

Press Release

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PACE rapporteurs see a window of opportunity for Russia

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Strasbourg, 24.04.2008 – The co-rapporteurs from the Monitoring Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), Luc Van den Brande (Belgium, EPP/CD) and Theodoros Pangalos (Greece, SOC), were encouraged by recent reforms initiated by the Russian authorities and their statements of intent to address some of the outstanding concerns of the Assembly. In their view there is now a window of opportunity for Russia to fulfil a number of commitments to the Council of Europe.¹

The separation of powers, and a proper system of checks and balances between them, is a main focus of the Assembly's monitoring process. In this respect, the rapporteurs took note of the steps taken by the authorities to reform the Prosecutors' Office and judiciary, with the aim to bring them closer to Council of Europe standards. In particular, they encourage the authorities to pursue their efforts aiming at ensuring the execution of domestic court decisions, which could significantly reduce the number of cases lodged against Russia with the European Court of Human Rights. They also welcome the efforts by the authorities to strengthen regional and local democracy.

Nevertheless, with respect to the role of the Prosecutor General's Office, concerns regarding the oversight function still remain. The rapporteurs encourage the authorities to continue co-operating closely in these fields with the Council of Europe expert bodies, including the Venice Commission, whose assessments they will study closely in the preparation of the report.

The rapporteurs welcome the statement of the Minister of Justice that he had requested the State Duma to reconsider the non-ratification of Protocol No. 14 to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). The rapporteurs strongly urge the newly-elected State Duma to ratify Protocol No. 14 as soon as possible, which is a key instrument for resolving the current operational difficulties of the Court. Such ratification would also resolve a main problem affecting the relations between Russia and the Council of Europe. They were also encouraged by the confirmation of the highest judicial authorities that the existing legal framework would exclude the application of the death penalty and expect the Russian authorities rapidly to translate this position into a constitutional principle, which would enable the country to ratify Protocol No. 6 to the ECHR.

While welcoming positive developments, the rapporteurs expressed serious concerns regarding the deteriorating situation of NGOs, the lack of media pluralism and the absence of an independent and impartial public service broadcaster and media regulatory authority, which are essential components of a genuinely democratic society. These will be among the issues for their follow-up visit to Russia in the autumn of this year.

¹. The two parliamentarians made a fact-finding visit to Moscow from 20-23 April 2008, during which they met the Minister of Justice, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, the President of the Supreme Court, the President of the Constitutional Court, the Deputy Prosecutor General, the Ombudsman and representatives of NGOs and the media.

The Parliamentary Assembly brings together 318 members from the national parliaments of the 47 member states.

President: Lluís Maria de Puig (Spain, SOC) ; Secretary General of the Assembly: Mateo Sorinas.

Political Groups: EPP/CD (Group of the European People's Party); SOC (Socialist Group); EDG (European Democratic Group); ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe); UEL (Group of the Unified European Left).