



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

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PACE Session
23-27 June 2008

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"We must always speak out within our organisation for human rights ...wherever they are transgressed worldwide; it is our duty to act. That is our responsibility and raison d'être..."

Lord Russell-Johnston



The very sad news arrived on Sunday, 27 July 2008...

Our good friend, Honorary President of the ALDE Group and colleague in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Lord Russell-Johnston passed away. Not only we, liberals have lost a very special, gifted, wise friend and politician but most of all, those who were assaulted and battered as it comes to their human and democratic rights.

Russell was a prominent liberal freedom fighter climbing the barricades wherever and whenever necessary, especially there where human rights were at stake. He was one of the most prominent defenders warriors for everything the Council of Europe was and is standing for. His speeches, leadership and remarkable personality will leave a non-erasable footprint in the Assembly.

Russell's death is, for me as for many-many others, a personal loss as well. He was the leader of the LDR group when I joined the Assembly in 1994, so Russell was not only my predecessor but also my political mentor and became a personal and family friend. We had the honour and pleasure to welcome him in our home several times. And just like many of us experienced, his personal post-cards landed in our post-box from all over the world – the last one, sadly on the day after he died. As if he knew, it was a picture about him having entered the House of Lords 11 years ago.

Russell's special smile, style, humor and colourful language will be remembered by all those who had the fortune to know him.

His curtain fell in Paris, his favourite European city. Although being a prominent advocate for Europe he remained a firm Scot as well. Once a Croatian fellow-liberal parliamentarian complimented him as such a fine and clever Englishman upon which he replied with his typical Russell-humour: "Next time you call me Englishman, I will call you a Serb!"

People pass away, but their real death comes when they are forgotten. Russell left us, but he remains alive as long as we remember him and as long as his political heritage is in safe hands. We, the ALDE Group must secure both his memory and his political will.

With deep respect and friendship to him,

Mátyás Eörsi

Leader of ALDE

Member of the Liberal Group of the Parliamentary Assembly since 1985, President of the Group from 1994 to 1999, President of the Assembly from 1999 to 2002 and Honorary President of the Group since 2002, Lord Russell-Johnston will leave a gaping void in our Group and in our hearts. A book of condolence is open at: www.alde-pace.org. Matyas Eörsi attended the memorial service for Lord Russell-Johnston in Inverness, August 11th, where he delivered a [speech](#) on behalf of PACE President

ALDE exchanged views with Russian human rights activists in Strasbourg

Oleg Orlov, director of the human rights organisation “Memorial” (Moscow, Russia), Svetlana Isaeva, member of the “Dagestan Mothers” (Dagestan) and Magomet Mutsulgov, director of the human rights organisation “MASHR” (Ingushetia) were invited by the ALDE to the Council of Europe during the June PACE session. The visit was co-organised by Iva Savic and Eleonora Karamyants, Committee for Peace in the Caucasus of the Freedom House, Washington.

The attention of the group and that of high representatives of the Council of Europe was drawn to human rights violations in the North Caucasus. Kidnappings, uninvestigated disappearances and general lawlessness tolerated and promoted by authorities terrorise the people of Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan, said human rights activists. The delegation provided documented information on uninvestigated kidnappings in Ingushetia and Dagestan; Svetlana Isaeva told about threats that she and her colleagues in Dagestan received prior to her departure to Strasbourg.

The delegation from Russia commended the Assembly’s decision to prepare a full-right report on legal remedies to human rights violations in the North Caucasus which will be prepared by Dick Marty, member of the ALDE. “The role of the Council of Europe may be crucial in making Russian legal system function and apply to every part of the country”, Oleg Orlov told the Group. The delegation called on the Council of Europe to control the application of the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights, to pursue information campaigns and the monitoring procedure and to promote the ratification of Protocol 14 to the European Convention on Human Rights by the Russian Federation.

Matyas Eörsi, leader of ALDE, congratulated the speakers on their courageous and valuable work. He thanked the delegation for having contributed to group’s understanding of the current situation on concrete and often shocking examples. “We have heard the tragedies of these people; born in Europe, we often ignore these terrible situations and hold theoretic discussions on human rights”, he said.

Among the highlights of the visit were meetings with the Human Rights Commissioner, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the President of the Assembly; Legal Affairs Committee of the PACE organized a hearing with the participation of three delegates. Human rights activists, Matyas Eörsi and Dick Marty also gave a joint press-conference on the situation in the North Caucasus.



Mátyás Eörsi (Hungary)

The report of the Ad hoc Committee on the Observation of the Presidential Elections in Georgia on 21 May 2008

Rapporteur of the Ad hoc Committee of the Bureau: (Hungary, ALDE)

Presented on Monday 23 June 2008



Nursuna Memecan (Turkey)

The state of democracy in Europe: Specific challenges facing European democracies: the case of diversity and migration

Rapporteur of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (for opinion) (Doc. 11653)

Presented on Wednesday 25 June 2008

[Voting Results](#)

[Report](#)

[Resolution](#)



Serhiy Holovaty (Ukraine)

The state of democracy in Europe: The functioning of democratic institutions in Europe and progress of the Assembly's monitoring procedure (Doc. 11628 and Addendum)

Rapporteur of the Monitoring Committee

Presented on Wednesday 25 June 2008

[Voting Results](#)

[Report](#)

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Mike Hancock (United Kingdom)

Activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) (Doc. 11608): Rapporteur of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population; Presented on Thursday 26 June 2008

[Voting Results – Report - Resolution](#)

Preventing the first form of violence against children: abandonment at birth (Doc. 11538): Rapporteur of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee; Presented on Friday 27 June 2008

[Voting Results - Report - Resolution](#)

Monday 23 June 2008

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



Paul WILLE (Belgium) said that he had observed a large number of commissions in operation and had started to see the questions that such operations raised. After an initially good start, the credibility of such commissions had been jeopardised. In a number of cases there had been complacency, and negative prejudice. The question needed to be asked, what was a democratic election? He did not like that parlance because it was media parlance. When it was said that a country was moving towards democracy, that was inadequate; it was necessary to determine whether the direction and speed of travel towards democracy was adequate and sufficient. The process in this regard must be revisited to enhance credibility. The reports were, however, excellent and were endorsed by his group. [Read more](#)

The fight against harm to the environment in the Black Sea (Doc. 11632)



Bernard MARQUET (Monaco). There had been concerns in 2005 and 2006 about Ukraine developing energy infrastructure in the Black Sea, and this raised the question of the environmental harm that could result. [...] There had been a recommendation made in Bern that an environmental impact assessment should be undertaken. [...] Recommendations were made, but unfortunately, nothing was accomplished. This was an example of why better co-operation was needed in the Black Sea region. [Read more](#); [voting results](#)

Tuesday 24 June 2008

Functioning of democratic institutions in Azerbaijan (Doc. 11627)



Mike HANCOCK (United Kingdom). – We should be careful about being too heavy on Azerbaijan. We let Azeris into this Organisation. We helped them. There is obviously a need for things to change and the country is working on that. [...] I was at the meeting of the Monitoring Committee just now and felt that we did not even give credit for the early stages of changes in the law. We wanted absolute endorsement Azerbaijan had started the process but we failed to give it even that recognition over the issue of money laundering. [...] We should not have double standards. We should treat every country the same and give Azerbaijan the same doubt that we have given so many other countries over the past few years. [Read more](#); [voting results](#)

Empowering women in a modern, multicultural society (Doc. 11612)



Nursuna MEMECAN (Turkey). – It is the powerful woman who challenges the status quo, who takes risks and supports the taking of risks. The giving and caring nature of empowered women benefits the whole society and moves it forward. [...] It should be on the agenda of every society to empower women in every part of that society. Concrete measures should be taken to empower women of different social and economic standing. First and foremost should be access to education. [Read more](#); [voting results](#)



Maximilian REIMANN (Switzerland) noted that, since the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development had been established in 1991, it had done great work, particularly under its current chairmanship. Although he acknowledged that good work had been done, he felt that serious consideration should be given to what the Bank did next. The EBRD was considering shifting its focus to Central Asia. But there were several questions to be answered: first, should it do this at all; secondly, should it do this alone; and thirdly, should it do it with partners? [Read more; voting results](#)

Wednesday 25 June 2008

The state of democracy in Europe: Specific challenges facing European democracies: the case of diversity and migration (Doc. 11623); Measures to improve the democratic participation of migrants (Doc. 11625)



Nino NAKASHIDZÉ (Georgia). – It is very important first to ensure that migrants have access to human rights – the rights of every human being. Often, migrants are treated as second-class citizens – I do not know why – and they do not enjoy all the privileges and rights that democratic society can offer to its citizens. It is also very important that everybody in a society has the same access to democratic values and privileges. I therefore think that it is very important – I underline this on behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe – that we should not use double standards and treat citizens and representatives of various countries differently. We should give them equal access to all human rights and values. If they had that, I am sure that their participation in democratic processes would increase. [Read more; voting results](#)

The state of democracy in Europe: The functioning of democratic institutions in Europe and progress of the Assembly's monitoring procedure (Doc. 11628 and Addendum)

Mike Hancock (United Kingdom) condemned corruption and emphasized political motivation as essential means for tackling corruption. President Matyas Eörsi on behalf of the ALDE disapproved certain viewpoints expressed in the speech as not reflecting the opinion of the group. [Voting results](#)

Debate under urgent procedure: The implementation by Armenia of Assembly Resolution 1609 (2008) (Doc. 11656)



Avet ADONTS (Armenia). – There is no doubt about the fact that much still needs to be done. In considering the criteria for further assessment, one needs to address two specific issues: the volume of the anticipated reforms and the further action that needs to be taken, and the time required for substantive progress against which further objective assessment can be made. That is the context in which we agree with the view of the rapporteurs that the time given to the Armenian authorities was short and therefore that the Assembly will review at its January 2009 part-session the extent of Armenia's compliance with the requirements of Resolution 1609. [Read more; voting results](#)

General policy debate on the situation in China (Doc. 11654)



Lord RUSSELL-JOHNSTON (United Kingdom). – This Assembly is an interfering body; we can be diplomatic, but we are not diplomats. Were it not for the commitment, courage and persistence of our predecessors, we would not now have a European Court of Human Rights. I sense a certain drift in the Assembly away from being forthright in criticising fellow members. [...] We must always speak out within our organisation for human rights, and paragraph 10 of the rapporteur's explanatory memorandum says that, wherever they are transgressed worldwide, it is our duty to act. That is our responsibility and *raison d'être*. [Read more;](#)

[voting results](#)

Debate under urgent procedure: The functioning of democratic institutions in Turkey: recent developments (Doc. 11660)



Matyas EÖRSI (Hungary). – This is a delicate debate but [...] there is a case for speaking up here, partly to promote European practices, but also to draw the court's attention to the possible political consequences of its acts. [...] This is also a discussion about the secular state. [...] The Assembly is calling for and strongly supporting secular states, but it is important that we demand only that the state is secular and not necessarily its political parties. [...] Checks and balances are also a very important issue [...] as we have very little evidence about the influence of the Army on the existing constitutional parties in Turkey. [...] Based on my 18 years in politics in a quasi-emerging democracy, I came to the

conclusion that democracy has nothing to do with good or bad decisions – there can be both in a democracy – but is about no one having absolute power and about always allowing room for change. [Read more;](#) [voting results](#)

Activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) (Doc. 11608)

Maximilian REIMANN (Switzerland) said he had taken a critical look at, and applauded, the thoroughly topical report, which he endorsed unreservedly. However, he had some comments, which might be deemed critical. The ICRC had abided by neutrality and independence and kept politics at arm's length. But the report commented that the arms' length principle was not complied with. [Read more;](#) [voting results](#)

Friday 27 June 2008

Preventing the first form of violence against children: abandonment at birth (Doc. 11538) [Voting results](#)

Gökçeada (Imbros) and Bozcaada (Tenedos): preserving the bicultural character of the two Turkish islands as a model for co-operation between Turkey and Greece in the interest of the people concerned

Mike HANCOCK (United Kingdom). The point that I want to make on behalf of the ALDE group is that I consider there to be a lack of balance in the report. There are islands that the Greeks occupy where the situation is parallel. There should have been an attempt to draw out that fact in the report and to balance the argument. [...] When we want to bring people together in Europe, it is sad that we continue to find excuses, such as those relating to names and the protection of ancient culture, that are put up as obstacles to such friendship and togetherness. [Read more;](#) [voting results](#) [Back](#)