



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

N°2, 2012

*PACE Session
23-27 April 2012*

IN THIS ISSUE:

Situation in the Russian
Federation

Focus on Belarus

ALDE Rapporteurs

ALDE Questions

ALDE Speakers

ALDE
members

Activities of the ALDE-PACE during the April part-session:

- On 23 April 2012, the ALDE held an exchange of views on the **situation in the Russian Federation**. The Group invited the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to share his views on the political reforms and the prospects of the country's fulfillment of commitments stemming out from its membership in the Council of Europe. The ALDE also continued its long-standing dialogue with liberal opposition of Russia, discussing the situation with Mr Ilya Yashin, one of the leaders of the liberal movement of "Solidarnost", representing the young generation of politicians in Russia.
- Following the persistent bans on Belarusian political opponents and civil society activists to leave their country, the Bureau of the ALDE issued a **statement** condemning this shameful practice and calling on the Belarusian authorities to stop it. At its meeting on 25 April 2012, the ALDE exchanged views with representatives of Belarusian civil society.
- During the free debate, the ALDE drew the attention of the Parliamentary Assembly to the risk of growing Europhobia on the European continent, a dangerous phenomenon that needed an urgent and coordinated counteraction by the Liberals and all those committed to European values. The safeguard of the authority of the European Court of Human Rights is one of the main areas of action.

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 meetings. The Group is thankful to the team of young volunteers who did their best to fully experience the work of the ALDE and the Parliamentary Assembly: Augustin Grenné (IFLRY) and Alexandru Ghiurca (ALDE's trainee from Romania).

ALDE endeavours to be the engine of the Assembly defending core European values
Visit our website: www.alde-pace.org

Situation in Russia: prospects for reforms and growing civil participation



Mr Jagland, Mrs Brasseur, and Mr Yashin

On 23 April 2012, the ALDE-PACE held a two-hour exchange of views on the last Russian presidential elections and the general situation in the country. The Group discussed the position of the Council of Europe vis-à-vis the latest developments in Russia with **Mr Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe**, and **Mr Ilya Yashin, one of the leaders of the liberal movement of “Solidarnost”** in the Russian Federation.

Respect for human rights, democracy and rule of law standards in the Russian Federation is of vital importance to the Council of Europe. Therefore, it is essential for the organisation to observe the policies that the newly elected president will adopt, and to follow the introduction and implementation of desperately needed political and social reforms. Much-welcomed measures aimed at liberalisation of political system were proclaimed by the authorities as a response to the large-scale protest rallies that brought together the politically active Russian middle class. The future of Russian democracy depends on the potential of this middle class in safeguarding the effective implementation of these progressive reforms.

Mr Yashin stressed that in spite of the prospect of political improvements, Russia was still facing numerous shortcomings as to the Council of Europe standards. The protest rallies showed that the political system was rigid and that it did not reflect the citizens' expectations. The new type of opposition emerged – on the basis of a new middle class, reclaiming more participation and a more active political role through the Internet media and peaceful protests.

Inequality in the organisation of the recent parliamentary and presidential campaigns, as well as the decision to appoint Mr Putin as a presidential candidate, were the main factors that kick-started the protests and dramatically reduced citizens' confidence in the regime. In their struggle for recognition of their demands, the leaders of the new Russian civil movement faced various forms of repression by the authorities, such as arrests and prosecution for organisation of and participation in peaceful rallies or informal blacklists that include the civil activists and political figures not allowed appearing on the official television channels.

Besides the demands of the civil society for a more active role, the Russian Federation has to tackle other serious issues, such as the military service reforms or the peaceful resolution of the Georgian-Russian conflict.

Mrs Anne Brasseur, President of the ALDE-PACE, underlined that although much welcome, the political reforms in the Russian Federation obviously came too late, and only under the explicit pressure from the streets. Beyond the liberalisation of certain aspects of political parties' registration and organisation of elections, the reforms had to substantially improve the ways in which the Russian political system could become more transparent and open, giving enough space for a true representation of the interests of the people, and a true participation of the citizen in the political process.

The ALDE Group also hopes that the Rapporteurs of the Monitoring Committee on the Russian Federation will be able to present their findings without further delay.

Focus on Belarus



Mr Hulak, Mr Dounaev, Mr Vardomatsky, Mr Marozau, and Mrs Brasseur

Mr Vladimir Dounaev, member of the Independent Bologna Committee, **Mr Aleh Hulak**, chairman of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, **Mr Pavel Marozau**, leader of the “Third way” liberal movement, and **Dr Andrei Vardomatski**, director of the independent sociological research centre “Novak” addressed the ALDE-PACE on Wednesday, 25 April 2012. The representatives of Belarusian civil society gave an overview of the human rights concerns and political situation in the country.

Regardless of the fact that two political prisoners have recently been released, the guests of the ALDE noticed that the human rights situation remained critical. A dozen of civil activists and political opponents of the regime were still in prisons, and no structural reforms aiming at liberalisation and democratisation of the political system have been envisaged. The harassment of civil society never ceased, moreover, new forms of pressure were applied, such as the bans to leave the country imposed on Belarusian civil activists. On 23 April, the ALDE-PACE issued a statement on this unacceptable violation of political rights ([download the statement](#)).

Nevertheless, several policy areas, such as higher education, offered some space for gradual reforms – especially considering that Belarusian authorities were compelled to reshape the academic system of the country in order to be included into the European Higher Education Area under the Bologna process.

Mrs Anne Brasseur, President of the ALDE-PACE, assured the guests that Belarusian civil society would benefit from all the support that the Group could provide, and that Belarus would remain on the agenda of the Group for as long as human rights were under threat in the country. “Thank you for your commitment and hard work in a context where the authorities make all possible to force the people to stay aside and not to speak up,” concluded Mrs Brasseur



Ms Anne Brasseur (Luxembourg)

The need to combat match-fixing (Doc. 12891) - Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media – 25 April 2012

“Match fixing is an attack not only on the image of sporting organisations, but on sporting values and on law and order. If criminal groups are to be prevented from increasing their influence over sport, a concerted effort has to be made to combat illegal practices. A comprehensive strategy to combat match fixing will require prevention, detection, co-operation, and a convention.”



Ms Marieluise Beck (Germany)

The situation of IDPs and returnees in the North Caucasus region (Doc.12899) - Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights (for opinion) – 26 April 2012

“Refugees are rarely welcomed, even when they were displaced within their own countries. Such people need support from their governments, and NGOs and citizen initiatives also play a key role. Of particular concern to defenders of human rights are cases of crime and murder against displaced people and those who seek to defend such people.”



Mr Serhiy Holovaty (Ukraine)

Follow-up by the Committee of Ministers to the work of the Parliamentary Assembly (Doc. 12887) - Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs - 26 April 2012

“I would like to insist firmly on the point that the basis of efficient co-operation will always lie in the goodwill of people sitting on both organs – in the Assembly and in the Committee of Ministers – as well as in the current needs of current Council of Europe institutions”

Question to Mr Saad dine El Otmani, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Co-operation of Morocco



Mr XUCLÀ (Spain) appreciated the progress that Morocco had made on human rights, but understood that the United Nations planned to extend the mandate of its mission to Western Sahara.



Mr EL OTMANI said that a large number of humanitarian groups were present in Morocco writing reports on its progress. He saw no justification for an expansion of the United Nations mission mandate.

Question to the Rt. Hon. David Lidington MP, Minister for Europe, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, United Kingdom, Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe



Mr XUCLÀ (*Spain*) thanked Mr Lidington on behalf of the Assembly's Liberal Group.

Large-scale abuses of human rights were taking place in Syria, and the international community had a responsibility to protect the citizens of that country. To what extent did Mr Lidington believe the Council of Europe was meeting its duty in that respect?



international Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian-Arab republic of the UN Human Rights Council, chaired by Mr Paulo Sergio Pinheiro.

I reiterate today the strong support of the Committee of Ministers for Secretary General Jagland's statement of 15 February this year. It is no secret that there are differences of opinion among members of the Council of Europe and members of the Security Council about exactly what the right approach should be to Syria. It is the firm view of the United Kingdom Government that political progress and reconciliation need to involve a transfer of power. We do not, as a government, believe that it is plausible to see President Assad being able to be the instrument of national reconciliation. He is now part of the problem, not part of the solution. [Back](#)

Mr LIDINGTON – The Committee of Ministers discussed the dramatic situation in Syria on several occasions, most recently last week. On 24 February, we supported the statement that our Secretary General had made the previous week about the situation in Syria. On 14 March this year, Ministers' Deputies held an exchange of views with the members of the independent

Question to Mr Zlatko Lagumdžija, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina



Ms BECK (*Germany*) – I will ask my question in English. According to my information, only 7.3% of the budget will go to federal state level, with all the rest going to the two entities. That does not convince us that you are working at strengthening state level, which is needed to make Bosnia one entity.



Mr LAGUMDŽIJA – Thank you. On Bosnia and Herzegovina's viability and its unity, everyone in the country understands that it will be one state and one country entering further stages of Europe-Atlantic integration. Perhaps we have some internal disputes about organisation, but no serious politician in the country talks about dissolution. That is not an option.

However, we are discussing how to create a better functioning state, and that is why NATO and the EU, especially through the 33 chapters of hopeful negotiations with the EU, will help us transform ourselves internally into a better functioning state.

Although it was not your fault, I was confused about the figure of 7.3%. Some figures show that the current budget we are about to adopt proposes a 7% increase in indirect taxes compared with the previous year. You therefore confused me with the figure, because it is almost the same. We are increasing the budget in 2012 compared with 2011 and 2010. Indirect taxes are up by about 7%. Some studies show that if you look at consolidated public spending, about 8% to 9% goes to the state level.

About 2% goes to the Brčko district. About 10% goes to all the municipalities' consolidated budgets, which leaves us with close to 80% of public spending going to cantons and entities. However, according to Dayton the state has nothing to do with social welfare or health care reform in a financial sense – although it does in a legislative sense. It is important that spending at the state level does not decrease relative to other spending, especially because this year there are certain considerations that did not apply in previous years. For example, we have to pay for certain things as a result of our European obligations in relation to border crossings, some institutions, the census and local elections. That did not apply with previous budgets... [Read more](#)

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



Ms BRASSEUR (*Luxembourg*): The election in the Russian Federation had been marked by inequality. Access to the media in particular had disproportionately favoured one candidate with privileged access. [...] Reforms had been introduced to the Russian political system, which were necessary and positive, but it was worth asking why these had occurred only after the election. It had been claimed previously that Russia was not ready for reform, but this was not the case as the demonstrations and the wider engagement of civil society had shown the people prepared and willing to decide their own fate. [...] The changes would have to be monitored, as breaches of human and other rights were still occurring and disillusionment growing among the people of Russia.

[Read more](#)

Free debate



Mr KENNEDY (*United Kingdom*) – Thank you, Mr President. I want to reflect shared concern among my ALDE colleagues about the future of the Court and the sustained pressure that is beginning to mount, certainly in the United Kingdom but not exclusively, about the operation of the European Convention on Human Rights itself. [...] Our message as European Liberals is clear: for Britain as an original signatory and indeed drafter of the Convention, it would be perverse and bordering on the tragic if our country was perceived as becoming disengaged from that process. [...] If Europhobia were to spread to other countries not only across Union member states but across Council of Europe ones, it would be catastrophic. It is therefore important for all of us as European Liberals to stay true to

those principles in the rational and constructive way that we heard here in January and today, but that we would like to hear more of in Britain as well. [Read more](#)

Tuesday 24 April 2012

Lives lost in the Mediterranean Sea: Who is responsible? ([Doc. 12895](#))



Mr HANCOCK (*United Kingdom*) – Nobody can accept that this was unexpected. For 15 years, people have been trying to cross that part of the Mediterranean in very difficult circumstances and many people have lost their lives. The international community was well aware of the implications and what would happen if the situation in Libya was to heat up in the way that it did, so the international community could not make the excuse that it was ignorant of what might happen or what had been happening for some time. One thing is clear: in maritime law one obligation above all others falls on a ship's captain – to assist other sailors who are

in distress at sea. [Read more, voting results](#)

Equality between women and men: a condition for the success of the Arab Spring ([Doc. 12893](#))



Ms SCHUSTER (*Germany*): The report highlighted various areas where improvement was still needed. While the Arab Spring presented an opportunity for the promotion of women's rights there were also areas of concern. For example, in Libya and Egypt, it was becoming clear that women's rights were not featuring high on the agenda for political reform. [...] While religion, tradition and culture had a role in all societies, these could not be used as a pretext to limit the rights of women. Europe's governments should work to ensure that the outcome of the Arab Spring benefited women. [Read more, voting results](#)

The promotion of active citizenship in Europe ([Doc. 12898](#))



Ms GUȚU (*Republic of Moldova*) : Such citizen engagement in European countries was often envied by developing democracies. It had various aspects and could include all age groups. In recent times the economic crisis had helped to promote greater citizen engagement, which had led to the removal of governments in some countries via the ballot box. The growth in the level of emigration between European countries posed an interesting question as to how to promote active citizenship among those who had left their countries. One idea was to allow immigrants a proxy vote in their home countries. Another aspect to active citizenship was discursive democracy – in other words, the role of freedom of speech.

[Read more, voting results](#)

Wednesday 25 April 2012

Good governance and ethics in sport ([Doc. 12889](#) + [Addendum](#))

The need to combat match-fixing ([Doc. 12891](#))



Mr HANCOCK (*United Kingdom*) – While both reports are welcome, from my perspective, one ingredient is missing – the responsibility of sporting bodies to their supporters, who turn up every week, pay their money to watch but are abused by the system in which sport operates, particularly in professional football. [...] Fans are abused because of cheating and betting. Anne Brasseur was right to expose the amount of money available to people prepared to gamble on sport. Gambling on sport immediately undermines the very value of sport, which should be an equal contest. Once that money has been brought into the system, there is, unfortunately, little hope for the credibility of sport. [...] Gambling in sport is out of control and it is

about time it was brought under proper regulation and transparency. FIFA should be the place where we start. [Read more, voting results: 1, 2](#)

The protection of freedom of expression and information on the Internet and online media ([Doc. 12874](#) + [Addendum](#))



Ms MEMECAN (*Turkey*) – The Internet is a medium where freedom of expression is so easily and widely exercised. The revelation of information, as well as the access to information, are basic rights. The introduction of laws, rules and regulations to limit what one can do on the Internet is limiting freedom of expression, which is a violation of a basic human right. There is definitely a need for ongoing research and debate on the relationship between privacy, freedom and security, and for advances in technology to address these complex issues. The liberal way to tackle the issue is to adopt a value-based approach. We should encourage the creation of a system of online ethics that respects human rights, basic

freedoms and privacy concerns – just as we do in real life. We should persistently call for the support of such liberal values in the online world, rather than trying to devise complex legal tools for each development. [Read more, voting results](#)

Debate under urgent procedure: The situation in Syria ([Doc. 12906](#))



Ms LUNDGREN (*Sweden*) As parliamentarians in the Council of Europe, we should be human rights protectors. Our global responsibility is to protect people, but we have failed several times. In Syria, we have failed perhaps through fear or through excuses, good or bad, some connected to Libya. I hear that there are attempts in the debate to rewrite history, but people started peacefully, demonstrating for their freedom, and they were met with bullets and tanks in the streets or in their homes. That has been going on for more than 400 days. For 403 days, violence has been escalating; for 403 days, Assad has been given many chances. The response is always new promises, but they have all been broken. Assad has

continued shelling and killing his people. [Read more, voting results](#)

Group
Speakers

Debates

Results

The situation of IDPs and returnees in the North Caucasus region ([Doc. 12882](#))



Ms REPS (*Estonia*) – The problem, which is well highlighted in the report, is very often an insufficiency of political will. The rapporteur pointed out that even if there is sufficient will from the federal government – sometimes even the central government – it comes back to the local government, which actually deals with the people. At that level, the political will is often lacking. I now come to the legal point of view, which was well set out by Ms Beck. There is a continuing climate of impunity for perpetrators of serious human rights violations. Especially worrisome for the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe is the violation of human rights defenders who are often dealing with IDPs, refugees and internees. There is not only insufficient help but violence against human rights defenders that can end up in murder or the threat of murder. We therefore call on the authorities to fully investigate and prosecute all criminal acts directed against these serious human rights violations, including murder, enforced disappearances and torture. [Read more, voting results](#)

Current affairs debate: The future of the European Court of Human Rights and the Brighton Declaration



Ms REPS (*Estonia*) – Our group held extensive discussions, and we raised three key questions: the nature of subsidiarity, the preservation of the right to individual application and the credibility of the Court and the quality of its judges. [...] , we understand that the backlog of cases and the process of reform has occurred only because some countries do not fulfil the obligations they agreed when they joined the Convention and our Organisation. Let us address the real issues and find a mechanism to engage with countries that are not executing judgments and not fulfilling the obligations they have made. [Read more](#)

Follow-up by the Committee of Ministers to the work of the Parliamentary Assembly ([Doc. 12887](#))



Ms BRASSEUR (*Luxembourg*) said that this was not the first time that the Assembly had discussed the subjects covered in the excellent report. Much work had already been done on those subjects and much discussion had taken place. Moments of tension had occurred between the two bodies of the Council of Europe, particularly on the occasion of the election of the Secretary General. [...] Efforts needed to be made by both sides and dialogue was necessary in order to make progress. In this sense, the report was hugely important and was supported by the ALDE group. Mr Holovaty should be invited to a meeting of the Committee of Ministers to discuss his ideas. [Read more, voting results](#)

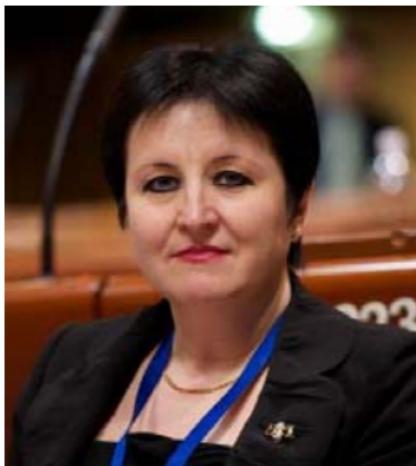
Friday 27 April 2012

Promoting an appropriate policy on tax havens ([Doc. 12894](#))



Mr HANCOCK (*United Kingdom*) – It would be an affront to civilised society and everyone who believes in fairness, whether we are on the right, the left or in the centre, not to support the right of a country to expect every one of its citizens to pay a legitimate amount of tax. That is a given. It is inexcusable that people look for reasons not to pay their taxes while enjoying the protection and the lifestyle of the country in which they live. It is completely unacceptable. [Read more, voting results](#)

Decent pensions for all ([Doc. 12896](#))



Ms GUȚU (*Republic of Moldova*): The recommendations contained in the report were welcome, but they did not represent a panacea. Rather, they suggested ways of improving the current situation. For example, some concerned the balance between the capitalisation of pension funds and their funding through pay as you go. Paragraph five made an important reference to the role of intergenerational solidarity. Elsewhere, the report highlighted the need for international co-operation and communication. [...] However it was not for the Assembly to impose its recommendations on national governments. Rather, members should return to their respective parliaments to

encourage reform. This was vital to ensure a good standard of living for all those in old age.

[Read more, voting results](#)

ALDE

Parliamentary Assembly

Council of Europe

<http://www.alde-pace.org/>