- Exchange of views with the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination: Establishment of an academic network on the Istanbul convention (Strasbourg, 26 April 2018)
- Speech delivered at the Academy of German-Italian studies of Merano: Sanctions and terrorism, the Council of Europe and the fight against terrorism (4 May 2018 – Merano, Italy)
- Written message for the Conference on "Safeguarding Democratic Institutions within a Europe in crisis: Challenges and Responses" (Nafplion, Greece, 11-12 May 2018)
- Speech delivered at the 128th meeting of the Committee of Ministers (Elsinore, Denmark, 18 May 2018)
- Presentation of the initiative to establish an Academic Network on Council of Europe conventions against corruption at the meeting of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy (Athens, 22 May 2018)
- Exchange of views with the Standing Committee of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (Warsaw, 25 May 2018)
- Introductory remarks at the Standing Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly (Zagreb, 1 June 2018)
- Keynote presentation at the 2018 HELP Network Conference of the Council of Europe (Strasbourg, 21 June 2018)
- Introductory remarks at the exchange of views with the Working Party of the European Union Council on the OSCE and the Council of Europe (COSCE) (Brussels, 22 June 2018)

3. Press releases

- The Independent External Investigation Body and PACE President met the press (22 April 2018)

- 'PACE is not a battlefield', says PACE President calling for conflict prevention and settlement through law (23 April 2018)
- Michele Nicoletti on the future of the Council of Europe: 'Let's concentrate on our core mission' (18 May 2018)
- President Nicoletti praises excellent co-operation between PACE and Greece (23 May 2018)
- 'The priorities of the Croatian Chairmanship correspond fully to those of the Assembly' (1 June 2018)
- President welcomes agreement between Athens and Skopje over 'name issue' (13 June 2018)
- Academic networks as ambassadors of Council of Europe values (21 June 2018)
- President's statement on the withdrawal of the United States from the UN Human Rights Council (21 June 2018)
- President urges member States to 'shoulder their responsibility' for European unity (22 June 2018)

4. Personalities met

4.1. Second part of the 2018 Ordinary Session (23-27 April 2018)

- Members of the Independent Investigation Body on the allegations of corruption within the Parliamentary Assembly (IBAC): 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, and Ms Elisabet Fura (Sweden), former judge at the European Court of Human Rights and former chief parliamentary Ombudsman of Sweden, legal adviser
- Mr Joseph Daul, President of the European People's Party
- Mr Jari Vilén, Head, and Mr Mendes de Bota, Deputy Head of the European Union Delegation to the Council of Europe
- Ms Dunja Mijatovic, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights
- Mr Nikola Dimitrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"
- Mr Jan Kleijssen, Director of the Information Society and Action against crime Directorate, Directorate General I – Human Rights, Council of Europe
- Ms Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of internally displaced persons
- Mr Anti Kaikkonen, honorary associate, former member of the Finnish Delegation to the Assembly
- Mr Anders Samuelsen, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers
- Ms Sanja Putica, Chairperson of the Croatian delegation
- Mr Anar Mammadli and representatives of NGOs dealing with human rights issues from Azerbaijan
- Mr Marco Gatti, member of the San Marino delegation
- Ms Aida Derguti and Ms Müfera Şinik, members of the Delegation of the Assembly of Kosovo
- Ms Ionneta Kavvadia, Chairperson of the Greek delegation
- Messrs Ertugrul Kurcku and Hisyar Ozsoy, Members of the Turkish delegation, and Mr Mithat Sancar, Deputy Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey
- Ms Gabriela Battaini, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe
- Mr Frank Schwabe, Member of the German Delegation
- Ms Liliane Maury Pasquier, President of the Socialist Group in the Parliamentary Assembly
- Journalists

4.2. 128th meeting of the Committee of Ministers (Elsinore, Denmark, 18 May 2018)

- Mr Alexander Grushko, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation

4.3. Meeting of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy and official visit to Greece (Athens, 21-22 May 2018)

- Mr Nikolaos Voutsis, Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament
- Mr Dimitrios Vitsas, Migration Policy Minister
- Mr Giorgios Katrougalos, Alternate Minister of Foreign Affairs
- Mr Prokopios Pavlopoulos, President of the Hellenic Republic
- Ms Maria Gavouneli, Head of the Delegation of Greece to the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) and Associate Professor of International Law, National & Kapodistrian University of Athens
- Mr Alexis Tsipras, Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic
- Ms Ioanneta Kavvadia, Chairperson of the Greek delegation and other members of the Greek delegation to the Assembly

4.4. Participation in the Parliamentary Assembly of the NATO (Warsaw, 25 May 2018)

- Mr Paolo Alli, President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly
- Mr David Hobbs, Secretary General of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly

4.5. Working visit to Croatia: Bureau, Standing Committee, Ad Hoc Committee meetings of the Assembly and bilateral meetings with authorities (Zagreb, 31 May-1 June 2018)

- Ms Marija Pejčinović Burić, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs
- Mr Gordan Jandroković, President of the Croatian Parliament
- Mr Andrej Plenković, Prime Minister of Croatia

4.6. 2018 HELP annual network conference : Good training for good judgments (Strasbourg, 21 June 2018)

- Ms Gabriella Bataini-Dragoni, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe
- Ambassador Miroslav Papa, Permanent Representative of Croatia to the Council of Europe
- Mr Linos-Alexandre Sicilianos, Vice-President of the European Court of Human Rights
- Mr Christos Giakoumopoulos, Director General, Directorate General Human Rights and Rule of Law
- Mr Andrea Posavec Franić, Director of the Judicial Academy of the Republic of Croatia

4.7. Exchange of views with the Working Party of the European Union Council on the OSCE and the Council of Europe (COSCE) and visit to the Council of Europe Office (Brussels, 22 June 2018)

- Ms Jutta Edthoffer, Chairperson of the Working Party of the EU Council on the OSCE and the Council of Europe (COSCE), and members of the COSCE
- Mr Jari Vilen, Ambassador, Head of the EU Delegation to the Council of Europe