



News from the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

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“The ALDE Group must make its guardianship of Council of Europe values more effective, through enhanced political action inside and outside the Assembly.”

[ALDE Mission Statement](#)

Welcome to the April 2008 issue of the *Newsletter of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)* in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe!

The Council of Europe is the largest pan-European institution, with 47 member states. Its Parliamentary Assembly meets four times a year, discussing most important European issues relating to democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Members of the Assembly are – unlike members of the European Parliament – not directly elected, but they are all members of the 47 national parliaments. This is the finest and most effective network of European MPs!

The ALDE Group is currently uniting 91 members from all over Europe. As a group, we endeavour to be the engine of the Assembly defending our core European values based on a mission statement adopted with full consensus in the group.

We issue this newsletter in order to cordially invite you to follow the debates in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe during its sessions in Strasbourg and to provide feedback on our activities. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Liberal Party of the Observer Delegation from Canada (Lorna Milne, and Derek Lee) for their active participation in the work of the Group. And we are grateful to our colleagues from liberal partner organisations who attended ALDE meetings in April: James Patava (LI) and Jan van Run (IFLRY).

ALDE elects three Vice-Chairpersons and a Secretary General

14 April 2008 the ALDE Group elected three **Vice-Chairpersons:**



Michael Aastrup JENSEN
(Denmark)

Terry LEYDEN (Ireland)



Kerstin LUNDGREN
(Sweden)

ALDE's Secretary General

Doris FIALA
(Switzerland)



ALDE Bureau

President:

Mr EÖRSI, Matyas (Hungary)

Honorary President:

Lord RUSSELL-JOHNSTON (United Kingdom)

Vice-Chairperson:

Mr BOKERIA, Giorgi (Georgia)

Mrs Brasseur Ann (Luxembourg)

Mr HANCOCK, Michael (United Kingdom)

Mr HOLOVATY, Serhiy (Ukraine)

Mr JENSEN, Michael Aastrup (Denmark)

Mrs LEUTHEUSSER-SCHNARRENBARGER,
Sabine (Germany)

Mr LEYDEN, Terry (Ireland)

Mrs LUNDGREN, Kerstin (Sweden)

Mr MARQUET, Bernard (Monaco)

Mrs OJULAND, Kristiina (Estonia)

Mr WILLE, Paul (Belgium)

Secretary General:

Mrs FIALA, Doris (Switzerland)

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Unfortunately, Lev Ponomarev, Executive Director of All-Russia Public Movement “For Human Rights” had to decline ALDE’s invitation to address the group during the April session in Strasbourg. Accused of slander, Lev Ponomarev had to give written undertakings not to leave Moscow before the court rules. Mr Ponomarev, however, submitted a written address to the group which you can request from our office. In this newsletter you will find the highlights of his address.

Charged twice for the same interview....

In November 2006 I told in an interview about the system of special torture colonies and about an analogue of “Kapo” in the form of the “discipline and order sections” made up of prisoners. The general sued me, the court denied a linguistic expert examination, and I was forced to make public retraction. It happened in the summer of 2007. However, Kalinin addressed to the procuracy again regarding the same fact, and on 22 February 2008 I was accused under article 129 paragraph 3 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation of producing slanderous accusations of grave offence against an official. They are trying to sue me second time for the same statement. If the trial takes place (the case is currently at the procuracy “for correction of mistakes”), I intend to turn it into trial regarding the torture system in Russian penitentiary institutions.

Repression mechanisms being created...

Absolutely manageable judiciary obediently following the procuracy; investigation trained to fabricate cases and use torture; powerful propaganda representing the dissidents as enemies or the “fifth file” connected to the west and the oligarchs – these are parts of repression mechanism in Russia today. Human rights defenders and political or civil activists are put under total control which allows arranging provocations and arrests of hundreds of persons in many regions within days.

Scenarios for Russia...

The system created in such a manner may evolve according to three scenarios:

- 1) Gradual decomposition of power under the influence of corruption and the inter-clan fight with subsequent progress towards systemic instability.
- 2) Transition to authoritarian modernization stage and gradual liberalization.
- 3) Establishment of single-party nationalistic dictatorship of “security forces”, suppressing violently dissidents and rivals.

In order for Russia to start gradual liberalization again, like 22 years ago, and to conduct necessary social and economic reforms in conditions of the monopolistic rule of the United Russia, liberal bureaucrats and experts who make up Dmitrii Medvedev’s team today should be accompanied with growing pressure on the authorities by a strong democracy-oriented opposition movement.

It is not a “thaw” yet, but a faint signal that the regime is trying to refrain from evolving towards a fascist-type system...

Since very many people expect a “thaw” from the rule of the “liberal lawyer” Medvedev, it is necessary to explain that all the thaw periods in Russia started from demonstrative repentance by the state, which clearly showed that certain forms of activities were no longer persecuted and a new, much higher standard of liberalism was set in society. The dismissal of the YUKOS case could be an adequate action, namely, cancellation of the second trial against Khodorkovsky and Lebedev and pardon or conditional release of the most high-profile figures in the case – Khodorkovsky, Lebedev, Bakhmina, Pichugin, terminally-ill Aleksanyan, as well as those sentenced to many years in prison in the downright-fabricated “spy” cases against scientists Danilov and Sutyagin.

ALDE's question to Mr Gašparovič, President of the Slovak Republic



Mr EÖRSI (*Hungary*). – For all the liberal democrats in the Council of Europe, freedom of the press is of the utmost importance. I mention this because the Slovak Parliament is passing a law that will limit the freedom of the press and place limitations on editors. The Assembly should know that, under this law, if someone is criticised in a newspaper, the editor must give that person space to answer. That measure was criticised by the high commissioner for freedom of the press at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. All is not lost, however, because the President has not yet signed the Bill. As a genuine democrat, I listened to his speech and I wondered whether he could block that law against the freedom of the press and prevent it from becoming law in Slovakia.



Mr GAŠPAROVIČ said that he had not seen the final wording of the law passed in parliament, but the law did not oppress freedom of speech – in fact, quite the contrary. He stated that he had no reason not to sign it. There was opposition to the legislation because it had supposedly been passed in an undemocratic way and he acknowledged that were he were to sign it, one group of parliamentarians would be dissatisfied. Those dissatisfied parliamentarians would still have recourse to the Constitutional Court and the European Court and should show their faith in those institutions. It would be up to the Constitutional Court to make a decision.

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ALDE Questions Angela Merkel, Federal Chancellor of Germany



Mr EÖRSI (*Hungary*). – In your speech, you awarded to the Jewish organisation B'nai B'rith the gold medal for combating anti-Semitism. We congratulate you on that. You also put a question: “How can we improve the opportunities for all people to live in freedom and peace?” Can you answer your own question in the context of the Council of Europe? How can we perform better? How can we work better to make your vision come true?



Mrs MERKEL said that she could not fully answer that question in 30 seconds. People did shy away from doing the right thing sometimes and the question was whether people would show the civic courage to act. Both ordinary people and politicians knew when they should speak out. Speaking openly ensured that people got along.

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ALDE questions Yulia Tymoshenko, Prime Minister of Ukraine



Mrs LEUTHEUSSER-SCHNARRENBARGER (*Germany*) asked the Prime Minister whether she would comment on the constitutional changes made during her mandate.

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Mrs TYMOSHENKO said that the Ukrainian Parliament was faced with the issue of members of parliament frequently moving from one faction to another. She gave an example: when the president called for an election, 40 parliamentarians changed party. Ukraine was currently a weak democracy, its parliament was weak and there was a strong need to establish rules and measures in the constitution in order to prevent such actions in future. Ukraine was a young democracy and she noted that members of parliament should represent the people rather than their own interests.

Addressing to Bernard Kouchner, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of France, ...



Mr EÖRSI (*Hungary*). – I think that everybody in this Chamber now understands that you became a part of Médecins sans Frontières and are now perhaps a statesman *sans frontières*. Perhaps fewer people know, however, that you are also a marathon runner. In this context, I would like to quote you when you said: “I ran to Biafra because I was too young for Guernica, Auschwitz, Oradour and Setif.” Where should the Council of Europe run to with you today?



Mr KOUCHNER admitted that he was not sure how to answer the question. He had been in Warsaw the previous day to commemorate the 65 years of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, and had awarded the *Légion d'Honneur* to Mr Marek Edelman, one of the last surviving leaders of the uprising. He referred back to the question about his activities during his youth and drew a comparison with Mr Edelman, who had lived his life with dignity and without the search for honour or glory; he had remained a modest and anonymous citizen, who worked as a cardiologist in Lodz. The fight for human rights was very much a fight against man himself. Although it was easy to sit back and watch history unfold, his passion for human rights told him otherwise.

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Bernard Marquet (Monaco)

Child and teenage suicide in Europe: a serious public-health issue (Doc. 11547)

Rapporteur of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee

Presented on 16 April 2008

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[Report](#)

[Resolution](#)

Monday 14 April 2008

Progress report of the Bureau of the Assembly and the Standing Committee



Kerstin LUNDGREN (Sweden). – Taking part in observations is crucial for us as parliamentarians. Usually, we do that together, through the long-term observers, but we have twice seen cases in Russia where there were no long-term observers. We have to draw common conclusions from the missions we are in: do we have an impact on the pre-election and election missions? We have to look for improvements, and we have to be able to follow up remarks made on an election in the monitoring procedures. [Read more](#)

Tuesday 15 April 2008

European Muslim communities confronted with extremism



Mike HANCOCK (United Kingdom). – We must understand that unless we do more to encourage young Muslims in our communities to become the religious leaders who have the fundamental framework of the European cultural background as well as a strong Islamic belief, it will always be difficult to balance the two. [...] We must be careful not to set up ghettos. Immigrant populations, no matter how long they have been in a country, should not be forced in one way or another to be in one place. [...] We should also accept that many accusations, such as those relating to honour killings and forced marriages, are aimed at the Muslim community by those who are ignorant.

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Abuse of the criminal justice system in Belarus

Sabine LEUTHEUSSER-SCHNARRENBARGER (Germany) congratulated the rapporteur on an excellent and very important report, and said that her group wanted to vote in favour of it. It had been produced under very difficult conditions; co-operation with the opposition had been largely refused, and it was very regrettable that Mr Pourgourides had not been allowed to travel to Belarus. [...] The Council should have a mechanism for monitoring and supporting victims of human rights abuses in Belarus. International defenders of human rights should investigate the fate of victims on a continuous

basis. [...] Continuous monitoring, which could improve the situation, needed to be actively supported.

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Wednesday 16 April 2008

Access to safe and legal abortion in Europe



Tina ACKETOFT (*Sweden*). – As the appointed speaker for ALDE, I have promised some of my colleagues to say that they feel that the issue is a matter of conscience and that there are different viewpoints in the group. [...] Having said that, let us not forget what the topic is all about. Let us not start trench digging and the warfare to which we are all so accustomed when it comes to discussing abortion. The report is not pro or anti abortion. If it is pro anything, it is pro-women's health and lives. [...] The report is also about gender equality and human rights.

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Current affairs debate: the consequences of the declaration of independence by the Kosovo Assembly



Lord RUSSELL-JOHNSTON (*United Kingdom*). – First, independence is a reality; we are politicians and we know that. It will not and cannot be reversed. [...] Secondly, it should be clear that devolution to the Serb enclaves in Kosovo is about self-government for them, and not about the Belgrade government, as Mr Koštunica seems to think. [...] Thirdly, I began by recalling the bad times; however bad they are they must be overcome. Yesterday we listened with respect, admiration and, I think, liking to Angela Merkel. Half a century ago, things would have been very different, but reconciliation has triumphed, and I am sure that it will do so in Kosovo, too.

I end by saying that the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe officially supports Kosovar independence and wishes the

new country well.

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Child and teenage suicide in Europe: a serious public health issue



Mike HANCOCK (*United Kingdom*). – Of all the subjects that we discuss here, none can be sadder than the loss of a child. No parent can face such an event easily. The pain that is felt on the death of a child is made even worse by the despair that is felt when that child has committed suicide. [...] We must bear in mind the importance of this report, which is about establishing a Europe-wide strategy to help young people and to make a determined effort to ensure that people are there to help them. We must ensure that those young people are given quality time and that they can talk to members of their peer groups, such as other students in schools and universities.

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Debate under urgent procedure: The functioning of democratic institutions in Armenia



Matyas EÖRSI (*Hungary*). – Mr President and colleagues, at this juncture nothing is easier than to be critical of Armenia and the functioning of democratic institutions there, but with your permission, I would like to start with ourselves. [...] One problem is that we often tolerate rigged elections. If you visit the Assembly's website, you will often see headlines in the "news" section that say, "One step towards democracy"; we all know that we are not telling the truth. There can be some improvements in the election environment, but very often the elections in question are rigged. If we want to be helpful to those countries, the least we can do is speak up and tell the truth. [...] One of the major problems in Armenia, aside from what happened on that tragic

day, is the general distrust of the democratic processes among the population because of the rigged elections. [...] Of course it matters who wins an election, but it matters much more that wider society should be able to trust and have confidence in the constitution and the electoral processes.

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Promoting the teaching of European literature



Nino NAKASHIDZÉ (*Georgia*). – Learning one's mother tongue and its literature plays a major part in forging a national consciousness. [...] However, restricting oneself to reading only one's own national literature can sometimes have an adverse effect. It can create a narrow vision and a disregard for other cultures. That is why learning European and perhaps world literature is very important. [...] In teaching European literature, we should take a special approach based on comparative analysis that can show our students that all our cultures are intermingled, and that they have a huge influence on one another.

Despite our national diversity, we have an important common European identity.

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The accession of the European Union/European Community to the European Convention on Human Rights



Terry LEYDEN (*Ireland*). – The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms is the key text of the Council of Europe and is considered to be the cornerstone of human rights protection in Europe and the fulcrum of Council of Europe activities. [...] If the Lisbon reform treaty is ratified by all member states – I am confident that it will be – it will provide for accession by the European Union to the Convention. That accession will not extend the Union's competences or transform EU fundamental rights law. It will allow the institutions of the EU to be subject to the same obligations that member states currently observe. [...] Citizens would then have recourse to the European Court of Human Rights if they felt that decisions in Brussels had

infringed their rights.

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Immigration from sub-Saharan Africa



Charles GOERENS (*Luxembourg*) said that it was wrong to say that all Africans wished to flee their continent. But 90% of those who migrated did so within the area, and only 10% left, half of them for other parts of Africa and half for Europe. [...] A further prejudice suggested that only the poor left Africa. In fact, the average profile of a migrant was of a young man with a school diploma and a family to support. [...] Sub-Saharan Africa provided a picture of both light and shadow, and it was essential to highlight the brightness. Europe had done much for which it required to be pardoned, and although the European Union was better than most at providing aid and co-operation, more could and should be done.

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Sustainable development and tourism: towards quality growth nobody

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