



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

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### Activities of the ALDE Group in June:

- Ahead of the June session, the state of **rule of law** in Russia was discussed at a joint liberal conference in Moscow. On 22 June the ALDE issued a [statement](#) condemning yet another signal of restriction of **political pluralism and freedom of association** in Russia. According to our Russian partners, over the past four years nine political parties were denied registration in the Russian Federation, including the most recent refusal by the Ministry of Justice to register the People's Freedom Party.
- A year after the PACE report on the Legal remedies for human rights violations in the North-Caucasus region, the ALDE discussed the **lack of progress in the human rights situation in Chechnya**. The Group exchanged views with Mrs Olga Sadovskaya and Mr Igor Kalyapin, Committee Against Torture, 2011 Human Rights Prize of the PACE
- ALDE **exchanged views with the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers** of the Council of Europe
- The Group was glad to welcome a former member and currently the **German Federal Minister of Justice, Mrs Sabine Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger**, who delivered an excellent speech at the plenary.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank those who took active part in plenary debates on behalf of the ALDE, presented reports, and attended group and committee meetings. The Group is particularly thankful to Mrs Olga Sadovskaya and Mr Igor Kalyapin for their valuable contribution to this newsletter. Finally, the ALDE is grateful to Mane Manukyan (Executive Director, IFLRY) and Anna Bazilo (Ukraine) for their interest and active participation.

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## ALDE exchanged views with the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe



*Mr Mykola Tochytskyi, Permanent Representative of Ukraine; Mr Kostyantyn Gryshchenko; Mrs Anne Brasseur*

Priorities of the Ukrainian chairmanship in the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe were discussed on Monday 20 June 2011. The Group exchanged views with the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers, Minister for foreign affairs of Ukraine, Mr Kostyantyn Gryshchenko. In his address, the Minister underlined that the “activities of the political groups essentially contribute to the development of the Assembly and the Council of Europe as a whole”. Mrs Anne Brasseur, President of the ALDE, thanked the Minister for the initiative to hold regular exchanges with the political groups and wished a successful chairmanship to Ukraine. “There are numerous challenges that we will have to face together,” said Anne Brasseur.

*Ukrainian chairmanship in the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe 11 May – November 2011*

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## ALDE keeps following the human rights situation in the North Caucasus



*Mr Igor Kalyapin, Mrs Olga Sadovskaya, Mrs Anne Brasseur*

*This year the biennial Human rights prize of the Parliamentary Assembly was attributed to the Interregional Committee Against Torture (Russian Federation) in recognition of the outstanding contribution to the defence of human rights in Europe.*

*Ahead of the award ceremony, the ALDE exchanged views with the Chairman of the Committee, Mr Igor Kalyapin, and his Deputy, Mrs Olga Sadovskaya. The Group discussed the follow up given to the report on Legal remedies for human rights violations in the North-Caucasus region and the lack of progress in the human rights situation in Chechnya. “We have no right to get used to human rights violations. And perhaps, the most efficient task that we, parliamentarians, could engage in, is to speak up about human rights and people who defend them,” said Mr Dick Marty. “This prize is a sign of recognition of your important work and I hope an encouragement to continue. You will not give up, and we won’t either”, concluded Mrs Anne Brasseur.*

Perhaps the most prominent piece of work of the Committee Against Torture is accomplished by the Joint Mobile Group of human rights defenders acting in Chechnya.

The Joint Mobile Group of Russian human rights NGOs (JMG) permanently present on the territory of Chechnya was created in November 2009 on the initiative of the Committee Against Torture for the purpose of conducting independent investigations into tortures and enforced disappearances allegedly committed by law enforcement servicemen.

From the moment the JMG was created, representatives of the following Russian human rights NGOs participated in its activities alongside the Committee Against Torture: INGO "Mothers in support of detainees, indictees and convicts", RNGO "Man and Law", Public Verdict Foundation, Moscow Helsinki Group, Komi Memorial Human Rights Commission, Russian-Chechen Friendship Society and TsentRus Information and Analysis Human Rights Agency.

Although since almost 11 years the JMG deals with the most high-profile and dangerous cases in Chechnya and potentially puts the lives of the human rights defenders at serious risk, it is only several days ago that our lawyers started to receive open threats.

On June 24 in Chechnya, right after the picket devoted to the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture which was suppressed by the police, the head of the Chechen representation of the Committee Against Torture Supyan Baskhanov and its public investigation inspector Magomed Alamov were urgently summoned to the Grozny Department of the Interior.

Our colleagues were interrogated and openly threatened by high-standing police officers. It was made clear that any criticism against the police and security forces would entail dire consequences. "If you continue smearing the Chechen police, we will not let you work," they said. This incident cannot but raise concerns about the security of the human rights defenders and their families in Chechnya.

At the same time, the leader of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov officially proclaims freedom of expression and states that there is no impediment to human rights defence in the Republic. It is quite hard to believe that Chechen law enforcers would ignore the official position of the Chechen president whose instructions have always been strictly followed.

Last week numerous wall inscriptions were made on the apartment building where Mrs Olga Sadovskaya lives with her family and a one-year-old child. "Sadovskaya defends terrorists!"; "Sadovskaya, we will ... you!" read some of the inscriptions.

Exerting psychological pressure on the Committee and human rights defenders are obviously the goal of the perpetrators. The Committee Against Torture maintains that these threats are linked to the organisation's activities aiming at human rights defence, fight against police abuses and its firm stand in securing the respect of human rights inscribed into the Russian Constitution.



Mr Edward McMillan-Scott, MEP, ALDE; Mrs Anne Brasseur

Rule of law, political pluralism, freedom of association and respect of human rights are *sine qua non* conditions for genuine democracy. Yet another refusal to register a political party in Russia last week, is a worrying signal, all the more when it intervenes on the eve of the parliamentary and presidential elections. During her visit to Moscow on 15-16 June 2011, Mrs Anne Brasseur, President of ALDE, discussed the pre-electoral situation with the leaders of PARNAS and Yabloko and addressed the ELDR - People's freedom party conference "Russia's European Way: Rule of law and modernisation." The conference brought together the Chairpersons of the ALDE-EP and ALDE-PACE, liberal members of the European Parliament and representatives of the Russian liberal community.

*Extract from Mrs Brasseur's address to the Conference:*

As a parliamentarian, I strongly believe that the Rule of law is one of the indispensable conditions for democracy. As a liberal, I consider the development of the modern vision of the rule of law to be one of the greatest liberal achievements in history. And as a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, I am proud that the principle of the Rule of law has become one of the three fundamental principles of the Council of Europe, alongside with human rights and genuine democracy.

For all these reasons, I welcome the initiative of the organisers to hold this timely debate on the rule of law in the future development of Russia.

The Russian Federation is member of the Council of Europe since 1996 (28 February 1996), which makes it 15 years of membership. By joining this European club Russia has committed itself to respect the values and the standards of the Council of Europe. At least that is how the international law sees it.

Membership in the Council of Europe has, I am sure, been useful for Russia and some progress has been achieved. But at the same time, the Russian Federation today is one of the most criticised Council of Europe member states. On numerous occasions, the Council of Europe stated that the Russian Federation fell short of its commitments.

You know well these major concerns:

- Freedom of expression, freedom of media, freedom of assembly and political pluralism are not duly ensured
- A number of important Council of Europe instruments are not ratified: in particular, Protocol No. 6 to the European Convention on Human Rights (abolition of death penalty).
- Several laws including the law on federal security services, the law on police, or the law on fighting extremist activities, still do not comply with European principles and standards.
- There is an urgent need for the reform of the judiciary in order to effectively guarantee its independence
- The implementation of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights should bring about tangible improvements: not only should the victims get compensations, but necessary measures should be taken in order to stop and prevent violations from happening in future.



**Ms Nursuna Memecan (Turkey)**

**Request for Partner for Democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly submitted by the Parliament of Morocco** - Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (for opinion) (Doc.12647) – 21 June 2011

*"We believe that closer co-operation between the Council of Europe and Morocco will add fresh impetus to the process of democratic reform already in progress in the country, strengthening the means for the Moroccan Parliament to play a major role in this process"*



**Ms Anne Brasseur (Luxembourg)**

**The situation in Tunisia (Doc. 12624)** - Political Affairs Committee – 21 June 2011

*"I think there are five major challenges to be addressed: internal security; deteriorating economy; migration; stabilisation of the situation and development of democratic institutions; and finally, the time to be given in order to establish new structures."*



**Ms Hermine Naghdalyan (Armenia)**

**More women in economic and social decision-making bodies** - Committee on Economic Affairs and Development (for opinion) (Doc. 12637) - 23 June 2011

*"Women in decision-making positions should be the rule rather than the exception."*



**Mr Dick Marty (Switzerland)**

**The progress of the Assembly's monitoring procedure (June 2010 – May 2011) (Doc. 12634 + Addendum)** - Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee) – 24 June 2011



Mr XUCLÀ i COSTA (*Spain*) thanked the President and wished the Minister every success. He noted that Ukraine wished to strengthen the rule of law and human rights and asked whether all member states would have to ratify statutes relating to the international courts and constitutional rights.



Mr GRYSHCHENKO – If I understood the question correctly, our accession to the International Criminal Court is an issue that is part of, among other things, our negotiations with the EU over our association agreement. The handicap that we face is the decision of our Constitutional Court, which precludes us from accession to the statutes of the Criminal Court in The Hague. However, when we negotiate the complex issues related to the association agreement with the EU, including the deep and comprehensive free trade area, we will introduce a motion either to change the constitution or to have another decision from the Constitutional Court. For that, we would presumably need a constitutional majority in the parliament. At a certain moment, we will then face this issue. We shall need to better explain the issues related to this set of challenges but at a certain moment we shall need to consider the issue as a nation. To do that we would need wide support in the country.

#### Address by Mr Viktor Yanukovich, President of Ukraine



Mr BADRÉ (*France*) welcomed the constitutional change but had concerns over how this would be implemented.



Mr YANUKOVYCH said that this was a very interesting issue as this would be the first time that Ukraine had attempted constitutional change. The constitution of Ukraine was 15 years old and during this time there had been a number of examples of attempts at constitutional reform which had not been systematic or successful.

In 2004, the re-election of the president had led to turbulence which was still being felt today. In 2010, a decision had been taken to change the constitution and the reforms of 2006 were cancelled. The country was still living with the results of those changes, which had made Ukraine realise that any future changes would need to be implemented in a more democratic way. Changes would have to be made through a constitutional majority. He hoped that this democratic approach would give the Ukrainian Government an opportunity to work with non-governmental organisations and political parties to unite both Ukrainian society and the members of its parliament. These constitutional changes would have to go through a public hearing. Such changes should not be adopted in a haphazard way – that was not an approach that he wished to see – rather, they should be done by a constitutional assembly with representative of international and local bodies. [Back](#)

**Address by Mr Serzh Sargsyan, President of Armenia**



Mr BUGNON (Switzerland) said he wished to ask a question about the security of the people

of Armenia and of the whole eastern European region. Fukushima had shown the risks associated with nuclear power plants, especially elderly power plants based in areas prone to earthquakes. Could the president guarantee the safety of his country's own power plants?



Mr SARGSYAN said that it was not just the opinion of his government that mattered. It was with joy that he could announce that Armenia had been visited by the International Atomic Energy Agency, whose team of inspectors had come to a favourable assessment and found the situation satisfactory. For quite a long time, efforts had been made to improve the security and operation of Armenia's

nuclear power stations and the government would continue to work with the IAEA as part of the international regime to ensure global nuclear safety.

The operation of nuclear power in Armenia would continue as a matter of policy. It did not pose a risk to the people of the region. Much greater risks were posed by the hyper-profits generated by other energy industries which supported the unsustainable purchase of arms and ammunition. Energy supplies to Armenia were currently being blockaded by two countries and this meant that Armenia had to rely on its own supply of nuclear energy.

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**Address by Mr Nickolay Mladenov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria**



Mrs MEMECAN (Turkey) – I welcome you to our Parliamentary Assembly and thank you for your inspiring address, Mr Mladenov. I also thank you for the statements that

came from the Bulgarian Parliament strongly condemning the attacks against the Muslims in Banya Bashi mosque last May. Will you please tell us what further concrete measures your government is taking to stop the escalation of racist verbal and physical violence against the Muslim community in Bulgaria?



Mr MLADENOV – Thank you, Mrs Memecan. Indeed, what happened in the mosque in Sofia was an extremely unfortunate and despicable incident. It was condemned not only by the political parties in parliament and by the government, but in a strong declaration by the National Assembly, adopted by consensus of all political forces. The government services have instituted an investigation to see who were the real perpetrators of these violent acts. I can assure you that it is the wish of the government and the political establishment in Bulgaria to see that such cases are never repeated – not just in our country, but anywhere else in the region.

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**Monday 20 June 2011**

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

(Doc. 12642 Part I + Addendum and Part II)



Mrs BRASSEUR (*Luxembourg*) : on 22 June in the Russian Federation, a decision would be made on the registration of a new party, the People's Freedom Party. I ask all our colleagues to appeal to the sense of responsibility of the registering committee, as it may be the first time since long that a new political party will be registered in Russia. Apart from abundant paperwork, the registration required as many as 45 000 signatures. These developments will be followed closely as the security of democratic pluralism in one of our member states, even one of the biggest member states, is at stake. [Read more](#)

**Joint debate: Budgets and priorities of the Council of Europe for the financial years 2012-2013 ( Doc. 12622) Expenditure of the Parliamentary Assembly for the financial years 2012-2013**

(Doc. 12623)



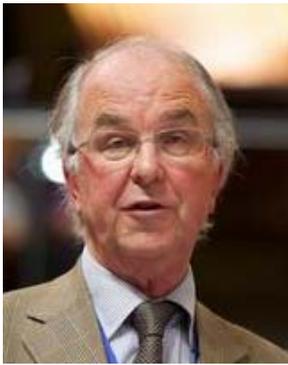
Mr HANCOCK (*United Kingdom*) – I congratulate the rapporteur on having the strength of character to get to grips with the situation. For the past five years or more, the Council of Europe has suffered a reduction in its budgets. Zero budgetary increase effectively means an inflation loss every year. Slowly but surely, we have had to retard the ambitions of the Council of Europe. However, it is very difficult to find out, line by line, how the money is spent. If we are to have a budget that runs for two years, we need, before we sign it off, to refer to a book, such as the one that I am holding up, that indicates how much will be spent on each of the priorities that we have set, because it could be that the Committee of Ministers has one set of priorities and we have another. [Read more, voting results](#)

**Tuesday 21 June 2011**

**Request for Partner for Democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly submitted by the Parliament of Morocco (Doc. 12625)**



Mr XUCLÀ i COSTA (*Spain*) thanked the President and said that in the past 20 years, democratic Europe had been looking towards the east and had become the Europe of 47. Recently the Europe of 47 had been looking towards the southern flank of the Mediterranean and the consolidation of democracy which had been taking place there. The recent revolutions in the region had captured the attention of the world, but it was also important to remember that there had been ongoing reforms which deserved attention and support. The achievement of democracy through reform was preferable to its achievement by the way of revolutions. [Read more, voting results](#)

**The situation in Tunisia (Doc. 12624)**

Mr BADRÉ (*France*) noted that when the Assembly had started the Partner for Democracy programme the expectation had been that both Morocco and Tunisia would be at the forefront of participating in partnership status, but only Morocco had achieved it. Partners for Democracy status was an excellent formula for the working of democracy but not for building democracy. The excellent report produced by Mrs Brasseur showed that Tunisia needed the support of all bodies, not just the Council of Europe, as it faced huge challenges involving constitutional reform and the economic and social sectors, as the Jasmine Revolution had hit tourism badly. [...] The Council of Europe had a role in assisting the electoral process but also should consider whether it could give some financial aid and support the unblocking of the frozen accounts of the Ben Ali family. [Read more, voting results](#)

**Joint debate: Asylum seekers and refugees: sharing responsibilities in Europe ( Doc. 12630) The interception and rescue at sea of asylum seekers, refugees and irregular migrants (Doc. 12628)**



Mrs ACKETOFT (*Sweden*) – Some 44 million people are refugees in the world today, four fifths of whom are being received by the poorest countries in the world, and some 750 000 people are stuck in the countries that neighbour Libya. Less than 5% have made it to Europe so when we talk of a humanitarian crisis, we do not mean a crisis in Europe but one in Africa, Syria, Iran and Pakistan. Nevertheless, for each and every one of those who have to leave their homes – whether that is because of war, persecution, environmental change or a general feeling of despair – it is a crisis. [Read more, voting results](#)

**Wednesday 22 June 2011**

**Living together in 21st-century Europe: follow-up to the report of the Group of Eminent Persons of the Council of Europe (Doc. 12631)**



Mrs BRASSEUR (*Luxembourg*) The contradiction of talking about the failure of multiculturalism, while Europe was in its nature and history multicultural, should be explored. Despite globalisation, Europe was turning inwards. The Secretary General should be congratulated on asking the Group of Eminent Persons to compile the report and the rapporteurs should be thanked. The report was just the first stage: they were just at the beginning and far from reaching conclusions. She admitted that she was not satisfied with the report and noted that all groups had welcomed it with a qualifying “but ...”. ALDE would only vote for the report on the premise that everyone had to continue to work together to find ways to live together to ensure a better quality of life. [Read more, voting results](#)

**Reform of the Parliamentary Assembly (Doc. 12627)**

Mr MARQUET (*Monaco*) There was an absolute need for the Assembly to investigate what was the most effective way it could operate. Mr Marquet believed that economic matters did govern the world and the recent nuclear disaster at Fukushima had shown that matters relating to energy were vital as well. There could be some discussions relating to the rapprochement of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, the Social Health and Family Affairs Committee and the Committee on the Environment , Agriculture and Local Regional Affairs. [Read more, voting results](#)

Thursday 23 June 2011

**The state of human rights in Europe : National parliaments: guarantors of human rights in Europe (Doc. 12636) The role of parliaments in the consolidation and development of social rights in Europe (Doc. 12632)**



Mrs SCHUSTER (*Germany*) It was clear that members had a certain amount of homework to do and that there were many areas which they would have to act on when they returned to their national parliaments. It was important to ensure that what was being decided was implemented and that the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights were enshrined in national legislation. [...] On the subject of parliamentary oversight, parliamentarians could intervene directly in the legislative process in their own national parliaments and they should use their powers *ex ante* rather than just *ex post*. Parliamentarians needed to make sure that governments were accountable and governments should be required to produce reports demonstrating how they had implemented principles in

practice. It was important that the necessary structures were in place in order to keep tabs on the government. [Read more, voting results](#)

**Current affairs debate: The political and humanitarian consequences of the situation in Syria and Libya**



Mrs MEMECAN (*Turkey*) – All people around the world strive for a better life, freedom and dignity. The Arab Spring was inevitable; the world was just not sure about its timing. [...] We condemn those who continue to use force to silence their citizens who call for change. More than 1 100 innocent lives in Syria and an estimated 1 400 lives in Libya have been lost in the quest for freedom. By fighting against their own people, both regimes have lost their legitimacy. As citizens of democratic and free regimes, we must assume collective responsibility to end the ongoing violence in Syria and Libya. [...] At this time, our priority should be to focus on the men, women and children who are fleeing from the violence in their home countries. We should be prepared to welcome them and provide them with temporary housing and care until it is safe for

them to return. [Read more](#)

**More women in economic and social decision-making bodies (Doc. 12540)**



Mr BUGNON (*Switzerland*) Much progress had been seen in the field but, regrettably, the female sex was still woefully under-represented. Therefore, the ALDE group welcomed the report but wanted to make three points as it felt that some proposals were not as good as others. In particular, there were concerns related to issues around quotas. [...] Mr Bugnon noted that some people wished to apply positive discrimination; however, it was still discrimination. He felt that women did not deserve any discrimination. Women should be recognized for their own ability to manage. The ALDE group was proposing a policy of “equivalent competence” which would involve women being offered positions if they, and any male candidates, were considered to be equally good. [Read more, voting results](#)

## Expansion of democracy by lowering the voting age to 16 (Doc. 12546)



Mrs GUTU (*Moldova*) Young people should be allowed to participate at all levels of elections: local, national and European. However she would be honest and admit that it was not a view shared by all ALDE representatives who came from many different countries and democratic histories and cultural traditions. Nevertheless, she believed they were approaching a consensus. [Read more, voting results](#)

## Friday 24 June 2011

### **The progress of the Assembly's monitoring procedure (June 2010 – May 2011)** (Doc. 12634 + Addendum)



Mrs SCHUSTER (*Germany*) Free and fair elections were the cornerstone of democracy and it was worrying that there were shortcomings in many countries, where, for example, there were restrictions on the registration of parties, freedom of speech and freedom of association. [...] The recent decision not to register the Parnas Party was disappointing. When Russia had joined the Council of Europe in 1996, it had committed itself to upholding the values enshrined in the charter. Therefore recent decision not to register a party had cast a shadow over the forthcoming elections as it made it more difficult for smaller parties to get seats in the parliament. The Monitoring Committee would need to get to grips with this situation. [...] In Azerbaijan the recommendations made by the Venice Commission had still not been implemented. In the

elections last November, the conditions necessary for free and fair elections had not been in place, resulting in only one seat being won by the opposition. [Read more, voting results](#)

### **Joint debate: Towards a European framework convention on youth rights (Doc. 12629)** **Reversing the sharp decline in youth employment (Doc. 12626)**



Ms GUTU (*Moldova*) hoped that the convention would be ratified by all member states of the Council of Europe. There were a number of documents cited in the report which could form the basis of the resolution. [...] Young people had been at the forefront of a number of major recent events, notably the Arab Spring which had seen young people on the streets demanding the right to a decent life, the right to take democratic decisions and the right to a job. [...] There were three major points in this debate – education, jobs and a decent life. [Read more, voting results](#)

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