



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

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22-26  
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## **June 2015 session in Strasbourg**

- ALDE met with Ms **Julie Cantalou**, Chair of the Steering Committee of the Individual Members of the ALDE Party, and discussed the perspectives of grassroots participation in the European liberal movement.
- ALDE exchanged views with Mr **Thorbjørn Jagland**, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, on the main challenges to the Organisation, including migration, conflict in Ukraine and attempts to defy the authority of the European Convention on Human Rights.
- Ahead of the **elections of the Secretary General of PACE**, to be held on 29 September, ALDE interviewed the two candidates running for this position: Ms Svetislava Bulajic (Serbia) and Mr Wojciech Sawicki (Poland).
- ALDE paid tribute to its Vice-President Mr **Charles Kennedy** who passed away on 1 June. “He will be remembered as a gifted politician, for his eloquence, for his sense of right and wrong and for being a true European”, said PACE President Ms Anne Brasseur at the opening of the June session. On 2 June, ALDE-PACE President Mr Jordi Xuclà expressed deep condolences to the family and colleagues of Mr Kennedy: “ALDE-PACE was deeply saddened to learn that our Vice-President, long-standing member and dear friend Charles Kennedy passed away. We were honoured to work with Charles during all these years.”

As always, we wish to thank ALDE members who took active part in plenary debates, defended our position in committees, presented reports and attended group meetings. We welcome all new members who joined the group since April and wish them excellent work. ALDE was glad that Mr Emil Kirjas, Secretary General of Liberal International, attended our meetings and provided valuable input. We are also thankful to the team of trainees who assisted us during the session: Ms Daphne Ploegstra (IFLRY, Netherlands), Mr Phil Hackemann (IFLRY, Germany), Ms Mariëlle van Heumen (Netherlands) and Mr Filip Chraska (Czech Republic). A very warm and special thanks goes to Mr Peter Kallenberger for his unfailing support and commitment.

**ALDE endeavours to be the engine of the Assembly defending core European values**  
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## Exchange of views with the Secretary General of the Council of Europe



On 22 June 2015, ALDE received Mr Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe. In the exchange of views, the liberals expressed concerns over the attempts by governments of some Council of Europe member states to challenge the universal and supreme nature of the European Convention on Human Rights. ALDE also discussed the Council of Europe's response to the political and human rights challenges posed by the conflict in Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation. Finally, the Secretary General presented the Organisation's actions to improve the situation of migrants and refugees arriving to Europe

to find shelter from violence and poverty; whereas ALDE underlined the need for a common European approach.

"Liberals strongly believe that such direct contacts between the Secretary General and MPs are an efficient tool to strengthen cooperation and synergies inside the Council of Europe. I therefore hope that we can renew such exchanges in future", said ALDE President Mr Jordi Xuclà thanking the Secretary General.

## Strengthening liberal cooperation in Europe

Later the same day ALDE gladly welcomed Ms Julie Cantalou, Chair of the Steering Committee of the Individual Members of the ALDE Party. Ms Cantalou presented the concept of individual membership, the activities in different countries and reported on the strong increase in number of Europeans wishing to engage in the liberal movement. She underlined that individual ALDE Party membership was also open to non-EU citizens and invited MPs to join forces in creating a stronger grassroots democratic commitment to liberal values.

Following the meeting, several MPs submitted their requests to become ALDE Party individual members.



[Learn more](#) about the individual membership and [join the European liberal movement](#).



**Ms Adele Gambaro, Italy**

**Progress report of the Bureau and the Standing Committee;** Rapporteur, AS/Bur ([Doc. 13813](#)) Monday 22 June 2015



**Mr Jordi Xuclà (Spain)**

**Evaluation of the partnership for democracy in respect of the Parliament of Morocco;** Rapporteur for opinion, AS/Jur ([Doc. 13826](#)), Tuesday 23 June 2015

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## ALDE questions

\*translation

### **Question to Mr Igor CRNADAK, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe**



Ms TAKTAKISHVILI (*Georgia.*) – I have two questions. Thank you for the information in the report, but what future measures does the Committee of Ministers plan to take to ensure the effective implementation of the Assembly's recommendations on the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine? Secondly, do you have any specific plans to assist the Ukrainian authorities in implementing the ambitious reforms process?



Mr CRNADAK – There is much to be said on this issue. It does, of course, receive permanent attention from the Committee of Ministers and was at the heart of the discussions we had at the ministerial session in Brussels. The Minsk agreement must be swiftly and fully implemented, and the Ukrainian Constitution must be amended. That was all emphasised. We are closely following what is going on. The chairmanship of Bosnia and Herzegovina, including me personally, also expressed our desire to be very active on this issue. We must bear in mind the importance and position of our country, but sometimes relatively small countries without many of the burdens that bigger countries may have can make unexpected breakthroughs. The Committee of Ministers under our chairmanship will continue to monitor this issue very closely and we will contribute as fully as possible to finding a solution that will bring peace to the region. I hope by the end of our chairmanship this problem will be if not resolved, at least smaller than it is today.

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**Question to Mr BAN Ki-moon,  
Secretary-General of the  
United Nations**

Mr DESTEXHE (*Belgium*) – In the future sustainable development goals, there is no target for democracy and human rights. These

words are not even mentioned. Why is that? My second question is this. In the millennium development goals, you had eight goals and 21 targets; now, in the SDGs, you have 17 goals and 169 targets. Is that current and realistic? Lastly, the question of population growth is not addressed. The population of Africa will double and will probably reach 4 billion by the end of the century. If you do not address this problem in the SDGs, they will probably fail. I would like your comments on those three points.

**Question to Mr Thorbjørn  
JAGLAND, Secretary General  
of the Council of Europe**

Ms LUNDGREN (*Sweden*) – Thank you for being here and answering questions, Secretary General. The Council of Europe has its basis in the European Convention on Human Rights, which all member states have ratified. However, some member states are attempting to start discussions about withdrawal from the Convention. How will you tackle the impact that that will have on the Convention and on the Council of Europe?



Mr BAN – This is a very important question. While discussing and negotiating the sustainable development goals, as part of the aims of the sustainable development agenda for 2030, member states have identified 17 provisional goals, which are now the subject of negotiations, with 169 targets. Some issues have been raised about whether 17 goals are too many or too few and whether 169 targets are too many or too few. There are some concerns about that, but I can tell you that, during the nine months of the open working group that was conducted last year, people engaged in depth on the best way to address all the problems affecting human lives and our planet.

As the Secretary-General, I have established two or three high-level eminent persons groups on sustainability, and I have convened the UN system-wide meetings to get all views. I even reached out to at least 8 million people through social media, and 8 million responded to the UN to tell us what kind of a future they wanted to have. It is important to have a wide-ranging way of reflecting the views of the people – not only government officials or economists. We reached out to business communities, civil societies and plain, common citizens such as students, women, girls and vulnerable groups. That is the way that I reported to the General Assembly and it has been working.

The 17 goals cover all spectrums of our life: economic, social and environmental. They are people-centred and planet-friendly, asking how human beings can live harmoniously with nature and our planet. The goals cover all spectrums. Of course, I cannot say that they are 100% perfect; there is some room for improvement, which is why the matters are still under negotiation. Concerns and principles – about democracy and how we can live in a peaceful society that respects human rights – are clearly reflected and mentioned. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights already governs all our lives. Peace and security, development, and human rights are the three pillars that govern us in accordance with the UN Charter. Therefore, I believe that, although the goals might not be 100% perfect, when they are adopted by the leaders in September, they will be a visionary guideline for our life and planet..



Mr JAGLAND – I am concerned by the fact that there is a tendency in quite a few member states to challenge the authority of the European Court of Human Rights. That was openly done in the United Kingdom before the election, and attempts have been made in Switzerland to hold a referendum on the authority of the Convention and the Court. Moscow has signalled that it may go in the same direction, and there have been discussions about the power of the Court. I have approached the Government of the United Kingdom – I wrote a letter to the Secretary of State for Justice – to ask for a dialogue about the matter, and I received a positive response. I intend to have a similar dialogue with any other governments that intend to start such discussions. It is important that parliamentarians here are aware of the situation and can respond to similar debates at home if they arise.

**Question to Mr Mladen IVANIĆ, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina**



Ms BECK (Germany)\* – In 2013, there was a census. To this day, its results have not been published.

Can we expect them to be published? We understand that many citizens did not opt for an ethnic category, and this has to do, of course, with the ethnic division of the population. Perhaps we can move on from that, and instead of having division have something that brings us together as citizens and people in Bosnia and Herzegovina.



Mr IVANIC – In the last 20 years, the census was always a very sensitive issue, in my opinion without any specific reason. The results of the census will not have any influence on the Bosnian Constitution. We have three members of the presidency regardless of the census numbers. We have a Council of Ministers which is composed with equal parity regardless of the census. The numbers of MPs from the different entities is not linked to the census, either. So the census does not have a real political influence, but for local politicians it is good to be tough and to fight for their point of view and their interests, because if they represent a majority, they are the key. That is the logic.

The real reason why this has still not been published is simple: how do we count the citizens who have been out of Bosnia for more than six months? Are they citizens or not? That is the main issue now. As always, all sides staked out their position in their corner and now it is difficult to escape from those corners, but I hope we will soon overcome that.

It is all very simple and some first results have already been published. We know roughly what the figures are. There is no big change and I do not understand why there is any dispute, because, as I said, the census will not have any influence on the governmental structure in Bosnia and Herzegovina. So for me this is purely a technical issue for technicians, not politicians. I hope that will be the case, and until now we have not had politicians involved in that discussion.

There is some sort of promise that we can expect the results by the end of this year. I hope that will be the case, especially as representatives of the European statistics institutions are very much involved in this in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**Question to Ms Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta**



Mr AZMANI (*Netherlands*) – I first thank the President of Malta, on behalf of ALDE, for giving her views to this Assembly, especially on the big challenge of migration. As the southern border of the European Union, Malta deals with a high influx of migrants. In the European migration agenda, there is a proposal on the need mechanism on reallocation for only Italy and Greece. What is your – or Malta's – feeling about that?



Ms COLEIRO PRECA – Malta is very much active in saving lives with Italy, Greece and now even some other member states of the European Union. Since last year, due to the response of the Mare Nostrum programme run by our Italian colleagues, Malta has not had such a great influx of migrants, but obviously a lot of work has been done to try to save people, so a lot of resources have been dedicated to saving people from the sea. In the event of Malta receiving a big influx of migrants, I am sure that that would be regarded as it has for Italy and Greece.

**Monday 22 June 2015****Progress report of the Bureau and the Standing Committee; Observation of the parliamentary elections in Turkey (7 June 2015)**

Mr HEER (*Switzerland*)\* – I will focus on the elections in Turkey, which I participated in as an observer. I think we can say that those elections were a strong sign of the viability of Turkish democracy. [...] I think we can now say that there is proper debate in Turkey in the parliament and the media. We should not forget, looking at the countries neighbouring Turkey, that in Syria there is no democracy at all. The country is in a state of war, and there are dictatorships in other neighbouring countries. [...] For the future, we need to look again at the 10% threshold, which is very high. The Council of Europe can perhaps help with that and look at whether such a high threshold can be justified if we want to see pluralism and democracy in Turkey. [Read more](#)

**Tuesday 23 June 2015****Improving the protection of whistle-blowers**

Ms TAKTAKISHVILI (*Georgia*) – We are gathered here to protect democracy, human rights and the rule of law. How can we do so if we do not properly protect the whistle-blowers who make public certain serious wrongdoings by governments that are sometimes covered by secrecy laws? The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe supports effective national security policies to counter terrorism and its related concerns. At the same time, however, secrecy rules are sometimes abused in order to cover up serious wrongdoing, such as corruption among government officials, links with organised crime and illegal surveillance practices. [Read more](#), [voting results](#)

**Evaluation of the partnership for democracy in respect of the Parliament of Morocco (Doc. 13807)**

Ms MATEU PI (*Andorra*)\* – Morocco was our first partner for democracy, and it has been one for four years. It is true that there is much still to do, but we should recognise that there have been mutual visits and exchanges between our Assembly and the Parliament of Morocco. There are reforms that must be pursued, and there are thorns in our sides: we will have to accept them to be able to advance; we cannot just forget them or set them aside. We must still strengthen legislation and the constitution – the criminal code above all – so that freedoms are respected in all their dimensions, including in relation to discrimination on grounds of a person's gender or condition. We must not forget that or leave it unsaid. We cannot set aside the question of the Western Sahara. Even though one of our colleagues dealt with that matter very well in a previous report, it remains a very present problem.

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**The functioning of democratic institutions in Azerbaijan (Doc. 13801)**

Mr XUCLÀ (*Spain*)\* – Since the presentation of the last report on democratic institutions in Azerbaijan in 2013, certain things have happened to human rights defenders, and the report should be amended to reflect that. The rapporteurs referred to the efforts to release certain prisoners. I am obviously very grateful for that, but journalists, political opponents and lawyers are still in prison, so I urge colleagues to vote for Amendment 14 to recognise that fact. The awarding of the Václav Havel human rights prize to Anar Mammadli already recognised criminal abuses and preventive detention. There are also judgments about drug abuse, tax evasion and so forth to consider. The amendment must be adopted to include the defence of human rights and to support these people, many of whom we have met – including at the Parliamentary Assembly – who are currently in prison. [Read more, voting results](#)

**Wednesday 24 June 2015****Consideration of the annulment of the previously ratified credentials of the delegation of the Russian Federation (follow-up to paragraph 16 of Resolution 2034 (2015)) (Doc. 13800)**

the Parliamentary Assembly. [Read more, voting results](#)

Ms ZELIENKOVÁ (*Czech Republic*) – We discussed the topic at the end of January, when we concluded that Russia had done nothing to dispel our concerns about the situation in Ukraine. Crimea was still occupied, and the fighting in Donbass continued. What has changed since then? Nothing. Crimea is still occupied, and those who disagree are persecuted by the Russian authorities. [...] It is regrettable and totally incomprehensible that Russia is conducting a policy that endangers European security. We can only make assumptions about Russia's true motivation. It is regrettable that Russia values its own interests more than the stability of the region and that its attitude has not changed one bit. Under such circumstances, there is no other possibility than to adhere to our previous position not to renew the Russian delegation's rights in

**Situation in Hungary following the adoption of Assembly Resolution 1941 (2013) (Doc. 13806)**

Ms LUNDGREN (*Sweden*) – My group does not speak with one voice: there are differences within it, as I am sure members will hear later in the debate. Nevertheless, we all want to see Hungary standing up for our values – human rights, democracy and the rule of law – and safeguarding freedom and prosperity for the Hungarian people. That is why we are worried when we hear about the fences. We applauded Hungary when it tore them down previously – remember that. [...] I urge colleagues to support the amendments that make clearer the wishes of the Assembly. We should keep up and follow closely the work of the Hungarian authorities. If anyone wants to fool themselves, they should be assured that they can. [...] This is a question not about personality or belonging to a particular political group, but about the need to stick to our values. [Read more, voting results](#)



Mr GARDARSSON (Iceland) – Being a politician means you have certain powers, but being a media owner can in some instances guarantee you much more influence in society, both politically and commercially. This is why transparency in media ownership is so vital. Media ownership has become more concentrated in recent years, which is a cause for worry. Media companies are fewer and bigger than before. Independent journalism is no longer the main goal, and journalists are under increasing pressure to follow the goals of the owners; otherwise they run the risk of losing their job. Many hang on to their journalistic integrity, but others do not, as everybody knows. [Read more, voting results 1, 2](#)

#### Thursday 25 June 2015

#### **Current affairs debate : The need for a common European response to migration challenges**



Ms FIALA (Switzerland) – The May factsheets from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees inform us that Turkey faces having to host almost 2 million refugees from Syria, while Lebanon has 1.2 million and Jordan has 660 000. Today, more than 16 million Syrians need humanitarian help. The United Nations has called for \$2.9 billion of financial aid for 2015, but we are now in June and no more than about 20% of the funds have been raised. [...] The recent fact-finding mission to Turkey by a group of 22 parliamentarians from the Council of Europe, with our President, Anne Brasseur, has opened the eyes of many of us. We visited the host cities, as the Turkish officials call their refugee camps. I want to express my full gratitude to and respect for Turkey for its enormous effort in handling this incredible situation, which is a very big challenge. [...] I want to motivate you all to find the common will to find a common strategy. On behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, I ask member states to give Turkey strong support and to have a coherent plan for sharing the burden in order to face these challenges. [Read more](#)

#### **Free debate**



Ms TAKTAKISHVILI (Georgia) – The topic of my speech is the need to further protect minority rights and specifically religious minority rights. [...] Why is that more important today? We have some old challenges and new challenges in this area. We support the fight against terrorism. We have the recent challenges posed by the terrorist organisation known under the name Islamic State – ISIS – but its name does not mean it has anything to do with Muslims in Europe. [...] We also have to be more focused on fighting against anti-Semitism. Old challenges include the use of religious issues and religious sensitivities by national politicians at the political party level. [...] The final reason why we think that freedom of religion is relevant today is that there is at least one country in this Organisation that uses propaganda to influence foreign states' internal policies.

Sometimes, religious issues are used to propagate anti-Western propaganda, to say that the NGOs that protect the rights of religious minorities are foreign agents and to challenge national sovereignty and the traditional values promoted by the dominant churches. [Read more](#)



Mr CHIKOVANI (*Georgia*) – We understand that the number of missing is not final. It will never be final until all parties to the conflict agree that this should not be a matter of political speculation. As previous speakers have noted, many other people who cannot be accounted for are not included in the report. I want to underline that there are human beings whom families do not await – the children who lived in the orphan houses in the occupied territories. The Ukrainian authorities have never been able to get proper information about what has happened to those young girls and boys. That is the gravity of the situation we face. [...] It is clear that all of us in the Chamber should unite in supporting our Ukrainian friends in doing so, whether with technical help or through sharing our experience. [...] One of the most important steps that must be taken to

address the problem is to have a cease-fire. We should not lie to ourselves: we all understand that an active conflict is going on in eastern Ukraine. [Read more](#), [voting results](#)

### **Towards a new European Social Model (Doc. 13795)**



Ms KALMARI (*Finland*) – We all understand that we cannot have the same social policy in every country, but with minimum standards and sufficient economic equalities we can increase our competitiveness. The report contains six recommendations and ALDE supports them. [...] Creating equal opportunities through education from an early age allows the possibility of breaking cycles of disadvantage. In Finland, we go a little further and provide free school lunches for everyone and allow people to study as much as their diligence will allow – whether their parents are rich or poor. In fact, my family was poor and I would not be here if the system did not exist. It is also important to enable women to integrate in the labour market by providing childcare services and ending discrimination. [...] We can make remarkable progress in taxation policies if we tackle them

together. For example, taxes on financial transactions should be global. [...] We must improve our social services and health care in a modern way by using modern technology and best practices. By doing so, we will find the cheapest way to do things well. Otherwise, we will leave too big a bill to our children. [Read more](#), [voting results](#)

### **Friday 26 June 2015**

### **Recognising and preventing neo-racism (Doc. 13809)**



Ms FIALA (*Switzerland*) – Rising racism, xenophobia, hate speech and anti-Semitism cannot be tolerated. They must be prevented, avenged and punished through disciplinary means, because, together with a lack of law and/or a miserable economic situation, they can become the soil of extremism and lead to neo-Nazism, as we can see in some member states. Racist cruelty against minorities – Jews, Roma, Muslims or immigrants – and discriminatory behaviour and speech are complex phenomena. To prevent them we need to take action early – I would say in school. We especially need people who stand up against them and live in solidarity with the victims. As a member of the Swiss national taskforce against racism, as well as in the name of ALDE, I am aware that populists often defend verbal slander and insults against minorities on the pretext that

freedom of expression and freedom of opinion are fundamental rights in a democracy and must be well protected. [Read more](#), [voting results](#)



Mr BUGNON (*Switzerland*)\* – There are advantages for society and individuals as a result of technological advances, but there is a flip side. There are inherent dangers from the malicious use of modern communications technologies, and we need to protect the private sphere. Nobody wants a Big Brother-type of society spying on them and monitoring their use of the Internet. We remember the excesses of the Americans and the NSA, who put in place a spying system across the world and sought the capability to spy on anyone they wished. Instead, we wish individual freedoms to be respected, which is why we support the proposals in the rapporteur's resolution. We must give ourselves the legal tools to clamp down on cyberterrorism. There are 47 countries in the Council of Europe, but when it comes to cybercrime there are no borders, which is why we must not leave it there. [Read more, voting results](#)

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