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Parliamentary questions for oral answer – Discussion of the communication on the activities of the Committee of Ministers

Parliamentary questions

1. Question from Mr von Sydow,

The State Duma elections in the Russian Federation on 2 December 2007, and the pre-election campaign, were not fair and failed to meet commitments and standards set by the Council of Europe. The parliamentary election observers were clear in their criticisms, which included the widely reported harassment of opposition parties.

There seems to be an almost total silence, however, about the murder of Mr Farid Babayev, a Yabloko party candidate, in Makhachkala, the capital of Dagestan. Mr Babayev was shot when entering his house on 21 November and died of his wounds three days later. Besides being his party's leading regional candidate in the elections for the State Duma, Mr Babayev was known for his civil courage. He had spoken out about human rights abuses by regional authorities, and had organised protests. He had investigated the shooting of a peaceful demonstrator, the abductions of civilians and the use of excessive force in special police operations.

Neither political opposition nor human rights defence can be silenced or stopped by killing the persons involved. Membership of the Council of Europe presupposes that its commitments are respected by all, including by the Russian Federation.

To ask the Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers whether he is aware of the murder of Mr Babayev, and whether he will search for an answer to find out whether Mr Babayev's death is connected to his efforts to hold the authorities accountable for human rights abuses in Dagestan; and what the Council of Europe can do in order to prevent killings of political opponents, human rights defenders and journalists in Council of Europe member countries.

2. Question from Mr Raffi Hovhannisian,

To ask the Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers what the position of the Committee of Ministers is on Azerbaijan's effective denial of access to the rapporteur of the Parliamentary Assembly Committee on Culture, Science and Education, who had recently been authorised by the said committee to conduct a goodwill mission to observe the site of the medieval Armenian cemetery of Jugha, Nakhichevan and to verify, *inter alia*, the existing evidence that thousands of cross-stones – testaments of our common European heritage – had been fully and finally destroyed by Azerbaijani uniformed personnel in December 2005; and whether this intentional destruction of heritage by a member state – carried out eleven years after the ceasefire, and hundreds of kilometres away from the conflict zone – or the denial of access to an official Parliamentary Assembly delegation, are in compliance with the obligations and benchmarks of its membership, and, if not, what should be done about this affront to our Organisation?

3. Question from Mr Adonts,

When joining the Council of Europe, Armenia and Azerbaijan undertook to settle the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict peacefully.



Recently the OSCE Minsk Group presented new proposals to the parties based on the fundamental principles of conflict resolution.

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe has emphasised the importance of informing the public about the necessity of fostering reconciliation and building confidence between nations engaged in conflict resolution.

To ask the Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers whether the Committee of Ministers will initiate confidence-building measures between the two nations with the aim of establishing favourable conditions for conflict resolution.

4. Question from Mr Béteille,

On 23 October 2007, Alisher Saipov, a young journalist aged 26 and father of a daughter of two months, was murdered in cold blood in a street in Osh, the second city of Kyrgyzstan. He had received anonymous threats on a number of occasions. Despite his comparative youth, Alisher Saipov was an acknowledged independent journalist. He worked as a correspondent for *Voice of America* and contributed to websites covering current affairs in central Asia. In spring 2007 he founded the Uzbek language weekly *Siyosat*, which he edited.

His mistake was probably to take too close an interest in the situation in Uzbekistan, his country of origin. In particular, he had tackled the sensitive topic of the murderous events of May 2005 in Andijan, where there were reportedly hundreds of victims, as well as the activities of the Uzbek security services on Kyrgyzstan territory and the fight against Islamic terrorism. In other words, he was considered a nuisance.

There are still concerns about the independence and impartiality of the inquiry opened by the Kyrgyzstan authorities. The premises of *Siyosat* have been placed under seal, its computers seized and the family home searched, close acquaintances of the victim are under suspicion and Alisher Saipov himself has been accused of being close to banned Islamic movements.

Solving the murder of Alisher Saipov would probably be the best way of honouring freedom of expression.

To ask the Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers how it intends to ensure that the Kyrgyzstan authorities conduct proper inquiries with the murder of Alisher Saipov.

5. Question from Mr Wille,

For many years, the Council of Europe has experienced zero growth in real terms at a time when one of its institutions, the European Court of Human Rights, has required ever-increasing resources to cope with a constant growth in its caseload. This situation has financial implications for other areas of the Council of Europe, particularly intergovernmental co-operation, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. The result is that these three sectors have fewer and fewer resources to carry out their responsibilities, even though they have already made major efforts to economise. While it is true that efforts to rationalise and modernise all the Council of Europe's institutions must continue, this must not be to the detriment of the objectives and priorities laid down by the heads of state and government at the 3rd Summit in Warsaw in 2005.

It was against this background of increasing concern that the Parliamentary Assembly adopted, at its October 2007 Ordinary Session, [Recommendation 1812 \(2007\)](#), setting out measures that might be taken by member states to enable the organisation to carry out, calmly and effectively, the role assigned to it by the Warsaw Summit, while constantly bearing in mind the goal of the Council of Europe as specified in Article 1 of its Statute.

To ensure that all the areas of the Council of Europe – Court, intergovernmental sector, parliamentary and local and regional – have sufficient resources to carry out their activities on behalf of the member states,

To ask the Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers if he and the Committee of Ministers are prepared to discard the principle of zero growth for the budget for 2009 (the year of the Council of Europe's 60th anniversary), and if he will give his views on the various proposals made by the Parliamentary Assembly in its [Recommendation 1812 \(2007\)](#) and the attitude of the Committee of Ministers to implementing, in consultation with the Assembly, some of the measures proposed.

6. Question from Lord Russell-Johnston,

The British Council is a well-known and respected cultural institution, and it has lately been harassed by the Russian authorities.

As a signatory to the European Cultural Convention, Russia has agreed to, “in so far as may be possible, encourage the study by its own nationals of the languages, history and civilisation of the other contracting parties and grant facilities to those parties to promote such studies in its territory”.

To ask the Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers what the Committee of Ministers will do to ensure that Russia fulfils its commitments under the European Cultural Convention.

7. Question from Mr Van den Brande,

Amongst the priorities of the Slovak presidency as outlined in November 2007 are included “efforts in the fight against discrimination, racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, extreme nationalism and chauvinism” and the promotion of “the truth about the Holocaust” (Priorities paragraph 3.b).

To ask the Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers how the Committee of Ministers envisages the implementation of these most laudable objectives.