



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

N°3, 2016

*PACE Session
20-24 June 2016*

IN THIS ISSUE:

Jordi Xuclà re-
elected to
Parliament

ALDE meets with
Anar Mammadli
and Nadiia
Savchenko

Rapporteurs

Questions

Speakers

ALDE
members

Highlights of the June part-session in Strasbourg

- At its group meeting on 20 June, ALDE welcomed **Anar Mammadli**, Azerbaijan, and **Nadiia Savchenko**, Ukraine. ALDE is thankful to all members who fought for their release and particularly to Kristyna Zelenkova, Czech Republic, who led the international campaign to free Nadiia Savchenko. ALDE will continue to promote political freedoms in Europe and demand the release of all those unlawfully imprisoned for political reasons in Council of Europe member states.
- On 20 June, **Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe**, presented his annual report on the State of Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law in Europe to ALDE-PACE members. [Download the report here.](#)
- ALDE-PACE is following the **situation in Georgia** ahead of the parliamentary elections that will take place on 8 October 2016. On 22 June, the group adopted a [statement](#) condemning harassment and physical attacks against politicians and journalists in Georgia.

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. We were glad to welcome Mane Manukyan, outgoing Executive Director of IFLRY. We are also thankful to our trainee Sandra Ahtola (Finland, University of Strasbourg) for her excellent work. 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
Visit our website: www.alde-pace.org

ALDE congratulates Jordi Xuclà on re-election



Following the early parliamentary election held in Spain on 26 June, ALDE wishes to warmly congratulate group chair, Jordi Xuclà, on his re-election.

The mandate of the Spanish delegation appointed in April was short, but we would like to thank all members for having actively participated in the work of the group. We also extend congratulations to Melisa Rodriguez Hernandez and Irene Rivera on their re-election.

The constituent meeting of the Spanish Congress of Deputies will be held on 19 July, and we look forward to welcoming Spanish colleagues in the ALDE.

ALDE welcomes Nadiia Savchenko and Anar Mammadli in Strasbourg



On 20 June, ALDE-PACE held a short exchange of views with Azerbaijani human rights defender Anar Mammadli and Ukrainian parliamentarian Nadiia Savchenko, both recently released after over 20 months spent in jail.

Anar Mammadli is a prominent human rights defender from Azerbaijan and a long-standing partner of the Council of Europe and ALDE-PACE. In May 2014, he was sentenced to over five years in prison. In September 2014, the Parliamentary Assembly awarded Mr Mammadli with the PACE Vaclav Havel Human Rights Prize, which was handed to Anar's father by the then President of the Assembly Anne Brasseur. On 17 March 2016, Anar Mammadli was released on presidential pardon. Despite of the pressure, the former prisoner of conscience speaks up for his country's democratic future.

In March 2016, Nadiia Savchenko, Ukrainian MP, member of PACE and former military pilot, was sentenced by a Russian court to 22 years in prison after having been illegally transferred from Ukraine and continuously kept in custody since June 2014.

"The ALDE group was among the many organisations that fought for your release. After having spent long months in captivity and being sentenced to a long prison term, you are finally free. You continue your fight for a better future for your country. Now you do it on the political arena, including in the Assembly. We welcome you among us and wish you a lot of strength and courage", said ALDE-PACE President Jordi Xuclà during his welcoming remarks.

ALDE-PACE is closely following the situation of political prisoners in Azerbaijan, including Ilgar Mammadov whose release was ordered by the European Court of Human Rights, and of all Ukrainian citizens illegally detained in the Russian Federation.



Ms Meritxell MATEU (Andorra)

Rapporteur of the Ad hoc committee of the Bureau on the **Situation of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Greece Report on the visit to Athens and Lesbos (30-31 May 2016)** ([Doc. 14086 Addendum III](#)), Tuesday 21 June 2016



Ms Chiora TAKTAKISHVILI (Georgia)

Transparency and openness in European institutions ([Doc. 14096](#)), Rapporteur for opinion AS/Pro, Thursday 23 June 2016



Mr Andrea RIGONI (Italy)

Violence against migrants ([Doc. 14066](#)), Rapporteur AS/Mig, Friday 24 June 2016

[Back](#)

ALDE questions

*translation

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



Ms MATEU (Andorra)* – Mr Secretary General, you welcomed the agreement between

Turkey and the European Union last March on matters relating to migrants. Three months on, what do you think of the agreement? Do you think that, pursuant to that agreement, from the end of this month Turkish citizens will no longer need visas to reach the member states of the European Union?



Mr JAGLAND – First, I commend you and the other members of the delegation that visited Greece. I too was in Greece. My special representative has been there twice and has also been to Turkey.

As I see it, the agreement between the EU and Turkey was the only possible way to avoid the continuation of human trafficking or human smuggling. It has been shown to be working well. We supported it provided that there was a guarantee that all people could apply for asylum on an individual basis. That is happening, and the Greek authorities are making tremendous efforts to apply that principle. We are following events very closely. My special representative is working on this, and all other international organisations are doing the same. Let us see how the agreement works.

I also remind you that the Court of Human Rights can stop the transfer of people if it does not think that it would be safe. We should remember that it has done so before, with regard to Belgium, when it overruled the Dublin regulations and stated that Dublin countries should not be allowed to send people back to Greece given the current situation. I mention that to show that the Court also has the right to intervene in such cases. It has not done so until now but it can if necessary. What was the second part of the question?

**Question to Mr Taavi RÕIVAS,
Prime Minister of Estonia**

Mr DAEMS (Belgium) – Freedom House consistently ranks Estonia top of the world for freedom on the net – a top liberal result worthy of a liberal Prime Minister. Congratulations. However, cybercrime and terrorism are a brutal reality of the net. What do you regard to be the right balance between freedom and limitation of freedom in order to fight crime and terrorism?



Mr RÕIVAS – That is a very important question, because the more digital a society becomes and the more Internet freedoms and online services it has, the more important it is to deal with the threats. In a way, becoming more digital leaves us more open to digital threats. The right thing to do is not to stop becoming more digital, but to realise what the threats are and to deal with them. I know of European governments that have hesitated to go digital because of the risks. The Estonian experience shows the opposite to be true; you can become a very digital country, but you need to evaluate the risks and be ready to fight them. Estonia was the first country in the world to experience a full-scale cyber-attack, back in spring 2007. The positive point is that Estonia was able to defend itself. Following that experience, we created the NATO centre of excellence for cyber-security in Tallinn, and many of the countries represented here are also represented there – it is actually bigger than all the NATO countries. That has made us safer and better prepared for potential risks in future. My message is clear: Internet freedom and going digital is an opportunity and we should not hesitate because of the risks but deal with them.

**Question to Mr Alexis TSIPRAS,
Prime Minister of Greece**

Ms BRASSEUR (Luxembourg) – Prime Minister, thank you for having accepted my invitation to address this Assembly. Your country has been undergoing very severe budgetary restrictions. Can you see the light at the end of the tunnel and how will you comply with the principle of accountability, keeping in mind that we want all Greeks to benefit in the near future from all these reforms, so that they can live a life of dignity, serenity and certainty about the future?



Mr TSIPRAS - In answer to the question on the principle of accountability, at the beginning of this grand adventure that followed the economic crisis we had elections, after the signing of the programme agreement. The Greek people went to those elections with all the cards on the table and in full knowledge of what they were deciding upon. The government was there in order to apply the agreement that was signed. Back then, in 2015, we received a mandate to negotiate. We negotiated and achieved a compromise. We then went back to the Greek people so that they could judge, and in September 2015 they requested that we continue. The programme was very difficult, but we were trying to protect their social rights and the most vulnerable groups. I hope that we will achieve that and that we will not have to cross any of the red lines that we laid down when we signed the agreement.

Monday 20 June 2016**Progress report of the Bureau and the Standing Committee**

Mr XUCLÀ (Spain)* - Ms Savchenko talked about reconciliation. She is somebody who has suffered much, and we are indeed ready for reconciliation. We must honour her words and stand by her testimony here. There is indeed a purpose behind the Parliamentary Assembly. Parliaments bring together men and women freely elected to their positions. We cannot assume that everyone will think about everything in the same way that we do; nevertheless, we must be open to resolving conflicts. Often we find conflicts among the 47, and sometimes they have even become armed conflicts. It is the duty of this Parliamentary Assembly, like others, to pick up what Ms Savchenko has said. She is here to talk about reconciliation – on the basis, of course, of compliance with commitments entered into and proper compensation for breaches of international law. There have been clear breaches in the

Ukraine conflict, as there were in Georgia in August 2008. This Assembly must be an effective forum, as it has been in achieving the release of Ms Savchenko. [Read more](#)



Ms TAKTAKISHVILI (*Georgia*) – On behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, I would like to draw your attention to the situation in the Russian Federation ahead of the parliamentary elections in September 2016. [...] Unfortunately, we see an ineffective approach to the activities of NGOs. In particular, NGOs and lawyers working on politically sensitive cases, including those before the European Court of Human Rights, those monitoring human rights abuses in the northern Caucasus and those dealing with investigative reports of corruption are being threatened. [...] Unfortunately, our Assembly has not made a statement about the assassination of the major democratic opposition leader, Mr Boris Nemtsov. The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe supports the referral of Mr Nemtsov's assassination to the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights for a report. We do not have the right to delay that Committee. We have to know what happened and how it happened. We need to know who the masterminds were behind what was a major political assassination within the Council of Europe's borders. [Read more](#)

Tuesday 21 June 2016

Refugees at risk in Greece (Doc. 14082, Doc. 14082 Addendum)



Mr GARDARSSON (*Iceland*) - The rapporteur is right that this is a European responsibility, not just a Greek one. The Greek asylum system is dysfunctional, even though the Greek authorities are improving it. Monetary support has been coming from the European Union, but the system itself has not been able to cope with the problem. Asylum seekers are not getting the necessary information about their rights, and there are long delays in the asylum process, especially in dealing with applications. There is not enough capacity in the system, and more staff are needed. There has been a call for other EU member States to contribute 400 asylum officers and 400 interpreters to Greece to speed things up, but by last month only 63 asylum officers and 67 interpreters had been deployed. This is not the time for finger pointing. It is not the time for blaming the Greek authorities or other EU member nations, many of which have been reluctant to accept refugees.

The only thing that matters is the refugees. They need a safe place to live in, they need to be able to work, they need access to health care and their children need education. [Read more, voting results](#)

Fighting the over-sexualisation of children (Doc. 14080)



Mr SCHNABEL (*Netherlands*) – On behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, I would like to express our grave reservations about the report's content and recommendations, which in our opinion are insufficiently supported by scientific evidence. [...] In the opinion of Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, we do not need reports that confound moral prejudice and human – in this case, children's – rights. In many countries, children, adolescents and adults are still suffering the unhealthy consequences of a long history of what we might call under-sexualisation. They would be helped greatly by government provision of a sexual health policy that makes sound and positive sexual education a normal part of the school curriculum, gives young people access to good contraception and helps to protect them against sexually transmitted diseases. I fear that the present

report will be put aside by governments that already do such things and welcomed by governments that are actually failing to enhance the sexual health of their children and adolescents. The Assembly will not help such children in any way by giving support to what we might call over-moralisation. [Read more, voting results](#)

Women in the armed forces: promoting equality, putting an end to gender-based violence (Doc. 14073)



Mr GRIN (*Switzerland*)* - Given the harassment and assaults that take place in an environment that lends itself to abuse, we need to provide proper support for victims who report abuse. Ways to improve the situation that have been flagged up include opening up positions in all parts of the armed services to women in a way that also provides a work-life balance. Many studies in this field are cited in the report, and they will be very useful for members. [...] The draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee proposes the means of eradicating the unacceptable violence facing women in a majority masculine context. Women must be able to serve their country with dignity. [Read more, voting results](#)

Wednesday 22 June 2016

The functioning of democratic institutions in Turkey (Doc. 14078, Doc. 14078 Addendum)



Ms BRASSEUR (*Luxembourg*)* – One should be more than worried in light of recent developments in Turkey. For the avoidance of misunderstanding and ambiguity, we firmly condemn all terrorist attacks perpetrated on Turkish soil and I reiterate my condolences to the victims' families. We need to fight terrorism, but we have to use the appropriate tools, based on the rule of law while respecting the European Convention on Human Rights. The Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Thorbjørn Jagland, has said that “terrorists cannot destroy our democracies. Only we can do that.” But the Turkish authorities are riding roughshod over the most basic principles of the Council of Europe, all of which can found in the excellent report. I congratulate the two co-rapporteurs. [Read more, voting results](#)

Administrative detention (Doc. 14079)



Ms TAKTAKISHVILI (*Georgia*) – As Liberals, we always stand for the highest standard of protection for human rights because we consider freedom to be one of the most important values. [...] We believe that the much-needed fight against terrorists does not justify the violation of Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Administrative detention should not be used as a means of managing migration flows. The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe welcomes the campaign launched by our Liberal colleague Ms Doris Fiala. We once again call on all member States to stop the detention of migrant children. We are particularly alarmed that legislation in some Council of Europe member States allows selective and politically motivated use of administrative detention. In seven Council of Europe countries, civil activists and political opponents are subject to administrative detention. In Romania, Azerbaijan, Russia, Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova and Turkey, activists are detained to prevent them from taking part in protest rallies or to deter them from participating in future demonstrations. [Read more, voting results](#)

Current affairs debate: Reaffirming the role of the Assembly as a pan-European forum for inter-parliamentary dialogue and co-operation



Mr MULDER (*Netherlands*) – ALDE stresses that this is not just a meeting place or a discussion room but a Parliamentary Assembly united on basic liberal values that bind us. Sometimes one or more countries find it difficult to act and live according to those basic values, but they still apply to every country. We have to beware of special treatment. When thinking about inter-parliamentary dialogue, we might also take into account, although it is difficult, the relationship between the executives and the parliaments of our respective countries. It is about how a parliament checks and challenges the work and policy of the executive; it is about the scrutiny role of parliaments. As Mr Fischer said, parliamentary dialogue is a good thing, but ALDE does not want us to become just a pan-European dialogue forum. We are a Parliamentary

Assembly with values that have to apply to every country. [Read more](#)

Thursday 23 June 2016

Joint debate: Culture and democracy (Doc. 14070); Educational and cultural networks of communities living abroad (Doc. 14069)



Mr MULDER (*Netherlands*) - In the first report, “Culture and democracy”, the rapporteur states that culture is a powerful tool for preventing radicalisation. On the other hand, she also states that in many countries budgets for culture are the first to be cut. To make a strong case for increased expenditure on culture, these projects have to be effective; they have to bring results. The report mentions many projects. What are the criteria for measuring their success? When do they work? Do they reach the people we want to reach? When people are radicalised, for example, they are very difficult to reach. [...] The other report is about integration. We liberals say that it is not someone’s origin that is central but their future, and that it is not the group that is central but the individual. Those are the liberal principles on integration. Having a job and learning the language are the key factors for successful integration. [...] The risk is that people who stay in their own group do not have

to learn the language of their new country, because within their community they can speak their own language; also, if they stay in their own community they are not confronted by other values. [Read more](#), [voting results 1](#), [2](#)

Transparency and openness in European institutions (Doc. 14075)



Mr van de VEN (*Netherlands*) – It is clear from Ms Vučković’s excellent report that the Council of Europe already avails itself of instruments for openness and transparency. ALDE derives from the report the conclusion that the Assembly should be more effective in monitoring possible conflicts of interest where its members are concerned. ALDE therefore endorses the conclusion in the report that we should follow more closely the *modus operandi* of GRECO, while adhering to the standards of the Council of Europe. Furthermore, ALDE endorses the report’s conclusion that NGOs and the media may contribute favourably to transparency and openness in the work of the Council of Europe.

[Read more](#), [voting results](#)

Joint debate: The nature of the mandate of members of the Parliamentary Assembly (Doc. 14077); Parliamentary immunity: challenges to the scope of the privileges and immunities enjoyed by members of the Parliamentary Assembly (Doc. 14076)



Mr van de VEN (*Netherlands*) – As members, we should be in a position to speak freely and to act unhindered and in an unbiased way. We should be in a position to fulfil our function as members of the Assembly in representing citizens of democratic States, and we should respect and honour the word of our fellow members, but we should also speak firmly, loudly and clearly if we think that human rights are at stake. Privileges and immunities should not be used with impunity – there is no room for abuse of our special rights since we also have special obligations towards the citizens we represent. On the other hand, the lifting of immunity should not be abused. [...] For members of the Assembly, immunity should exist in appearance and in fact. This double-edged immunity prevents sending states from factually hindering those members of the

Assembly who belong to a minority opposition party, especially during a political campaign in their home state. [Read more](#), [voting results 1](#), [2](#)

Friday 24 June 2016

Violence against migrants (Doc. 14066)



Ms PALLARÉS (*Andorra*) - Violence against migrants, whether they are regular or irregular, is always an attack on human rights, so we have to find and implement all the measures to reduce and prevent it. The report, which contains many sad details, asks us to understand how deep, serious and worrying the situation is in our countries at the moment. We have also heard the testimonies of heroes. Migrants are suffering from all the representations of hatred, including physical violence, labour exploitation, trafficking, sexual harassment and abuse, discrimination and hate speech, which are all specified in the report. This Organisation has made many recommendations on how to tackle all these problems, and sometimes I wonder what we really have learnt about it. In my opinion, during the migrant crisis, human rights and the values we defend have been knocked down by fear, bureaucracy and nationalism. We know that immigration has been one of the main

topics discussed in the Brexit campaign, and we have seen the result today. We must analyse how the crisis of anti-immigration and anti-refugee sentiment has come about in our countries, because migration is not going to stop. It is a fact that migration will continue and many more people will arrive in Europe over the coming years, for many different reasons, as we have discussed in this Assembly. [Read more](#), [voting results](#)

Road safety in Europe as a public health priority (Doc. 14081)



Mr van de VEN (*Netherlands*) ALDE wishes to use this opportunity to express its compassion with the direct and indirect victims of road accidents. It cannot be stressed enough that individuals who suffer from the consequences of a road accident are in a very pitiable position, and deserve our sympathy. Nevertheless, ALDE is somewhat puzzled. Road safety concerns practical aspects of daily life in any given European State that should be taken care of by the national government per se, as one of its prime governmental tasks. Also, ALDE wonders about the question of a direct causal link between road accidents and unsafe roads, the use of stimulants, including drugs or medicines, by drivers, the carelessness of drivers and other factors. Human rights must also be considered. In addition, ALDE would like to ask Ms Karapetyan why her report did not deal with the EU directives on road safety and whether these directives could be used as guidance to improve safety on European

roads. [Read more](#), [voting results](#)

ALDE

Parliamentary Assembly

Council of Europe

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

Photos © Council of Europe