

Highlights of the January part-session in Strasbourg

PACE Session
23-27 January 2017

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- How to make international election observation efficient and reliable? **ALDE-PACE discussed election observation practices with Mr Michael Georg Link, Director of OSCE/ODIHR.** Visiting Strasbourg on the invitation of the ALDE group, Mr Link also conducted meetings with the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the President of the Parliamentary Assembly.
- ALDE exchanged views on the situation in Turkey, Russia, Ukraine and Poland. **Ms Małgorzata Szuleka, Polish Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights,** expressed concerns over the recent developments in Poland, including with regard to the Constitutional Tribunal, the media space and the freedom of assembly.
- **Mr Andrea Rigoni** (Italy) joined ALDE's bureau as a Vice-President. **Mr Rik Daems** (Belgium) and **Mr Raphaël Comte** (Switzerland) were elected to vice-chair positions in AS/Pol and AS/Cult respectively.

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 and wish them excellent work. We were glad to welcome Frida Sigfrids (Finland, IFLRY). A very warm and special thanks goes to 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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ELECTION OBSERVATION

ALDE reflects on election observation practices with Michael Link



Mr Haukaas, Ms Shlyk, Mr Link and Mr Xuclà, ALDE-PACE meeting, 23 January 2017

On 23 January 2017, ALDE exchanged views with Michael Georg Link, Director of OSCE/ODIHR. Mr Link was accompanied by Alexander Shlyk, Head of Elections Department, and Jan Haukaas, special advisor to the Director. Welcoming the guest speaker, ALDE President Jordi Xuclà particularly underlined the honour to receive Mr Link not only in his high official capacity, but also as a prominent German liberal and a friend.

The discussion focused on cooperation between PACE and OSCE/ODIHR in election observation missions. It is essential to reinforce synergies between ODIHR and PACE monitors to achieve the most objective assessment of electoral practices, assessment which is technically reliable and has political legitimacy. Close cooperation can also reduce the risk of “forum shopping” where state authorities extend invitations only to observer missions they deem less critical.

In their statements, ALDE members praised the monitoring work done by ODIHR, most notably by its long-term observers. Since PACE missions are more limited in time and size, and taking into account that electoral practices cannot be reduced to the election day, members of the Assembly systematically rely on the information provided by ODIHR. The particular context of the forthcoming constitutional referendum in Turkey makes successful cooperation of long- and short-term observers from OSCE and PACE all the more crucial.

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CHANGES IN COMMITTEES AND ALDE BUREAU

Changes in PACE committees and ALDE bureau



Member of the Parliamentary Assembly since 2001, Chair of the Sub-Committee on Co-operation with non-European countries of origin and transit, full member of the Political Affairs, Monitoring and Rules of Procedure committees, **Andrea Rigoni** (Italy) joined ALDE-PACE's bureau on 23 January 2017.



Rik Daems (Belgium), Chair of the Belgian delegation to PACE, was elected second Vice-Chair of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy.



Raphaël Comte (Switzerland), President of the Swiss Council of States in 2015-2016, was elected first Vice-Chair of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media



ALDE REPORTS



Ms Adele GAMBARO (Italy)

Online media and journalism: challenges and accountability, Rapporteur AS/Cult (Doc. 14228), Wednesday 25 January 2017



Mr Jordi XUCLÀ (Spain)

The functioning of democratic institutions in Ukraine, Co-Rapporteur AS/Mon (Doc. 14227), Wednesday 25 January 2017

Challenge on procedural grounds of the still unratified credentials of the parliamentary delegation of the Slovak Republic, Rapporteur AS/Pro (Doc. 14247), Thursday 26 January 2017

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ALDE QUESTIONS

Question to Mr Ioannis KASOULIDES, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Cyprus, Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers



Mr R. HUSEYNOV (Azerbaijan) – Certain democracies have announced that 2017 is an international year of the family. To some

degree, the Council of Europe itself is a big family that unites its 47 members, but this family of ours can in no way be accepted as exemplary, given that a number of its member States have engaged in conflict with one another. In response to the noble appeals in this year of the family, what concrete measures can be taken by the Council of Europe to resolve conflicts between its member States so that we can finally become a normal family?



Mr KASOULIDES – Honourable members, the mandate of the Council of Europe is not to resolve conflict. That is a matter for other international organisations. That being so,

we must ensure that all people living in Europe can benefit from the protection granted by the Council of Europe's instruments, particularly the European Convention on Human Rights. This Organisation is here to promote dialogue and understanding between members. In that regard, there was the Secretary General's initiative last year to send a fact-finding mission to Crimea. I hope that it will be the first step towards re-opening access to Crimea for the Council of Europe's monitoring structures. However, as we know, Crimea is not the only conflict area in Europe. The same issue concerns in other places and was discussed at the ministerial session in Sofia last May. The Secretary General has been asked to follow up the discussion and he has my full support in his endeavours.

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Question to Mr Johannes HAHN, European Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations



Mr JOVANOVIĆ (Serbia) – How would you respond to critics who argue that a rather technical approach to enlargement which also favours stability

over democracy, the rule of law and media freedom has contributed to a further democratic recession in some candidate countries? What would be the European Commission’s reaction to, and what do you see as the likely consequences of, some of the acceding countries declaring a temporary moratorium on EU integration?



Mr HAHN* – Once again, the rule of law is not negotiable; it has to be upheld and, above all, experienced. There cannot be any kind of discount granted in that regard, as the rule of law is an inalienable condition. I feel, and have always assumed, that

economic development can very much improve the rule of law, because independent judges give legal certainty and all of this is an element that can attract external investors into a country; there has to be legal certainty and predictability, so economic development can also help to bolster the rule of law. Therefore, there can be no discounts or shortcuts.

If a country withdraws from the negotiations, that is its prerogative; we will not say, “You are not a member. Do you want to be a member?” Whether a country wishes to become a member of the European Union has to be the concern of that country and its citizens. We have a policy of open doors, but if someone does not want to come in, we are certainly not going to force them, as we have seen with the example of Iceland.

Question to Mr Nicos Anastasiades, President of Cyprus



Ms OEHRI (Liechtenstein) – Mr President, what is happening about the property of

those who were driven out? How can you achieve unity on the question of restitution, and how is this perceived in the Turkish part of Cyprus?



Mr ANASTASIADIS* – That is our aim. Without of course ignoring the fact that there are properties which for the public good may not be returned, what is important and has been agreed upon is that we recognise the right of ownership. In order to deal with the rights of property owners, agreements have

been forged with regard to five remedies: partial restitution; full restitution; alternative properties; exchange of properties; and other similar such mechanisms. In this fashion, we will find the best solution to these very complicated property issues, which are linked to the territorial adjustments in that particular chapter. I would like to hope that there will be an agreement on the property issue. In other words, I hope that we will have the return of the considerable properties under the Turkish Cypriot authority which, since 1974, have not been in the hands of their legal owners, so I hope for a certain amount of return.

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



Mr van de VEN (Netherlands) – Mr Secretary General, yesterday we discussed and

voted on the issue of whether or not to hold an urgent procedure debate on the political situation in Turkey. The discussion was a balancing act between the principle of holding such a debate and the opportunity of such a debate in view of the reality of that political situation. My question is: in what way



Mr JAGLAND – It is difficult to quantify success, as you indicated. We can define it only if we apply it to concrete situations and cases, as I did for example with regard to Azerbaijan. It is not right to say this is a success, because it is a necessity, but if we could soon get Ilgar Mammadov out of prison we

would show that the Court is strong and the Convention is strong on behalf of one individual. It is a success if we are able to put in place judicial guarantees and remedies for 130 000 people in Turkey – without the Council of Europe we would not have had this and now we do. It will be an even bigger success if the mechanisms now being put in place prove to be independent, and make decisions on the basis of the case law of the Court and the Convention. That is the way in which we can measure success. We always have to keep in mind that the Council of Europe is there for individuals – for the rights of people. If we have focused on that, we can succeed in

does the Council of Europe and we as the Parliamentary Assembly benefit from this effort we make? What is the goal of that effort? Do you see progress? If so, how would you quantify success?

the way we see in the examples I gave. The Parliamentary Assembly has time and again played a very active role in this regard, on behalf of people. We were put in place because of people. So please continue doing as you have done in the past and watching whether people's rights are being put in place, guaranteed and respected in our member States

ALDE QUESTIONS

Question to Mr Klaus Werner Iohannis, President of Romania



Mr XUCLÀ (Spain) – I congratulate you on the

Romanian-Spanish common project to set up an international court against terrorism. What do you consider the key initiative to avoid populism, and why do you think populism is increasing around Europe and around the world?



Mr IOHANNIS – This is a very broad topic. I am a member of the European Council, and on several occasions we have discussed the future of the union, the way our constituents have voted in recent years, the fact that whoever has called a referendum has lost it, and the fact that populism has become popular again. Politicians usually have opinions about

every subject. Everybody has an explanation for the populism, europhobia and xenophobia that we face, but we have to be honest. We usually blame the media and migrants – others – but we should use a mirror if we are to explain why populism has become popular again.

I think we have a problem in Europe, and perhaps elsewhere, too. Too often, we avoid giving clear answers to clear questions. Too often, we tell people one thing during political campaigns and do something else during our mandate. Too often, we think that our constituents would not understand our plans, so we do not explain what we want to do.

I have come to a conclusion, which I shared with my colleagues in our discussions in the European Council. Europe has all kinds of problems – problems with the economy, with migrants, with the Eastern border, with the Southern border and with the banks – but at the root I think we have a credibility problem. Politicians and the institutions we built are not credible any more. If we want to make things better and beat the populists, we must not become populists ourselves. We should reconnect with the people and tell them what the problem is and what we intend to do for them. If we do that, I think we will have to speak less often about the rise of populism, extremism, europhobia and xenophobia.

*translation



**GROUP
SPEAKERS**

DEBATES

RESULTS

*translation

Monday 22 January 2017

Progress report of the Bureau and the Standing Committee



Mr XUCLÀ (Spain)* – From the point of view of the assessment of the most important events that have happened since October, I think the Nicosia declaration, which Mr Nicoletti mentioned, is important. It is not coincidental. We find ourselves at a crossroads, and we have to ask ourselves whether the Parliamentary Assembly can be inclusive while the composition of the Europe of 47 is being redefined. Since October, the jewel in the crown – the European Court of Human Rights and the Council of Europe – has been threatened by some very worrying events. Of course, judgements such as the Ilgar Mammadov resolution need to be implemented, but certain countries are

considering leaving the Convention. [Read more](#)



Ms LUNDGREN (Sweden) – Will we address the growing new autocratic populist developments or will we hide in fear of being accused of bashing some countries, giving those autocrats shelter to grow their models? For us as liberals and democrats, the answer is obvious. We have to take up the torch from our predecessors and fight to develop our norms and standards against all those arguing for and initiating different kinds of so-called illiberal democracies, abandoning and installing new European orders. [...] Fight for democracy, the rule of law and human rights. In other words, fight for our liberal values. [Read more](#)

Attacks against journalists and media freedom in Europe (Doc. 14229)



Ms BRASSEUR (Luxembourg)* – Freedom of expression and freedom of the media are absolutely fundamental to our democracies. Attacks against journalists, against the media and freedom of expression are attacks against democracy. These attacks are coming from terrorist groups – we have seen what terror they can spread – and from authorities and powers-that-be in certain countries. We must resolutely combat both phenomena, because they are undermining the strength of our democracies. [...] If we vote for this resolution that is good, but it is just a one-day effort and we need to keep a watch over the situation. [Read more, voting results](#)

The humanitarian crisis in Gaza (Doc. 14224)



Mr BILDARRATZ (Spain) – I had the opportunity to enter Gaza before the 2014 armed conflict, in March of that year. I went again just after the armed conflict, so I visited twice in a very short period of time. The situation was unbearable before, but it is impossible to describe how bad it was afterwards. [...] People have different ways of looking at this conflict that has been around a long time. The questions and sensitivities are all responded to in the report, which sets out goals and targets for the international community and an agenda to be followed by the Israeli Government, as well as for the Palestinians. [Read more, voting results](#)

Wednesday 25 January 2017

Joint debate: Online media and journalism: challenges and accountability (Doc. 14228), Ending cyberdiscrimination and online hate (Doc. 14217)



Mr COMTE (Switzerland)* -- Media are going through a revolution. [...] This revolution runs parallel to the technological revolution, which has brought profound change to journalists' work in a world of non-stop news. [...] It would be wrong for us to fight against the technological revolution. The best thing we can do is to promote a critical spirit among citizens and young people in particular. [...] It must be stressed that media cannot be a legal no man's land. Too many users have the impression that they can do whatever they want on the Internet, meaning that all sorts of unpleasant discourse, including hate discourse, is easily unleashed. That leads

us to the question of online media users' traceability. [Read more, voting results 1, 2](#)



Mr KROSS (Estonia) - Democracy in Ukraine is an issue not just for the Ukrainian Government or even just for the Ukrainian people, but for the future of Europe, because this is a question about the strength, resilience and vitality of European values. I would therefore like to look at the larger picture today rather than just at the reforms in Ukraine. [...] The report urges the Ukrainian Government to speed up in taking steps to fulfil its obligations under the Minsk agreement, and of course this is important. As we have heard already today, the key word “decentralisation” is important, yes, but as important is the word “dismemberment” or “occupation”,

which should always be mentioned together with decentralisation. [Read more, voting results](#)

Reinforcing social dialogue as an instrument for stability and decreasing social and economic inequalities (Doc. 14216)



Mr GRIN (Switzerland)* – As far as ALDE is concerned, social dialogue is of paramount importance as an instrument of stability and as an instrument to reduce social and economic inequalities. If we want to have an efficient and effective dialogue, it is important to strike a proper balance between the economic circles and trade unions. The report of our colleague, Mr Jónasson, seeks to attach too much importance to the unions and suggests strengthening the labour law to some extent. [Read more, voting results](#)

Thursday 26 January 2017

Debate under urgent procedure: The need to reform European migration policies (Doc. 14248)



Mr POLIAČIK (Slovak Republic) – Mr President, honourable colleagues, three things need to be kept in mind when addressing the issue of migration. The first is that we are dealing with people – not “waves”, “floods” or “epidemics”, but people. The first war we need to win is in our heads, and the results show in the way we talk about things. The dehumanisation of migrants in the language of populists needs to be rejected, because it shapes the thinking of anyone willing to listen. In order to create ground for acceptance and understanding, every human being in pursuit of his or her future well-being has to be perceived as a person, a face and a story. [Read more, voting results](#)

Challenge on procedural grounds of the still unratified credentials of the parliamentary delegation of the Slovak Republic

Mr POLIAČIK (Slovak Republic) – The ALDE group has been informed about what is happening with the Slovak delegation, which takes this issue seriously. We are here to respect the rules. This situation occurred because the head of our delegation was appointed to the government and was replaced by a male member. We still have two female members of the delegation, but they are substitutes. The change will take place in the Slovak Parliament on Tuesday next week. [Read more, voting results](#)

The progress of the Assembly’s monitoring procedure (September 2015-December 2016) and the periodic review of the honouring of obligations by Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France and Germany (Doc. 14213) [Read more, voting results](#)

Current affairs debate: The situation in Syria and its effects on surrounding countries (Doc. 14247)



Mr XUCLÀ (Spain)* – This is not a current affairs debate in the sense that is about this week, or this month. This problem has been persistent for several years, from the beginning of the century. We have not experienced such a serious and widespread humanitarian crisis since the crisis in the Balkans in the 1990s. Colleagues from the Balkans in the Chamber might think that we reacted rather late in the day to the situation in that region and that our reaction was perhaps not appropriate, but of course we did react. In this case, we are talking about a far more complex situation. [Read more](#)

The situation in Lebanon and challenges for regional stability and European security (Doc. 14226)



Ms van MILTENBURG (Netherlands) – Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, our Assembly has adopted numerous resolutions addressing the situation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. For a population of 4.5 million people, there are now between 1 million and 1.5 million Syrian refugees. Even though Lebanon does its utmost to solve the refugee problem, with a lot of financial and other aid from the international community, there are simply too many refugees to ensure that all their basic needs are met. [Read more, voting results](#)

Friday 27 January 2017

Joint debate: Human rights compatibility of investor-State arbitration in international investment protection agreements (Doc. 14225), “New generation” trade agreements and their implications for social rights, public health and sustainable development (Doc. 14219)



Mr van de VEN (Netherlands) I would like to thank Mr Omtzigt for the effort he put into writing his report. ALDE agrees with his conclusion on the establishment of a permanent multilateral Investment Court System, as already proposed by the European Union in connection with TTIP. [...] I will now comment on the “new generation” trade agreements report. I strongly believe that the rapporteur was committed to preparing an interesting report. What struck me, however, is the report’s rather protectionist approach towards international trade agreements. [...] ALDE does not subscribe to this draft resolution. [Read more, voting results 1, 2](#)

Promoting the inclusion of Roma and Travellers (Doc. 14149)



Mr BILDARRATZ (Spain)* – We need to send a positive message to society and to raise awareness, particularly about the Roma. I have been a teacher, and I had pupils from the Roma community. I tried to teach them that they have to work inclusively in our communities as well. One area is working with young people. We need to work hand in hand – us and them, together. This is an era in which there are a greater number of Roma students at university than ever before, thanks to proactive work and joint work with them. [Read more, voting results](#)