



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 ALDE-PACE during the June part-session:

- On Monday 25 June, ALDE exchanged views on the **state of liberal ideas and values in Europe** with Sir Graham Watson, MEP, President of ELDR. The growth of populist political movements boosted by the economic crisis is one of the main political challenges in Europe. In Eastern Europe liberal parties have yet to be created and sustained. One of the proposals that the participants of the discussion formulated was to keep a clear focus on liberal values in political action through establishing effective synergies between national, international and supranational parliamentary work.
- The ALDE Group continues to maintain the **human rights situation in the North Caucasus** on the political agenda. While the region remains among the most difficult spots for human rights defence, the Group discussed the most recent findings on the problem of impunity in the North Caucasus with Mr John Dalhuisen, Director for Europe and Central Asia at the Amnesty International. In addition, ALDE conducted a public round table debate on the state of women's rights in the North Caucasus and discussed the growing rate of so-called "honour" crimes.
- Finally, against the background of the EU decision to appoint a Special Representative for human rights, the ALDE initiated a current affairs debate on the **co-functioning of mechanisms of human rights protection in Europe**. Welcoming the steps undertaken by the EU towards a greater focus on human rights, the ALDE Group believes, however, that human rights in Europe will benefit more from efficiency and cooperation, than from duplication of efforts and competition between the Council of Europe and the EU institutions.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank those who took active part in plenary debates on behalf of ALDE, presented reports, and attended group meetings and side-events. We are particularly grateful to Ella Asoyan (Freedom House), Philip Hansen (ELDR) and Rita Patricio (Amnesty International) for their valuable cooperation. The Group is also thankful to the team of young volunteers who did their best to fully experience the work of the Parliamentary Assembly: Wiebke Muller (IFLRY) and Alexandru Ghiurca (Romania, trainee of ALDE). It was the last session for Alexandru, who has completed a three-month traineeship with the Group and is willing to pursue his commitment to liberal ideas. We wish him well.

ALDE endeavours to be the engine of the Assembly defending core European values

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Liberal ideas and values in today's Europe



On Monday 25 June, ALDE exchanged views on the state of liberal ideas and values in Europe with Sir Graham Watson, MEP, President of ELDR. The growth of populist political movements boosted by the economic crisis is one of the main political challenges in Europe. In Eastern Europe liberal parties have yet to be created and sustained. One of the proposals that the participants of the discussion formulated was to keep a clear focus on liberal values

in political action through establishing effective synergies between national, international and supranational parliamentary work.

Addressing the Group, Sir Watson praised the work that ALDE was doing in the Parliamentary Assembly: “From the support given to Russia’s most famous political prisoner, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, in defence of his human rights, to the perseverance by which you unmasked Europe’s secret CIA prisons, Liberal action here - particularly as the action of an assembly which does not sit full time - is of immeasurable value.” Sir Watson also invited the members of the Group to use the opportunities that the European Liberal Democrat network provides, including through the individual membership in the ELDR.

President of ALDE Mrs Anne Brasseur underlined that liberals had a lot of work to do: facing the challenge of populism from right and left but also working on consolidation of liberal parties. In France, Mrs Brasseur regretted, the centre parties were disunited and thus prevented from having a strong representation in Parliament. “Putting liberal ideals on the map is one of the tasks that liberal forces have in Europe today. And we need to do it for our citizens – we need to do it to remain on the democratic path and to safeguard the principles of political pluralism and freedom. Our European citizens really need these guarantees of democracy in times of crisis”, said Mrs Anne Brasseur.

Read more on www.eldr.eu

"Honour" crimes and impunity in the North Caucasus



The ALDE Group continues to maintain the human rights situation in the North Caucasus on the political agenda. While the region remains among the most difficult spots for human rights defence, the Group discussed the most recent findings on the problem of impunity in the North Caucasus with Mr John Dalhuisen, Director for Europe

and Central Asia at the Amnesty International. In addition, ALDE conducted a public round table debate on the state of women's rights in the North Caucasus and discussed the growing rate of so-called "honour" crimes.

Two years ago, in his report on Legal remedies for human rights violations in the North Caucasus, Dick Marty presented his shocking findings on the women's situation in Chechnya. Following this report, in its Resolution 1738 (2010) the Assembly expressed its "concern over the deterioration of the situation of women in the Chechen Republic. In contrast with other Caucasian republics, a rigid interpretation of religious norms is imposed, sometimes in a humiliating manner, which, moreover, seems to be at variance with the religious and cultural traditions in the region."

The roundtable discussion highlighted the issue of impunity and the growing trend of popular acceptance of violence against women in the North Caucasus. Ms Milashina, an investigative journalist from "Novaya Gazeta", underscored in her presentation that violence against women, and especially so-called "honour crimes", are endemic in the region, and not limited only to Chechnya. She cited a recent case of the so-called "honour killing" occurred in the neighbouring republic of Dagestan, which illustrated the reluctance of law enforcement agencies to conduct proper investigation into such crimes due to the traditionally low societal value of women in the North Caucasus.

Ms Inna Hayrapetyan, Program Coordinator of women's centre "SINTEM" in Chechnya, noted a growing rate of domestic violence against women, compounded by overwhelming reluctance by women to turn to the police for help. As primary reasons, she cited widespread conviction among women that 1) going to the police will exacerbate the situation for the woman in her family and would lead to more abuse; 2) police, mostly represented by men, would not investigate the case and blame the woman; 3) exposing publicly family troubles in the close-knit traditionalist community, would bring shame onto the woman's family and lead to her isolation even within the extended family.

Echoing the PACE report on Legal remedies for human rights violations in the North Caucasus region, Mrs Malika Abubakarova, a human rights lawyer in Chechnya, elaborated in her presentation on the problem of ineffective justice system together with misguided application of Islamic legal norms and patriarchal local traditions which put great value on women's honour and a burden to uphold the honour standards by women, while placing men's interest above women's rights.

Concluding the discussion, Mrs Anne Brasseur underlined: "To our greatest sadness, we continue to receive reports on women being stripped of their dignity, rights and lives all over Europe, with the same unacceptable motives of so-called 'honour' and tradition. The North Caucasus situation must remind us that this is our common European human rights problem and a challenge that we need to tackle all together."

On 11 May 2011 the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence was opened for signature and ratification. The Convention clearly stated that "culture, custom, religion, tradition or so-called "honour" shall not be considered as justification for any acts of violence". One year later, the Convention has been signed by 21 states and ratified by one.



Mr Roman Jakič (Slovenia)

The young generation sacrificed: social, economic and political implications of the financial crisis ([Doc. 12974](#)) - Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy (for opinion) – 26 June 2012

“Rising unemployment among the young is especially worrying because it can easily lead to long-term unemployment and make it harder for the next generation to find its way into the work force.”



Mr Raphaël Comte (Switzerland)

Multiple discrimination against Muslim women in Europe: for equal opportunities ([Doc. 12976](#)) - Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media (for opinion) – 26 June 2012

“The Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media underlines the importance of education to promote integration of Muslim women into society.”



Ms Nursuna Memecan (Turkey)

The honouring of obligations and commitments by Montenegro ([Doc. 12952](#)) - Monitoring Committee (co-rapporteur) – 27 June 2012

“I am confident that Montenegro will continue with the same pace further to remedy the shortcomings in the areas of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.”



Ms Mailis Reps (Estonia)

The situation of human rights defenders in Council of Europe member States ([Doc. 12957](#)) - Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights – 27 June 2012

“Quite a few of our member states felt it unfair that they had been included in the list, but I can guarantee that in all those cases the NGO community has identified deficiencies. Of course, they are not on the same scale of severity as those relating to the North Caucasus that we have heard about here, but there are deficiencies and it is our duty to address them.”



Ms Anne Brasseur (Luxembourg)

Political transition in Tunisia ([Doc. 12949](#)) – Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy – 28 June 2012

“I would also like to express our admiration for all that the Tunisian people have achieved over the past 17 months, but much remains to be accomplished, and The path is strewn with obstacles.”

**Question to Mr Sali Berisha,
Prime Minister of Albania**



Mr XUCLÀ (Spain) said that he had twice visited Albania and appreciated the democratic process that was going on there. The opposition had not played its full part for some months. He asked when this situation would be normalised and about representation in the Assembly.



Mr BERISHA – Thank you for your question. It is true that after the 2009 elections the opposition adopted a boycott – or half-boycott – because they were very disheartened about the results of those elections, even though international observers stated that the elections met most OSCE standards and that there was no evidence of the results being manipulated or irregular counting. It took some time, because the Albanian opposition is pro-European Union – it is not at all anti-European. The problem was that the leader of the opposition thought that blocking the government would increase the opposition's political capital. Local elections were held, in which the Council of Europe was deeply involved in helping – as a matter of fact, the Presidential Committee and the resolution drafted in this place were very helpful. The opposition is now in parliament. Last October, we reached an agreement, and it is almost entirely honoured by both sides. We are finalising electoral reform in a very consensual spirit. I am happy to inform you that this reform started in December, and until now the committee concerned has discussed only those amendments proposed by the opposition, because the opposition asked for this initiative and we agreed to it. Indeed, we will never tire of offering the opposition this consensual spirit.

**Question to Mr Edmond
Haxhinasto, Deputy Prime
Minister and Minister for Foreign
Affairs of Albania, Chairperson
of the Committee of Ministers**



Ms BRASSEUR (Luxembourg) – I want to ask a question about the European Court of Human Rights. You rightly spoke about it, but we have had Interlaken and Brighton, so what do you think we can do to improve the implementation of the decisions of the Court?



Mr HAXHINASTO – As you have noticed, Ms Brasseur, our chairmanship considers the implementation of the Brighton Declaration to be one of our important priorities. We believe that what is important is to involve all the bodies of this respectable Organisation to work jointly and take concrete steps towards implementing what it has already been agreed should be implemented. We will continue to do that in the future. Albania has already taken some concrete steps in this direction and we will continue to do so. I mentioned the inclusion of knowledge of this Organisation in national curriculums for students of case law.

Regarding the Committee of Ministers, in December 2010, it agreed on a new procedure to make more effective and more transparent the revision of the execution of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. That procedure has been implemented as from 2011. It is based on a twin-track approach with simplified supervision for cases whose execution does not present problems and enhanced provision for those cases that require particular attention owing to the nature of the issue concerned. [Back](#)

Question to Mr Zoran Milanović, Prime Minister of Croatia

Mr JAKIĆ (*Slovenia*) – Prime Minister, I congratulate you and your country on the achievements you have made in your path towards the European Union, particularly given the Commission's positive assessment for Croatia this year. According to the Commission's report, there are still some shortcomings in respect of the judiciary and fundamental rights – you have just answered these points – but also in respect of justice, freedom and security, which I am confident will soon be addressed. Can you please tell us what measures your government has undertaken to make good on these shortcomings?



Mr MILANOVIĆ – As you mentioned, I have already addressed the first part of your question, at the request of your colleague. Maybe something further could or should be added. It is a long process, at the bedrock of which lies trust and confidence. We are on that path; I am quite confident about that. We will also have one of the longest land borders among all EU states with a non-EU member state. The Croatian-Bosnian border is 1 000 km long, and it will cost money to monitor it. As I said, we are working hard. We have good faith and the best intentions. We have achieved a lot so far. We have been exposed to unprecedented scrutiny – deserved but unprecedented – and the number of areas that the EU and the Commission showed a particular interest in scrutinising far exceeds anything seen so far, so the same or an even higher standard will be applied to all new aspiring states. I hope that satisfies you.

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Monday 25 June 2012

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



Ms BRASSEUR (*Luxembourg*) congratulated the President on being re-elected to the National Assembly, which meant that he could continue to preside over the work of the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe had been a key issue in his election campaign and he had set a good example for other delegates to follow in stressing the importance of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Secondly, she thanked the Deputy Secretary General, whose last session this was. Thirdly, it was important to continue to strengthen the co-operation between the different parts of the Council of Europe and to use the available expertise.

[Read more](#)

Free debate



Ms LUNDGREN (*Sweden*) – I want to express our views on the importance of freedom. Freedom of assembly and freedom to protest are essential in our Council of Europe countries. That space for democratic protests and reactions should be safeguarded carefully in all our countries. [...] We have seen protests in Russia since December. We have also noticed how colleagues in the Duma in recent weeks voted in favour of a new law curbing freedom of assembly. They toughened punishment with fines six times higher for those who attend, at €7 236, and 11 times higher for those who organise, at €14 472 at the highest. Remember that the average salary is around €600 per month. [Read more](#)

Tuesday 26 June 2012

Joint debate: Austerity measures – a danger for democracy and social rights (Doc. 12948); The young generation sacrificed: social, economic and political implications of the financial crisis (Doc. 12951); The impact of the economic crisis on local and regional authorities in Europe (Doc. 12944)



Ms LUNDGREN (*Sweden*) It is clear that the ongoing economic crisis is deeply felt by many, many people all over the world. [...] Our institution, created out of the lessons learnt from the past, has an important responsibility in this situation: to safeguard human rights, the rule of law and democracy, not only for the citizens of today, but for our children and their children's children. And please, do not say that they do not have a future, because they do. [...] Having said that, I want to focus on the report on austerity measures, because it does not deal with our core issues, as we see it. [Read more, voting results 1, 2, 3](#)

Multiple discrimination against Muslim women in Europe: for equal opportunities (Doc. 12956)



Ms MEMECAN (*Turkey*) Rather than focusing on immigrant women as victims, we should support an understanding that is optimistic and encouraging and that targets the empowerment of Muslim women in the way the report does. [...] Our policies that address diversity and immigration need to focus much more on women and their needs, seeing them as resources for diverse societies. If we can manage to adopt this attitude, women can be primary agents of cohesion and solidarity in our societies. When women come together, even if they are from different backgrounds, they share stories, find commonalities and develop mutual understanding. [Read more, voting results](#)

Wednesday 27 June 2012

Joint debate – Democracy at risk: the role of citizens and of the State today: (i) The crisis of democracy and the role of the state in today's Europe (Doc. 12955); (ii) The portrayal of migrants and refugees during election campaigns (Doc. 12953)



Mr KOLMAN (*Croatia*) – We need to return to two basic questions. First, what is the fundamental purpose of the democratic state? Secondly, why did we start the process of a united Europe in the first place? We need to remember why free markets and the liberal economy existed in the first place. To prevent problems we need to reinvent and reapply the fundamental liberal idea, and bring it and Europe back to where it all began: the protection of individual liberty. Our political institutions and our means of influencing the economy have to serve this fundamental purpose: the protection of our freedom. That is especially important in eastern European countries and in new democracies, where institutions are fragile. If we allow deformed capitalism and the populist and extremist politics that feed on it to lead the way, the democratic state will have no future and neither will our freedom.

[Read more, voting results 1, 2.](#)

The honouring of obligations and commitments by Montenegro (Doc. 12952)

Mr HOLOVATY (*Ukraine*) – As a rapporteur of the Monitoring Committee since 2007, I have followed the developments in Montenegro and I welcome the efforts that have been taken by this Council of Europe member state. However, I cannot but emphasise two areas in which the ongoing reforms are, in my view, insufficient and unsatisfactory. Both concern the rule of law and human rights. [...] First, while welcoming the increasing role of the ombudsman in Montenegro, I must express my regret that a number of the recommendations of the Assembly and of the Venice Commission have not yet been implemented. [...] Secondly, there has been no progress at all on the revision of the constitution either in respect of the removal from the Montenegrin fundamental law of any legal possibility of disproportionate political influence over the appointment of judges and prosecutors, or in respect of neutralising the excessive accumulation of authority in the persons of the president of the supreme court and the supreme public prosecutor. [Read more, voting results](#)

The situation of human rights defenders in Council of Europe member States (Doc. 12957)

Ms ACKETOFT (*Sweden*) – Indisputably, a world in which people's rights and liberties are respected is a safer world for all of us to live in. Upholding respect for human rights is the responsibility of national governments, but many fail to do so. [...] That only goes to show that human rights can never be taken for granted, even in a democracy. [...] The list of ways in which a state can operate to silence human rights defenders' voices in our member states is a long one – death threats and torture, persecution through the use of the judicial system, silencing by restrictive laws, public defamation, disappearance and murder – but, for some reason, freedom of assembly and freedom of expression seem to be under particularly heavy attack by governments at the moment. Sometimes the pretext is that of saving our children from immorality – that is, homosexuality, bisexuality or transsexuality – by passing laws against freedom of speech, as Russia, Moldova and others have done. [Read more, voting results](#)

Thursday 28 June 2012

Debate under urgent procedure: Crisis of transition to democracy in Egypt (Doc. 12981)

Ms LUNDGREN (*Sweden*) – We have noted the first steps being taken by the president in saying that he wants to be inclusive and to make contact with all political groups and with the young people from Tahrir Square. I have also heard in the media that he is going to appoint one female vice-president – she is also a Copt, which is also a good sign. We can assure the proud Egyptian people that we will be there if they need our help. We have great hope for them and for the region, and we are ready to help if they want us to.

[Read more, voting results](#)



Mr HOLOVATY (*Ukraine*) – The creation of new institutions to promote human rights across Europe and beyond is not a bad thing per se if it leads to greater progress in advancing human rights protections. However, the focus of the European Union is wrong. [...] The priority of the EU should be on advancing the accession process to the Convention, and on ensuring that its institutions and laws fulfil Convention standards. All EU member states are signatories to the Convention, but they have ceded significant powers and authority to EU institutions. Those institutions are not externally judicially accountable at present. Common European standards of human rights will be enhanced by focusing energy and resources on making this possible rather than by creating new offices and institutions that divert

what limited resources are available. [Read more](#)

Political transition in Tunisia (Doc. 12949)



Ms MEMECAN (*Turkey*) Tunisia, the country that initiated the Arab Spring, has undertaken many reforms and its reform process is well advanced. It offers an inspiring model for smooth democratisation to countries in the region. The proper handling of the elections, of which I was an observer in October 2011, and the apparent determination of the Tunisian electors, marked the beginning of a successful transitional period. [...] On the downside, there is serious concern about the exclusion of women from activities involving the building of the new democratic society in whose initiation they played a vital part. At the April part-session, we had a debate on women in the Arab Spring, at which we heard from many women who were disappointed at being blocked out of the political and social spheres, which was hindering any chance of contribution. [Read more, voting results](#)

Roma migrants in Europe (Doc. 12950)



Ms ACKETOFT (*Sweden*) – We must also consider whom we are really talking about. Roma people should have the same right as other Europeans to be seen and treated individually. They have the same right to non-discrimination as any other citizen. [...] We in this Assembly are always keen and eager to fight for human rights and non-discrimination for people all over the world, but we turn our backs on our own minority. That is simply not acceptable, and it is high time that we started turning centuries of malpractice into good practice in this Assembly and in our own nations. [Read more, voting results](#)

The inadmissibility of restrictions on freedom of movement as punishment for political positions (Doc. 12943)



Ms ANDRÝSOVÁ (*Czech Republic*) – We are dealing with a report on the limitation of three freedoms: freedom of expression, freedom of association, and freedom of movement. [...] The freedoms that I mentioned are the basic principles of our society, especially freedom of expression. [...] We need to look for a better and clearer formulation or interpretation of the existing legislation – for instance, that involving the blacklisting of “unwanted people”. Searching for a better solution will help us to discover whether we have a systemic problem or simply a problem involving individual cases that should be solved individually by the courts. The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe is against restrictions on freedom of movement as a punishment for political positions, and we are therefore in favour of the report. [Read more, voting results](#)

The progress of the Assembly’s monitoring procedure (June 2011-May 2012) (Doc. 12954)



Ms REPS (*Estonia*) – There is an interesting anniversary today. We should celebrate the fact that we introduced a new tradition 15 years ago – that of monitoring countries in the Monitoring Committee. [...] Furthermore, a few years ago we started a process whereby countries that are not under monitoring or in a post-monitoring dialogue can also be looked at with respect to what conventions are adopted, ratified and signed, and the status of different legislation. [...] Our group has always taken a serious interest in monitoring, because it is important that human rights, democracy and the rule of law are considered at all stages in this Council of Europe. Thus, country reports represent an important process, as we can see whether one country or another has fulfilled its commitments and help countries to identify problems. [Read more, voting results](#)