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Communications of the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to the Bureau of the Parliamentary Assembly

Addendum to the report
President of the Assembly

1. Past meetings and visits

1.1. Official visit to France (Paris, 20-21 February 2008)

I chose to make my first official visit during my term of office to France, as the Council of Europe's host country. On 20 February 2008, I met the President of the Senate, Mr Christian Poncelet, and on 21 February, the State Secretary for European Affairs, Mr Jean-Pierre Jouyet.

Being fully aware of the constraints affecting the members of the French delegation in connection with the local election campaign, I was delighted to accept the invitation by its Chair, Mr Jean-Claude Mignon, to continue my official visit to Paris after the elections, in April 2008.

On 21 February, I also took part in the conference on "Bicameral systems and representation of regions and local authorities: the role of second chambers in Europe" held in Paris by the French Senate and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, in co-operation with the Assembly and the Venice Commission. I gave an opening address and made a general statement on the representation of regions.

The main topic of discussion with Mr Poncelet and Mr Jouyet was France's role as the Council of Europe's host country.

I mentioned the visit by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Kouchner, to the Assembly's April part-session and voiced the hope that the French President, Mr Sarkozy, would accept the invitation to address the Assembly.

I presented my decision to write to the ministers for foreign affairs of all Council of Europe member countries urging them to attend the Committee of Ministers' ministerial sessions in person, beginning with the forthcoming session in Strasbourg on 7 May 2008.

I thanked Mr Poncelet for being one of the first parliamentary presidents to confirm his participation at the European Conference of Presidents of Parliaments in

Strasbourg on 22 and 23 May 2008 and said that I hoped the President of the French National Assembly, Mr Accoyer, would also take part.

Through my discussion partners, I thanked France for its contribution to the Council of Europe's budget and I asked them to ensure that France showed the other member countries its positive example.

At the same time, I expressed my concern about France's withdrawal from the Partial Agreement on the North-South Centre.



In the talks, we also began considering the arrangements for celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Council of Europe.

Another key topic of discussion was the French European Union presidency. In this context, I underlined the importance attached by the Council of Europe to the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding between our two institutions and to the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty, in particular regarding accession by the EU to the European Convention on Human Rights.

My discussion partners showed great appreciation of the Council of Europe's importance and value added in the European institutional context. In particular, they underlined the promotion of democracy and human rights and our Organisation's role as an institutional forum bringing together all European Union member states and the other countries in Europe.

Our discussions also covered:

- the situation in Kosovo;
- the need to intensify intercultural dialogue;
- co-operation in the Mediterranean Basin (in particular, in connection with the French plans for a Mediterranean Union);
- co-operation with other parts of the world (from the angle of a Council of Europe "neighbourhood policy").

1.2. Meetings at the European Parliament (11-12 March 2008)

I met European Parliament (EP) President Hans-Gert Pöttering in Strasbourg to discuss implementation of the co-operation agreement between the Parliamentary Assembly and the EP, accession by the European Union to the European Convention on Human Rights, and the Lisbon Treaty. We agreed to further develop co-operation, notably in matters related to promoting human rights and culture, as well as the observation of elections.

I also met the leaders of the main political groups of the European Parliament, Mr Martin Schulz, President of the Socialist Group, Mr Joseph Daul, President of the PPE-ED Group, Mr Graham Watson, President of the ALDE Group.

1.3. Commemoration ceremony of the 50th anniversary of the European Parliament (12 March 2008)

I made a speech at the official ceremony to mark the European Parliament's 50th anniversary.

1.4. Visit to Greece and participation in the 4th plenary session of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (Athens, 28-29 March 2008)

I was in Greece on 28 and 29 March at the invitation of Mr Dimitris Sioufas, President of the Greek Parliament, who was also chairing the 4th plenary session of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly.

On 28 March, at a meeting with Mr Karolos Papoulias, the President of Greece, we discussed the need for more focused Council of Europe action to integrate migrants. I also met Yannis Valinakis, the Greek Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, with whom I discussed the possibility of setting up a Euro-Mediterranean observatory on migration, as called for by the Assembly in 2006 and which Greece has offered to host. My discussions with the president and the minister also concerned stability in the Balkans, and the renewed hope that a peaceful solution could be found to the situation in Cyprus. I also held an exchange of views with the Greek parliamentary delegation to the Assembly and with a former member of the delegation, Ms Elsa Papadimitriou, who is now VicePresident of the Greek Parliament.

On 28 March I also attended the 4th plenary session of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA), which represents the parliamentary dimension of the Barcelona Process. Its importance can be gauged by the decision taken by the last European Council to lay the foundations for a Mediterranean Union. In my opening address I reiterated the request of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe for observer status with the EMPA. The other speakers at the session included Mr José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, Mr Costas Caramanlis, Prime Minister of the Greek Republic, and Mr Stavros Dimas, member of the European Commission responsible for environmental affairs.

Given that the main themes of the plenary session of the EMPA were the energy and environmental dimensions of Euro-Mediterranean co-operation, I said in my address that protection of the natural environment had to be regarded as a fundamental human right and should be incorporated into the European Convention on Human Rights, through an additional protocol.

On 28 March I also took part in the final part of the conference on “Anti-terrorist Measures and Human Rights”, held by the Greek Marangopoulos Foundation for Human Rights (MFHR), in co-operation with the Parliamentary Assembly and in particular its Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights. In my speech, I said that fighting terrorism with illegal and inhuman actions only leads to barbarism and I criticised the complicity of European governments in abuses discussed at the conference, such as secret detention, illegal renditions and unfair terrorist blacklisting procedures.

1.5. Visit to Portugal for the award ceremony of the 13th North-South Prize (Lisbon, 1 April 2008)

On 1 April I took part in the ceremony for the award of the 2008 North-South Prize by the Council of Europe’s North-South Centre to the two prizewinners, Mrs Simone Veil and Mr Kofi Annan. In my speech I paid tribute to their exceptional qualities and universal standing and referred to their profound and unfailing attachment to human rights and the dignity of all.

1.6. 30th plenary session of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of Member Nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States (IPA CIS), (St Petersburg, 3 April 2008)

At the invitation of Mr Sergey Mironov, Chairman of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States (IPA CIS) Council, Chairman of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, I addressed the 30th plenary session of the IPA CIS.

In my statement I stressed, in particular, that relations with neighbouring countries of the Council of Europe are one of my priorities. I expressed my conviction that the European democratic model based on our Organisation’s fundamental values continues to exercise its power of attraction well beyond Europe. We must, therefore, work closely with our neighbours, including those in central Asia, and think about pragmatic methods enabling us to develop an institutional dialogue in specific fields of cooperation.

I also mentioned that the Parliamentary Assembly was going to review the functioning of observer status with the Council of Europe and that it would consider the establishment of a new status for non-member states that wish to co-operate with the Council of Europe but are not yet in a position to guarantee full compliance with its principles.

The participation at this plenary session was an excellent opportunity to meet several presidents of parliaments of the CIS and I held meetings with:

- Mr Sergey Mironov, Chairman of the IPA CIS Council, Chairman of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation;
- Mr Boris Gryzlov, Chairman of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation;
- Mr Tigran Torosyan, Chairman of the National Assembly of Armenia;
- Mr Oktay Asadov, Chairman of the Parliament of Azerbaijan;
- Mr Marian Lupu, Chairman of the Parliament of Moldova;
- Mr Arseniy Yatsenyuk, Chairman of the Supreme Rada of Ukraine;
- Mr Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Chairman of the Senate of the Parliament of Kazakhstan;
- Mr Vadim Popov, Chairman of the Chamber of Representatives of the National Assembly of Belarus;
- Mr Mahmadsaid Ubaidulloev, Chairman of the Parliament of Tajikistan.

1.7. Inter-Parliamentary Conference on “Globalisation of migration processes and problems of legal regulation” (St Petersburg, 4 April 2008)

On 4 April I addressed the Inter-Parliamentary Conference on “Globalisation of migration processes and problems of legal regulation” organised in St Petersburg on 4 April by the Parliamentary Assembly and IPA CIS. This conference was the last in a series of joint conferences organised by the two assemblies since 2002.

In my speech I recalled the priorities in the migration field for the Parliamentary Assembly, in particular:

- strengthening the fundamental rights of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons, and ensuring the setting-up of a legal framework which fully respects their rights;
- promoting intercultural dialogue, fostering tolerance and ensuring the integration of immigrant communities in the host society;
- managing migration and respecting the different needs of countries of origin, transit and destination.

I also took this opportunity to invite the InterParliamentary Assembly of Member Nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States (IPA CIS) to take part in the inauguration of a “European Day of Integration and Intercultural Tolerance”. This proposal was made at the Parliamentary Assembly’s Conference on Migration and Integration held in Aachen (Germany) in November last year. In my opinion, it would be a clear and visible sign of our shared commitment to making this goal a top political priority for Europe. If the IPA CIS joined this Parliamentary Assembly/European Parliament initiative, it would become a symbol of the whole Eurasian continent, providing an excellent contribution to the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008.

2. Press releases¹

1. A collective effort to fight trafficking in human beings
2. Lluís Maria de Puig: “Belarus has once again opted for barbarism rather than justice”
3. PACE President welcomes Japanese MPs proposal to suspend executions
4. Kosovo: PACE President urges all parties to preserve peace and dialogue
5. Official visit by PACE President Lluís Maria de Puig to France
6. Fidel Castro’s withdrawal from politics opens a window of hope, says PACE President
7. “Bicameral systems have a bright future ahead of them”, says PACE President
8. PACE President appeals for calm in Yerevan, calls for dialogue
9. PACE President condemns the assassination of a former municipal councillor in Spain
10. Council of Europe leaders call for practical steps to fight gender violence on International Women’s Day
11. PACE-EP: EU accession to the European Convention on Human Rights “a major joint project”
12. Cyprus: PACE ready to support negotiations under UN auspices
13. PACE President wishes to incorporate the right to a healthy environment in the European Convention on Human Rights
14. PACE President and Greek President agree more action needed to integrate migrants
15. North-South Prize 2008: PACE President praises work of prizewinners, Simone Veil and Kofi Annan
16. Fighting terrorism: “restricting freedom makes us less secure”
17. PACE President wants to work closely with Council of Europe neighbours including central Asia
18. Cyprus: PACE President welcomes reopening of Ledra Street
19. European Day of Integration and Intercultural Tolerance
20. PACE President deplores secret unannounced executions in Japan

3. Speeches²

1. Opening statement at the January 2008 part-session (Strasbourg, 21 January 2008)

1. These texts are available on the Council of Europe Internet site, at the following address: <http://assembly.coe.int>

2. Bicameralism and the representation of the regions and local collectivities: The role of the second chambers in Europe (Paris, 21 February 2008) (French only)
3. Speech at the 50th anniversary of the European Parliament (Strasbourg, 12 March 2008)
4. Speech at the 4th plenary session of the EuroMediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (Athens, 28 March 2008)
5. Speech at the occasion of the handing over of the North-South Prize (Lisbon, 1 April 2008)
6. Address on the occasion of the 30th plenary session of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States (St Petersburg, 3 April 2008)
7. Speech on the occasion of the Joint Inter-Parliamentary Conference: "Globalisation of Migration Processes and Problems of Legal Regulation" (St Petersburg, 4 April 2008)

2. These speeches are available in their entirety on the Council of Europe Internet site, at the following address: <http://assembly.coe.int>