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## **President's activities (January-December 2021)**

**Communication**

President of the Assembly



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## **Abridged progress report by Mr Rik Daems, President**

### ***Foreword***

Upon my election as President of the Assembly in January 2020, I laid out my vision and priorities of my Presidency with special focus on:

1. a Council of Europe working together;
2. championing our conventions: the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention);
3. towards a right to a healthy environment;
4. uniting around shared values;
5. unity in diversity.

As my term in the office comes to an end, I am proud of the achievements of our Assembly during the two years of my Presidency. Not least given the challenges we faced as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis and its impact on the social, economic and political life of our societies.

I can say it with conviction that we have been able to deliver in all my priority areas and across the work and activities of our Assembly.

Institutional co-operation is very strong. Triologue has gone from strength to strength and practical cooperation with the Committee of Ministers, through tangible input by the Assembly into the priorities of its Presidencies, has shown its advantage, added value and impact. I hope that this approach will be further developed and consolidated in the future.

I have continued to champion the Council of Europe flagship conventions, notably the Istanbul Convention on violence against women and domestic violence, both in our member States and beyond. With Mexico, Kazakhstan and at least one of our South-Med partners working towards the signature and ratification of the Convention, our work towards the convention being recognised as most advanced global tool to eradicate gender-based violence is yielding results. I am also proud of the push forward we gave to translating the Handbook for parliamentarians on the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention in as many languages as possible to enable parliamentarians to play the important role they have in promoting and monitoring the implementation of the convention.

Through the work and activities around the Route 47 initiative, we have been able to further strengthen relations with national parliaments and bring the Council of Europe expertise to support our national parliaments to respond to the challenges our societies face in upholding human rights, including during times of crisis.

Co-operation, synergies and impact have been in focus of my efforts when reaching out to other international organisations. I am proud of the work we have done to strengthen co-operation and identify joint action with the United Nations, European Union, Organization of American States, World Bank and EBRD in areas of interest such as gender equality, combating discrimination, ending violence against women, ensuring the right to a safe, healthy and sustainable environment. I strongly believe that working together, both at the level of the Council of Europe, but also with our national and international partners, is the best way to achieve results and meaningful impact of our work.

The achievement I am most proud of, and one that I consider as the legacy of my presidency, is our work towards ensuring the right to a safe, healthy and sustainable environment. When I first spoke about environment being a human right and as such it should be incorporated in the European Convention of Human Rights, there was – to say the least – a lot of scepticism. Two years later, seven reports adopted by the Assembly and a strong show of support at UN level, the tide has turned. And it has turned in the right direction. The Assembly reports and recommendations demanded a paradigm shift in international and national law, as well as government policies, to ensure that a healthy environment is recognised as a basic human right. The Assembly recommendations followed my call for an ambitious new legal framework, both at national and European level, to anchor “the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment” and recommended a draft additional protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights.

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe followed up the recommendations of the Assembly and instructed the Steering Committee on Human Rights to assess the need for, and the feasibility of developing further normative instrument(s).

This issue is very close to my heart, and I will continue to actively engage in the activities of the Assembly on this issue. Guided by my strong belief that a healthy environment is essential for all of us – but it must become a legally-enforceable right if we are to make the huge changes our planet needs in the years ahead – I will continue my work until this becomes a reality.

### **Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe raising to the challenge of the crisis**

Following the amendments to the Assembly's Rules of Procedure related to the holding, in exceptional circumstances, of physical, hybrid or fully remote meetings, as well as complementing the Rules with an exceptional electoral procedure for electing judges to the European Court of Human Rights, the highest officials of the Council of Europe, or its own President and Vice-Presidents, the four parts of the 2021 Ordinary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly were held in a hybrid mode. These were the **first ever hybrid part-sessions organised**. 84 parliamentarians were physically present at the January Session, and 100 for the April Session (130 persons in total including delegations' support staff). Those who could not come to Strasbourg participated by videoconference.

To achieve this, unprecedented administrative, logistical and sanitary measures were put in place, including on-site testing. **Co-operation and strong support by the relevant Council of Europe departments and the French authorities** were very important to the success of the organisation of the 2021 session.

By holding these sessions, the Assembly members shouldered their responsibilities to continue making the voices of the 830 million European citizens heard; reiterated their commitment to upholding democracy, human rights and the rule of law, even in times of crisis and emergency, when these values are even more relevant than ever; and continued co-operation and dialogue to ultimately deliver the results that citizens and our member States expect.

Some of the highlights of the Assembly's 2021 first and second part-sessions included addresses by the President of the Republic of Moldova, Ms Maia Sandu, the Federal Chancellor of Germany, Ms Angela Merkel, the President of the European Parliament, Mr David Sassoli, and the European Commissioner for Justice, Mr Didier Reynders.

Thanks to quick action in amending the Assembly's Rules of Procedure and the mobilisation of the entire Assembly, we were able to continue **fulfilling the statutory and conventional obligations**. During the January and April 2021 part-sessions, the Assembly thus elected:

- Mr Bjørn Berge, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe;
- Ms Despina Chatzivassiliou-Tsovilis, Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly;
- Mr Ioannis Ktistakis, judge to the European Court of Human Rights in respect of Greece;
- Mr Andreas Zünd, judge to the European Court of Human Rights in respect of Switzerland;
- Mr Frédéric Krenc, judge to the European Court of Human Rights in respect of Belgium;
- Mr Davor Derenčinović, judge to the European Court of Human Rights in respect of Croatia.

I mentioned in my speech at the January part-session the hybrid or remote meetings of the Assembly and its bodies should remain an exceptional measure. Interactive direct exchange, networking and personal contacts between parliamentarians are indeed essential for the **good functioning of parliamentary co-operation and diplomacy** and **meaningful parliamentary dialogue**.

### **Addressing the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic on our democratic institutions and fundamental rights**

During the first half of 2021, the Assembly continued to address the challenges brought by the Covid-19 crisis and its manifold consequences on the social, economic and political life of our societies.

At its January part-session, the Assembly approved a wide-ranging report on "Covid-19 vaccines: ethical, legal and practical considerations", making a series of recommendations for the safe and fair worldwide deployment of vaccines against Covid-19. Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization, took part in the debate remotely. The Assembly also held a current affairs debate on "Covid passports or certificates: protection of fundamental rights and legal implications" at its April part-

session and further debates took place at its June part-session, such as the protection of fundamental rights and legal implications of Covid passes or certificates, the impact of the pandemic on children's rights or the socio-economic crisis sparked by the pandemic.

Speaking after the current affairs debate held at the Standing Committee meeting on 19 March 2021 on "Democracies facing Covid-19: the way forward", I recalled that "the rule of law must prevail in the emergency situation created by the Covid-19 pandemic", and stressed that "any laws linked to the pandemic should comply with the constitution and international standards". I underlined that while the European Convention on Human Rights allows for extensive restrictions on rights in emergency situations, such restrictions should only be applied, when necessary, be proportionate to the public interest being pursued, be time-limited, and have a clear basis in the law. I urged all member States to conduct independent reviews of their national experience and the compatibility of the national response with European standards. I further stressed that "parliamentary oversight over emergency measures, transparency in decision-making, and proper checks and balances remain essential for the realisation of the rule of law and democracy". These messages were further reinforced by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe on the role of the Council of Europe during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Secretary General presented the wide array of support that the Council of Europe has offered to its member States, including advice, knowledge and information sharing, guidance, practical tools as well as material support.

In my address at the online Plenary Session of the St Petersburg International Legal Forum on the theme "Vaccination by Law" (19 May 2021), I recalled the important work of the Assembly and the legal standards developed by the Council of Europe in this field. I presented the position of the Assembly as regards mandatory vaccination as expressed in the [Resolution 2361 \(2021\)](#) on "Covid-19 vaccines: ethical, legal and practical considerations" which was adopted at the first 2021 part-session. I recalled the importance of awareness-raising, clear, transparent and reliable information and communication when dealing with vaccine hesitancy.

The Assembly will continue to support national parliaments in their efforts to tackle the pandemic and prepare them to face effectively any future crisis.

### **Addressing strategic political priorities**

The Assembly proposed its vision on the **strategic priorities for the Council of Europe for the coming years** on the occasion of a debate at its April part-session and the discussion on a report prepared by Mr Tiny Kox (Netherlands, UEL) on "The Assembly's vision on the strategic priorities for the Council of Europe".

On this occasion, the Assembly underlined that the Council of Europe's overall priority is to remain the pillar of democratic security, the guarantor of human rights and rule of law, as well as a platform for genuine multilateralism in Europe.

Other strategic priorities included the upholding of the authority of the European Court of Human Rights by all member States and the further improvement of its effectiveness, notably by enhancing the execution of its judgements; EU accession to the European Convention of Human Rights; reinforcing the protection of social and economic rights, equality, inclusion and respect of human dignity; promoting a contemporary and holistic vision of human rights, including the new generation rights and development of "new legal instruments aimed at ensuring the right to a safe, healthy and sustainable environment for present and future generations, and making it a legal obligation"; address increasing challenges to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly and providing adequate responses to challenges related to the emergence of new technologies, in particular artificial intelligence.

The Assembly also recalled that while it is a priority for the Assembly to carry out its work independently, opportunities should be seized where possible to build on the principle of "effective complementarity" with the activities of the Committee of Ministers and the intergovernmental part of the Organisation.

The Assembly Resolution contributed to the 131<sup>st</sup> Session of the Committee of Ministers, which endorsed the strategic outlook of the organisation for the next four years' work at the Council of Europe, as laid out in the Strategic Framework of the Council of Europe by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe. The adopted texts were also brought to the attention of the EU bodies responsible for the Organisation of the conference on the future of Europe.

## Promoting equality and non-discrimination

Another priority of the Assembly has been to continue championing equality and promoting the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention).

The Assembly continues to put **strong focus on promoting the ratification and effective implementation of the Istanbul Convention**. Following the announced withdrawal by Turkey from the Istanbul Convention, I issued a joint statement on 21 March 2021 with the German Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Heiko Maas, President of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers, and the [Secretary General of the Council of Europe](#), Ms Marija Pejčinović Burić, expressing deep regret about this decision and calling on the Turkish authorities not to weaken the international system to protect women against violence.

To mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Istanbul Convention, the Assembly organised a high-level event and debate during its June part-session. This event, on my initiative, included speeches by: Nadia Murad, winner of the 2016 Václav Havel Human Rights Prize and the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize; Alexander de Croo, Prime Minister of Belgium; Anca Dana Dragu, President of the Romanian Senate; Elisabeth Moreno, French Minister for Gender Equality, Diversity and Equal Opportunities; Dubravka Šimonovic, UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its causes and consequences; and Marija Pejčinović Burić, Secretary General of the Council of Europe. Following the debate, Zita Gurmai, Assembly General Rapporteur on violence against women, highlighted the way forward to make progress with the signature, ratification and effective implementation of the Istanbul Convention.

I also participated in the opening of the high-level conference on “Gender equality and the Istanbul Convention: a decade of action” organised by the Council of Europe in partnership with the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth in the framework of the German Presidency of the Committee of Ministers on the occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening for signature of the Istanbul Convention (11 May 2021). In his address, I stressed the importance of the Istanbul Convention, its tools and mechanisms in order to combat violence against women and girls in a proactive, practically-oriented and efficient way and condemned current deliberate attempts to instrumentalise the Convention for political gains. I specifically asked for the translation of the Parliamentary Assembly Handbook for parliamentarians on the Istanbul Convention into the languages of all member States, in order to promote parliamentary action in support of the ratification of the Convention and the monitoring of its implementation more widely.

Furthermore, the Assembly has committed to the Coalition on gender-based violence of the Generation Equality Forum 2021. The Assembly's commitment includes a series of parliamentary actions around the promotion and implementation of the Istanbul Convention by pursuing four areas of action:

1. awareness raising activities with parliamentarians from the 47 member states, Observer and Partner for Democracy countries, highlighting the progress made by the convention in combating violence against women;
2. training for parliamentarians on action to be taken both in their constituencies and in their parliaments, involving improvement of the understanding of the added value of the Istanbul Convention and eliminating misconceptions about it;
3. promotion of the ratification of the Istanbul Convention and its full implementation in member States, by proposing action to be taken in parliaments, including through legislation, in application of Article 70 of the convention which provides for active monitoring of its implementation by national parliaments and the Parliamentary Assembly;
4. dissemination of the convention in global forums by raising awareness and sharing good practices, as well as tools to combat violence and protect the right to live free from violence;

The Handbook for parliamentarians on the Istanbul Convention provides a very useful tool for the design and implementation of the Assembly activities in this regard.

The 2020 Václav Havel Human Rights Prize, which rewards outstanding civil society action in the defence of human rights in Europe and beyond, was awarded to Ms Loujain Alhathloul (Saudi Arabia), a Saudi women's rights activist who has campaigned to end the male guardianship system and the Saudi ban on women driving, and for greater protection for women facing abuse in the Kingdom. The two other shortlisted candidates were The Nuns of the Drukpa Order (Nepal), a group of young Buddhist nuns who promote equality, sustainability and tolerance in their home villages in the Himalayas, and Ms Julienne Lusenge (Democratic Republic of Congo), a human rights activist who has been documenting sexual abuse and acts of violence against women in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

## **Intra-institutional relations within the Council of Europe: enhancing the “trialogue” dynamic**

Strengthening **trialogue consultations** as a useful tool to coordinate and mutually reinforce the activities and the work of the Parliamentary Assembly, the Committee of Ministers and the Secretary General, especially in response to major political challenges, remains a priority for the Assembly.

The Assembly adopted a resolution at its January part-session, on the basis of the report by Sir Edward Leigh (United Kingdom, EC/AD), deciding to amend its Rules of Procedure to enable the implementation of a complementary joint procedure between the Committee of Ministers and the Assembly in response to a serious violation by a member State of its statutory obligations, as decided by the Assembly in January 2020 in its [Resolution 2319 \(2020\)](#). These changes concern the conditions for initiating and dealing with such a procedure, as well as the conditions for voting on an Assembly decision initiating this procedure.

I took part in the 131<sup>st</sup> Session of the Committee of Ministers in Hamburg, which took place in hybrid mode, marking the transition from the German to the Hungarian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers. In my speech, I welcomed the increased dialogue and co-operation between the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly. I congratulated the German Presidency for the achievements of their Presidency, notably progress with the preparation of human rights standards in the area of artificial intelligence, work towards compliance with the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, combating discrimination, inequality and hate speech, upholding women’s rights and promoting the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention and its importance in ending gender-based violence. I also welcomed the Hungarian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers and reiterated the commitment of the Assembly to continue close co-operation and coordination, built on the added value of the Council of Europe institutions and thus increase the impact of the work of the organisation.

The Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers, the President of the Assembly and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe issued joint statements on issues of concern to the organisation such as their joint statement on 4 February 2021, calling upon the Russian authorities to abide by the international obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights or the announced withdrawal by Turkey from the Istanbul Convention on 21 March 2021.

I held regular **trialogue consultations** with the Chairperson of the Ministers’ Deputies and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe during the first semester of 2021, and the Assembly will continue working within the triialogue logic, seeking better co-ordination between the statutory bodies and the Secretary General regarding political issues as well as the strategic priorities of the Council of Europe.

## **Relations with national parliaments and international partners**

Further developing and strengthening relations with national parliaments and international partners remains a priority for the Assembly.

During this period, national parliaments continued to organise **hearings on the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic**, focusing on issues where the Council of Europe could bring valuable expertise. I intervened by videoconference in the hearing organised on 16 April 2021 by the Parliament of Cyprus, on the theme “The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education and culture”, two sectors of utmost relevance and importance for the organisation of life in democratic societies. Other speakers from the Assembly were Mr Nicos Tornaritis, Chairperson of the Assembly Cyprus delegation, and Mr Constantinos Efstathiou, Assembly Rapporteur on “The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on education and culture” for the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media.

The importance of continued co-operation based on trust, respect and partnership, shared values and equal standards were also the topics of discussions of my **working visits to the Russian Federation, Turkey and Hungary**. On these occasions, I stressed the relevance of dialogue, multilateralism and co-operation based on equal standards to overcome challenges and make progress at national and international level.

The exchange of views with Mr Didier Reynders, European Commissioner for Justice, at the January part-session provided an opportunity to discuss synergies between the Parliamentary Assembly and the European Commission in the field of justice and the rule of law, focusing in particular on the preparation of the annual Rule of Law Report of the European Commission.

Intervening at the April part-session, the President of the European Parliament Mr David Sassoli warned that the values that guide the EU and the Council of Europe are not indestructible and called for strengthened cooperation between the two institutions to uphold respect for human rights and democratic principles. The EU's accession to the European Convention on Human Rights will contribute to further strengthening such links.

The European Union's accession to the ECHR was also mentioned during my bilateral meeting with the President of the European Parliament on 8 June 2021 where the President further reiterated the strategic priority of the completion of the accession of the European Union to the ECHR for both organisations. On this occasion, ways of further implementing the 2007 Agreement on the strengthening of co-operation between the Assembly and the European Parliament were also discussed.

I participated in the informal retreat of Heads of Mission of EU member States at the Council of Europe (5 March 2021). In my intervention, I focused on the challenges that multilateral co-operation is facing and stressed the importance of synergies and the strategic partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Union, both value-based organisations working to uphold democracy, human rights and the rule of law. I emphasised the importance of the Council of Europe Convention system, in particular the European Convention on Human Rights, in this regard.

The Assembly continued to develop further the co-operation with international parliamentary assemblies. I participated in the remote international parliamentary conference on "Global challenges and threats in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic: terrorism and violent extremism", co-organised by the PACE, the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean as well as the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism on 15 April 2021. In my opening statement, I stressed the importance of stepping up international and inter-parliamentary co-operation to confront international terrorism, violent extremism and radicalisation. The Assembly organised and moderated a specific session devoted to "Democracies facing the Covid-19 Pandemic", addressing the themes of "Challenges to Parliaments in Covid times", "Upholding Human Rights in times of crisis and pandemics: gender, equality and non-discrimination", "Humanitarian consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic for migrant and refugees" and "Covid-19 vaccines: ethical, legal and practical considerations", with the participation of many Chairpersons and members of Assembly committees or sub-committees.

I held a videoconference with the President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Ms Odile Renaud-Basso, to take stock of ongoing co-operation with the EBRD over the past 30 years which include the use of Council of Europe standards as benchmarks and progress indicators for the purposes of EBRD's assessments.

### **Anchoring the right to a healthy environment**

Addressing the environmental changes has been among the top priorities of the Assembly work and activities since 2020. Work undertaken by several of the Assembly committees culminated during the September 2021 session, when a series of seven reports were unanimously adopted by the Assembly. These reports demanded a paradigm shift in international and national law, as well as government policies, to ensure that a healthy environment is recognised as a basic human right. The Assembly called for an ambitious new legal framework, both at national and European level, to anchor "the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment" and recommended a draft additional protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights which would make such a right enforceable in law in all countries which ratified it.

The discussions on the aforementioned reports were accompanied by an interactive debate of a high-level panel representing all sectors of society on the theme of the environment and human rights. The panel included interventions from the Assembly President, the Council of Europe Secretary General Marija Pejčinović Burić, Hungarian President János Áder, the Speaker of the Italian Chamber of Deputies Roberto Fico, Portuguese Deputy Environment Minister Eduardo Pinheiro, European Court of Human Rights Judge Tim Eicke, and Belgian climate and human rights activist Anuna de Wever Van der Heyden. A video message of support from UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and a letter from the Pope Francis were also presented.

The decisions of the September 2021 session were actively followed-up. The five recommendations adopted by the Assembly were communicated to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, who instructed the Steering Committee on Human Rights (CDDH) to assess the need for, and the feasibility of developing further normative instrument(s).

The Assembly also actively participated in the parliamentary meeting held during the COP26 Conference in Glasgow in November 2021. I was among the keynote speakers of that meeting and, in my intervention, I made a proposal to establish a World Parliamentary Climate Accountability Day, when parliamentarians around the world will question their governments on concrete action aimed at addressing environmental problems.

The issue of the right to healthy environment has also been systematically raised during my numerous bilateral meetings. In particular, the Assembly's work on environment and human rights was the main focus of the discussions during my visit to the United Nations and meetings with the US authorities and representatives of the Senate and the Congress. During meetings with the UNGA President, the UN Assistant Secretary General for Strategic Coordination and the UNSR on Human Rights and the Environment, strong appreciation and support was expressed for the Assembly leadership and remarkable progress in this area.

### **Responding to emerging challenges in and outside Europe**

During the second half of 2021, the Assembly continued to address current and emerging challenges faced by the European governments and societies. During the September 2021 session, the Assembly held urgent debates on issues such as the situation in Afghanistan, the increased migration pressure on the borders of Latvia, Lithuania and Poland with Belarus, and a new draft protocol to the Council of Europe's Cybercrime Convention on enhanced co-operation and the disclosure of electronic evidence. An important current affairs debate on "The Western Balkans between democratic challenges and European aspirations: what role for the Council of Europe?" also took place.

The critical situation on the Polish border with Belarus, its human rights dimensions as well as the overall situation with the respect to human rights in Belarus remained among the top priorities for the Assembly throughout this period. The migration crisis was systematically addressed at different levels (e.g. September 2021 session, meeting of the Standing Committee, bilateral meetings etc.) with a view to helping find an effective solution to the problem artificially created by the Belarus authorities through the means of enhanced regional and European co-operation, while fully upholding human rights and humanitarian principles as well as refugee law and the right to seek asylum.

I met Ms Svetlana Tsikhanouskaya, the leader of the Belarus opposition, in Warsaw to discuss practical ways to support democratic transformation processes in Belarus and the important role that the Assembly may play in this regard. A dialogue was initiated and maintained with the Venice Commission on the constitutional reform process in Belarus.

The ninth Václav Havel Human Rights Prize – which honours outstanding civil society action in defence of human rights – has been awarded to Belarusian human rights activist Maria Kalesnikava, who at the moment of the award ceremony (September 2021) was serving a lengthy prison term.

Also, the Assembly debated and adopted texts on (1) the humanitarian consequences of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan / Nagorno-Karabakh conflict; (2) restoring social trust by strengthening social rights, and (3) strengthening the fight against so-called "honour" crimes. The monitoring of national elections continued despite the difficulties generated by the Covid-19 pandemics with monitoring missions visiting Bulgaria, Kirgizstan, Morocco, Republic of Moldova, and the Russian Federation.<sup>1</sup>

During its meeting in Rome, Italy (25-26 November 2021), the Standing Committee marked the 70th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions with a report on the increasing synergy between international humanitarian law and international human rights and a report on the voluntary relocation of migrants in need of humanitarian protection and the voluntary resettlement of refugees.

### **Developing links with national parliaments**

Further developing and strengthening relations with national parliaments and international partners remains a priority for the Assembly. During this period, national parliaments continued to organise hearings on the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, some of which were held in the context of the 'Route 47' initiative, focusing on issues where the Council of Europe could bring added value and meaningful support.

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1. Limited election assessment mission was deployed in the Russian Federation instead of a regular fully fledged observation mission.

On 7 October, I addressed the Senate of the Republic of Poland during its plenary sitting. In my speech, strong emphasis was made on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in Poland. While welcoming the positive developments highlighted in the GREVIO report on Poland, I encouraged further implementation of the convention in national policy and practice. The ongoing issue of the reform of the judiciary was also addressed, stressing that such reforms should respect and strengthen judicial independence and the rule of law.

On 21 October 2021, the European Conference of Presidents of Parliaments opened in Athens (Greece). In my opening speech, the importance of the Assembly as a place where, on the basis of common values and shared experiences, members of national parliaments can meaningfully contribute to making the lives of European citizens better was highlighted. The Conference specifically addressed the role of the national parliaments in ensuring that the right to healthy and sustainable environment is widely recognised as a human right. The role of parliaments in support of democratic principles in the context of the Covid-19 public health crisis was also discussed.

The importance of continued co-operation with national parliaments based on trust, respect and partnership, shared values and equal standards were also the topics of discussions of my visits to Morocco, Georgia, Finland, Poland, Kazakhstan, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom.

In the course of my official and working visits, the accession to the Istanbul Convention or further promotion of its effective implementation were on the top of the list of items discussed. Also, the development of meaningful and constructive dialogues between the majority and opposition in national parliaments and the role that the Assembly may play in facilitating such dialogue was frequently discussed.

My visits were also instrumental in mobilising support to the Assembly's initiatives on environment and promoting the proposal of a "paradigm shift" on the environment and human rights, moving from policy to principle.

### **Strengthening the Assembly and its role in a wider world**

The Assembly continued to review its working methods and procedures with a view to promoting diversity, integrity and effectiveness of its work. It debated, during the September 2021 session, the gender representation within the Assembly, as well as new guidelines on the scope of the parliamentary immunities enjoyed by its members. In November 2021, the Standing Committee approved a report revising the Assembly's Code of Conduct introducing the explicit prohibition of sexism, sexual harassment and sexual violence and misconduct.

Taking into account that the relevance of the work of the Assembly as well as of principles and values it aims to uphold, are not limited to Europe, efforts were made to establish strong and sustainable links with the countries outside the Council of Europe membership. I visited Morocco, United States and Kazakhstan aiming to deepen already existing co-operation with these countries, based on the Council of Europe convention system and standards. The focus of these efforts was on engaging non-member states in the normative work on environment protection, but also on fighting violence against women and girls (by promoting Istanbul Convention), addressing human trafficking or child protection issues.

Progress was made with regard to further strengthen cooperation with other international organisations to strengthen impact. At the level of the UN, World Bank and the Organisation of the American States, significant progress was made regarding co-operation related to environment and human rights, equality and women's rights, ending gender-based violence and the promotion of the Istanbul Convention or upholding children's rights.

I initiated and finalised the renewed exchange of letters within the framework of the Agreement between the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Parliamentary Assembly signed in Budapest in April 1992. New priority areas for co-operation include: joining forces to promote gender equality and measures to prevent and combat violence against women; co-operating to promote a safe, healthy and sustainable environment and the transition to a low-carbon green economy; and promoting inclusive and sustainable economies through digitalisation.

In the course of my visit to Kazakhstan, an agreement was reached to assess the effectiveness of the current co-operation agreement between the Assembly and Kazakhstan (signed in 2004) and to explore different options for enhanced, mutually beneficial co-operation (such as, for example, Partner for Democracy status)

Overall, the second half of 2021 proved to be an extremely dynamic and productive, with considerable progress made in many key areas where the Assembly achieved tangible and concrete results, and its increasing political relevance in addressing emerging challenges was further strengthened.

## **Appendix – Presidential transition paper / Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe 2022**

1. Keywords to PACE activity:
  - a. result based;
  - b. impact on daily life;
  - c. added value for the Council of Europe as a whole;
  - d. position PACE/Council of Europe as global leader on fundamental values.
2. The elements described below were introduced in the last 24 months and touch upon structural changes to existing practices / existing practices remain or are to be revisited.
3. The bureau is invited to take note of the presidential transition paper.
4. The outgoing President will brief the incoming President in detail.

### **1. Trialogue SG-CM-PACE: coordination and synchronisation Council of Europe bodies**

- structural CM debrief;
- topical triologue on need base;
- regular Sec.Gen. – CM Bureau – PACE PC concertation.

### **2. Thematic approach + panel based plenum: substantial contribution to CM and SG**

- COVID vs. fundamental rights & freedoms;
- artificial intelligence (AI);
- violence against women & Istanbul Convention / handbook translations a.o.;
- environment as a basic Human Right / link UN / parliamentary network;
- legal discrimination of women within the 47 member States of the Council of Europe / + link World Bank\*.

### **3. National parliament's connectivity: route 47 and PACE as partner and service provider to national parliaments**

- successful try outs / multiple topics;
- structural rollout country based / min. 1 per year hybrid or physical;
- P2P & C2C programme / P-President C-Committee;
- national delegation leader's feedback to pace.

### **4. Bilateral connectivity: scope & reach out of PACE and Council of Europe**

- Morocco: partner for democracy / next step;
- United States: target observer to pace / formal visit to pace June 2021;
- Kazakhstan: reach out & explore partnership for democracy / on hold;
- Mexico: Istanbul convention / non Council of Europe member State pilot case;
- Western Balkans (tbc): regional approach;
- follow up deliverables of member state visits / Russian Federation – Turkey – Hungary – Poland among others.

## **5. Multilateral connectivity: PACE-Council of Europe as leader in value based standard setting & SDG's**

- UN & its agencies: environment / human rights;
- World Bank gender equality;
- EU PA +: topical exchange;
- IPU & other int. PA's: outbound standard setting;
- others (OECD / EBRD / CEB, etc.).

## **6. Covid related and non-Covid related working practices**

- remote & hybrid meeting methods + measures / informative vs deliberative meetings;
- revisit monitoring system & address existing “double standards”;
- focus on deliverables of topical reports / recommendation oriented;
- political impact of urgent & current debates.

## **7. Other**

- president & vice-presidents and committee chairs caucuses;
- two year topical business plan based on deliverables.

The bureau is invited to consider to seize all committees for report in view of preparing a thematic-holistic debate on legal discrimination of women within the Council of Europe member States during the September 2022 part session.

## **PACE added value to the SG / CM / Council of Europe**

- environment & human rights;
- Council of Europe convention's reach out;
- multilateral connectivity & SDG's;
- political voice on fundamental rights and freedoms;
- Council of Europe fund raising / voluntary contributions & secondments.