

**AS/Per (2007) PV 3**  
18 January 2008

## **Standing Committee**

**Minutes<sup>1</sup>**

**of the meeting held  
in Bratislava  
on 23 November 2007**

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<sup>1</sup> Approved by the Assembly on 21 January 2008.

## 1. OPENING OF THE MEETING

**Mr van der Linden, President of the Assembly**, opened the meeting at 9 a.m. and thanked the Slovak delegation and its Chair, Mr Zala, for their invitation to hold the meeting of the Standing Committee in Bratislava, and for their hospitality. He had been very pleased with his discussions with the President of the National Council of the Slovak Republic and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, which had been particularly constructive.

He invited the Standing Committee to approve a declaration prepared by the Chair of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in the context of International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (25 November 2007): "Involvement of men - a crucial factor for change to combat violence against women".

The declaration was approved (see Appendix I).

## 2. WELCOME ADDRESS BY MR PAVOL PAŠKA, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

**Mr Paška, President of the National Council of the Slovak Republic**, welcomed the Standing Committee to Slovakia. The Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe was both an honour and a challenge. Slovakia intended to promote the values that were those of the Council of Europe. The National Council had, in May 2007, hosted the Conference of the Speakers of European Union Parliaments. The present meeting was another step along the same path, enabling the authorities to make clear their will to support the Council of Europe's values.

**The President** thanked Mr Paška for his statement. He welcomed Mr Kubiš, with whom he had had a very interesting meeting the previous day. The document setting out the priorities of the Slovakian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe was in the files.

## 3. EXCHANGE OF VIEWS WITH MR JÁN KUBIŠ, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC, CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS CM/Inf(2007) 46

**Mr Kubiš** welcomed the members of the Standing Committee to Slovakia and expressed pleasure at his country's co-operation with the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly. He set out the priorities of the Slovakian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, which continued along the same lines as those of the previous Chairmanships. (*Statement reproduced in Appendix III to these minutes*)

**The President** thanked Mr Kubiš for his statement.

In reply to several questions raised by **Mr Kox**, **Mr Kubiš** said that he would shortly be travelling to Georgia, in order to assess the political situation on the eve of the elections. The Slovakian Chairmanship would of course support the activities of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights. On the subject of the Organisation's budget, he acknowledged that, in view of the lack of funds, it was necessary to continue to rationalise and prioritise activities, with the proper functioning of the Court being a priority.

Following a question from **Mr Foss** about Kosovo, **Mr Kubiš** said that it was pointless to engage in further speculation about the outcome of the negotiations. The decisions to be taken by both the European Union and UN Security Council would be crucial to the stability of the region and the prospects of integration into the Union of the countries concerned. Slovakia intended to support the Union's initiatives, particularly the deployment of an EU mission to Kosovo.

Replying to **Mr Mercan**, **Mr Kubiš** pointed out that the Council of Europe had developed standards for combating terrorism while respecting human rights. Terrorism was a threat that could not be ignored. Nor was it possible to ignore, in the course of the fight against terrorism, the need to respect human rights, in accordance with the standards of the Council of Europe, European Union and United Nations. Where enlargement of the European Union was concerned, Slovakia was in favour of the Union keeping its doors open to new member states, such as Croatia and Turkey. Once Turkey had honoured its commitments and implemented the *acquis communautaire*, which might or might not take a long time, then it would be able to join the Union.

**M. Eörsi** said that bilateral relations between Hungary and Slovakia could be better. **Mr Kubiš** replied that, nevertheless, some constructive progress had been made between the two countries in certain fields.

**Mr Ateş** referred to relations between the Council of Europe and the European Union, and said that, notwithstanding the conclusion of the memorandum of understanding, the Union continued to encroach on the Council of Europe's remit. **Mr Kubiš** said that the Committee of Ministers would, at its 118th meeting, be evaluating the memorandum of understanding, so as to consider how the co-ordination of activities could be further improved. In many respects, it was the Council of Europe which took precedence in the setting of standards, and that was a fundamental role in the European institutional architecture.

**The President** thanked the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic for his contribution and his detailed comments in reply to members' questions. He referred again to the situation in Georgia (stating that the Assembly would be sending a substantial delegation to observe the elections in that country), to the situation in Belarus, to intercultural dialogue (another priority for the Assembly) and, lastly, to the Organisation's budget, which was under serious threat because of the Court's problems.

*Mr Lindblad, Vice-President of the Assembly, took over from Mr van der Linden in the chair.*

#### 4. EXAMINATION OF NEW CREDENTIALS

Doc. 11449

The Standing Committee **ratified** the credentials of the newly appointed representatives and substitutes of the delegations of Belgium, Greece, Ireland and the Netherlands, as they appeared in Doc. 11449.

#### 5. MODIFICATIONS IN THE COMPOSITION OF COMMITTEES

Commissions (2007) 8  
+ addendum

The Standing Committee **ratified** the changes in the composition of Assembly committees in respect of the delegations of Belgium, Greece and Ireland, as they appeared in the documents Commissions (2007) 8 and addendum.

#### 6. REQUEST FOR A CURRENT AFFAIRS DEBATE OR A DEBATE UNDER URGENT PROCEDURE

**The President** stated that no request for a current affairs debate or a debate under urgent procedure had been submitted by the required deadline. Accordingly, there would be no debate under item 11.

#### 7. AGENDA

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**The President** said that the report on the draft Convention of the Council of Europe on the adoption of children, which appeared at item 19.a, would be taken after item 12.

The revised draft agenda, thus amended, was **adopted**.

#### 8. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY'S SITTINGS HELD ON 4 OCTOBER (AFTERNOON) AND 5 OCTOBER (MORNING) 2007

AS (2007) PV 35, 36

The minutes of proceedings of the Parliamentary Assembly's sittings on 4 October (afternoon) and 5 October (morning) 2007 were **approved**.

#### 9. REFERENCES, TRANSMISSIONS AND MODIFICATIONS OF REFERENCES TO COMMITTEES

AS/Bur (2007) 97

**The Director of General Services** referred to document AS/Bur (2007) 97, which set out the proposals for references, transmissions and modifications of references to committees, and which had been considered by the Bureau at its meeting on 22 November 2007. He notified members of the changes suggested by the Bureau under this item.

The Standing Committee **approved** the references and the amendments and extensions of references as they appeared in Appendix 1 to Appendix II below.

## 10. OBSERVATION OF ELECTIONS

### Observation of the pre-term parliamentary elections in Ukraine (30 September 2007)

AS/Bur/AHUKR (2007) 6

*Rapporteur of the Ad hoc Committee of the Bureau:*  
Mrs Hanne Severinsen (Denmark, ALDE)

**Mrs Severinsen** presented the report of the Ad hoc Committee to observe the pre-term parliamentary elections in Ukraine. These elections had overall taken place within the bounds of democratic standards; the campaign had been particularly open and competitive. Some concerns remained, however. The amendments made to the electoral legislation did not take it in the right direction. The existing rules required some clarification. The lists of voters left something to be desired. The electoral system as such should be revised.

**The President** thanked Mrs Severinsen, whose final report to the Assembly this was, for her exemplary contribution to the Assembly's work.

The Standing Committee **took note** of the report (Doc. 11469).

## 11. CURRENT AFFAIRS DEBATE OR DEBATE UNDER URGENT PROCEDURE

None.

## 12. ECONOMIC AFFAIRS AND DEVELOPMENT

### Activities and orientations of the Council of Europe Development Bank

Doc. 11306  
Amendments

*Rapporteur of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development:*  
Mr Márton Braun (Hungary, EPP/CD)

*Rapporteur of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population (for opinion):*  
Mr Andrej Zernovski ("the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", ALDE)

Doc. 11358

**The President** welcomed Mr Kolte, Chairman of the Governing Board of the Bank, Mr Alomar, Governor of the Bank, and Mr Ruiz-Ligero, Vice-Governor.

**Mr Braun** presented the report on the "Activities and orientations of the Council of Europe Development Bank" (Doc. 11306), which reviewed the activities during the period 2004-2006 of the Bank, which had celebrated its 50th anniversary the previous year. The Action Plan adopted at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Summit of Heads of State and Government had confirmed the role and aims of the Bank, which had stepped up its redeployment of funding to help the target group of central, east and south-east European countries. This tendency should be continued for the benefit of the States which were not members of the European Union.

**Mr Zernovski**, presenting the opinion on behalf of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population, said that 50% of the Bank's funding projects concerned the target group of the new or future member states of the European Union, with a view to the latter countries' integration into the Union. It was vital for the Bank to redeploy funding to programmes concerning states which were not members of the Union, more particularly in those regions affected by conflicts, for the benefit of refugees and displaced persons, especially in the Balkans and the Caucasus.

**Mr Kolte**, Chairman of the Governing Board of the Bank, welcomed the Bank's close contacts with the two Assembly committees concerned, and gave a summary of the Bank's recent activities (*Statement reproduced in Appendix IV to these minutes*).

**The President** thanked Mr Kolte for his statement, and said that six amendments to the draft recommendation had been presented.

**Mr Zernovski** presented Amendments Nos 1 to 3. **Mr Braun** said that the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development had been in favour. Amendments Nos 1, 2 and 3 were unanimously **adopted**.

**Mrs Severinsen** presented Amendment No 5, which was unanimously **adopted**.

**Mr Zernovski** presented Amendment No 4. The Committee on Economic Affairs and Development had been in favour, and Amendment 4 was unanimously **adopted**.

**Mrs Severinsen** presented Amendment No 6, which was also unanimously **adopted**.

**The President** put to the vote the draft recommendation set out in Doc. 11306, as amended, which was unanimously **adopted** [Recommendation 1818 (2007)].

## 19. LEGAL AFFAIRS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

- a. **Draft Convention of the Council of Europe on the adoption of children (revised)** Doc. 11274  
Doc. 11381  
Amendment

*Rapporteur of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights:  
Mr Jaume Bartumeu Cassany (Andorra, SOC)  
Rapporteur of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee  
(for opinion): Mrs Ruth-Gaby Vermot-Mangold (Switzerland, SOC)*

Doc. 11453

**Mr Marty**, in the absence of Mr Bartumeu Cassany, rapporteur, who had apologised for his absence, presented the report on the "Draft Convention of the Council of Europe on the adoption of children (revised)" (Doc. 11274). The draft Convention tackled fundamental issues and constituted a genuine advance in international standards relating to adoption, and in their harmonisation in the States Parties. The possibility of adoption by homosexual couples was left to the discretion of national legislatures. Adopted children were given access to the information about their origins held by the authorities. The Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights welcomed the very positive work done by the Council of Europe experts, but took the view that more should be done to give priority to the interests of the child. Inter alia it asked for reservations to the Convention not to be allowed at all, since sufficient flexibility was already available.

**Mr Schmied**, in the absence of the rapporteur for opinion, who had apologised for her absence, presented the opinion of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee. The Committee presented an amendment intended resolutely to promote the right of adopted children to access to information about their origins and to know the identity of their birth parents.

**The President** put to the vote the only amendment to the draft opinion that had been presented.

The amendment was unanimously **adopted**.

**The President** put to the vote the draft opinion set out in Doc. 11274, as amended, which was unanimously **adopted** [Opinion 266 (2007)].

## 13. RULES OF PROCEDURE AND IMMUNITIES

- a. **Improving the participation of members in Assembly plenary sessions and committee meetings** Doc. 11295

*Rapporteur of the Committee on Rules of Procedure and Immunities:  
Mr Andreas Gross (Switzerland, SOC)*

**Mr Gross** said that the Committee on Rules of Procedure and Immunities was presenting three reports to the present meeting, drawn up in the context of its detailed consideration of changes in the functioning of the Assembly. The report on "Improving the participation of members in Assembly plenary sessions and committee meetings" (Doc. 11295) was intended to promote various means of remedying the credibility deficit suffered by the Assembly, by encouraging improved participation by members and by making Assembly sessions and committee meetings more attractive. The Assembly also needed to rationalise its activities and structures, particularly by reducing the number of its committees. In many respects, the

situation of the Parliamentary Assembly and the challenges which it needed to meet were no different from those faced by national parliaments themselves.

Among the measures which were conceivable, **Mr Jurgens** said that rapporteurs' speaking time during debates should be so arranged that they could speak for longer and more frequently.

**Mr Kox** agreed, but noted that the Assembly was more a place for a succession of monologues than a true forum for discussions and exchanges of opinions. The answer to the problem of declining participation by members in the work of the Assembly was to organise debates in a way that fuelled genuine discussion. The proposals which appeared in the report had met with the approval of the UEL group, which he chaired.

**Mr Schmied** said that the Council of Europe represented a considerable and under-used geopolitical area. The Assembly held its meetings in Paris, a city to which many members were unable to make frequent journeys. He felt that the opposite was needed: the number of committees should be increased, but with restricted membership and with attractive subject matter.

**Mr de Puig** expressed a pessimistic view of the capacity of the planned reforms to achieve their aim. The Parliamentary Assembly was by its very nature a body whose members endeavoured to agree on a consensus, and not a place of ideological confrontation.

**Mrs Wurm's** view differed: the consensus reached in the Chamber was often the result of animated and impassioned debate in the committees, where diametrically opposed views were expressed. However, for the sake of the Assembly's credibility and legitimacy, it was important to encourage livelier debate during sessions, inter alia when the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers presented his or her communication.

**Mrs Err** concurred. Debates were sterile if they did not give rise to true exchanges. It was not, however, possible to discuss ways of improving participation by members unless the situation of the smaller Assembly delegations was borne in mind, the members of which were unable to participate effectively and regularly in the work of all the committees.

**Mr Marty** pointed out that members of the Assembly were also detained by their obligations in their national parliaments. That said, some members never appeared in committees or sittings, although they certainly were present. Complete transparency should therefore be promoted in the published information and statistics relating to attendance and participation. Similarly, the work of the Assembly ought to be refocused on a smaller number of reports on subjects likely to generate real debate, and not a succession of monologues.

**Mr Eörsi** agreed with the previous speakers that there was effectively a measure of idealism in the report's proposals. These reforms nevertheless deserved to be implemented, and he wholeheartedly supported the report.

**Mr Mignon** said that the chair of every delegation had a duty to shoulder his or her responsibilities and motivate its members. There was effectively no political jousting in Assembly debates, and members could be confused by the feeble consensus that emerged from some debates. He would like the Assembly to be more political. Another prerequisite of the promotion of its visibility and efficiency was a strengthening of dialogue with the Committee of Ministers, which should relay Assembly decisions at national level.

**The President** put to the vote the draft resolution set out in Doc.11295, which was unanimously **adopted** [Resolution 1583 (2007)].

**b. Application and amendment of various provisions of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure**

Doc. 11431  
Amendments

*Rapporteur of the Committee on Rules of Procedure and Immunities:  
Mr Erik Jurgens (Netherlands, SOC)*

**Mr Jurgens** presented the report on "Application and amendment of various provisions of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure" (Doc. 11431), which was intended to tidy up the Rules of Procedure to take account of changing practices in the Assembly, clarify certain provisions and specify the role and functions of the organs of the Assembly, particularly the Presidential Committee, the Bureau and the President of the Assembly. Among the innovations were a reduction to two years in the term of office of the President and committee

chairs, the election by the committees of their own bureau, clarification of the length of Assembly members' term of office and a change to the procedure for examining amendments.

**Mrs Err** said that these were constructive proposals to which she gave her support, and which, like those in the previous report, helped through improved organisation of debates to increase their quality and to make members more responsible. She particularly welcomed the capacity given to the committees to appoint their own bureau.

**Mr Kox** expressed full support for the report, particularly the proposals on changes to speaking time and on spontaneous questions to guests.

**Mr de Puig** expressed great satisfaction with the report, which made proposals along the right lines. It was essential to inject greater spontaneity into debates. The restriction on lists of speakers was problematic, and it should be made possible for more members to speak in debates.

**Mr Gross** congratulated the rapporteur, whose proposals supplemented those in his own report.

**The President** said that four amendments to the draft resolution had been presented.

**Mr Jurgens** presented Amendment No 2, relating to the length of Assembly members' term of office, together with a stylistic sub-amendment. The sub-amendment was approved, and Amendment No 2, as sub-amended, was unanimously **adopted**.

**Mr Jurgens** presented Amendment No 4, also relating to the length of Assembly members' term of office, which was also unanimously **adopted**.

Amendments Nos 3 and 1, also presented by **Mr Jurgens**, were also unanimously **adopted**.

**The President** put to the vote the draft resolution set out in Doc. 11431, as amended, which was unanimously **adopted** [Resolution 1584 (2007)].

**c. Gender equality principles in the Parliamentary Assembly**

Doc. 11432  
Amendments

*Rapporteur of the Committee on Rules of Procedure and Immunities:*

*Mrs Ana Mendonça (Portugal, SOC)*

*Rapporteur of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights:*

*(for opinion): Mrs Ingrida Circene (Latvia, EPP/CD)*

Doc. 11439

*Rapporteur of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men:*

Doc. 11433

*(for opinion): Mrs Lydie Err (Luxembourg, SOC)*

**Mr Gross**, in the absence of Mrs Mendonça, rapporteur, presented the report on "Gender equality principles in the Parliamentary Assembly" (Doc. 11432). Respect for gender equality was a vital element for assessing a parliament's degree of democracy. The Assembly needed to apply this principle to itself and to promote better gender representation within its own walls. The findings were not encouraging, as was evident from the three delegations' credentials ratified that very day. Efforts therefore still needed to be made to reverse the trend, although the Assembly was wholly dependent on national parliaments in this sphere.

**Mrs Circene** pointed out that equality between women and men was an integral part of human rights. The European Convention on Human Rights and Protocol 12 on the prohibition of discrimination were fundamental to the promotion of gender equality. The Assembly had adopted numerous recommendations in this field, but the results had not come up to expectations. But it needed to set an example in the implementation of the principles of gender equality. Encouragement should be given to the accession of women to posts of responsibility.

**Mrs Err** expressed complete disagreement with the proposals made in the report. There was an urgent need to promote equal representation within the Assembly. What the Assembly had done when fulfilling its duty to elect Judges to the Court, it could do again for other Council of Europe bodies. The Assembly could also draw on the declaration on women's participation in elections adopted by the Venice Commission in June 2006, which stated inter alia that deterrent penalties should be imposed in the event of failure to comply with the obligation to provide for a balanced percentage of women and men. The resolution under discussion could follow the same path. It was in the interest of democracy to encourage equal opportunities.

**Mrs Bilgehan** mentioned the situation in her country, where initiatives by associations and awareness-raising campaigns had borne fruit, resulting in 9% female membership of the Turkish parliament, a proportion twice as high as in the previous legislature. The Parliamentary Assembly had 24% female membership, which represented an increase over the previous figures, but fell below the figure in the European Parliament, for instance, which had 33%. The Assembly had no female chair of a political group, and only nine female chairs of national delegations. The report's proposals were very modest. How much longer would it take to achieve far-reaching change?

**Mr Jurgens** said that the aim of having the same percentage of women in Assembly delegations as in national parliaments, an aim oft restated by the Assembly, did not get much response in certain parliaments. The Assembly proved powerless against states which did not consider themselves bound by any kind of obligation in this sphere. The case of the election of the Maltese judge to the Court showed this.

**The President** said that 17 amendments to the draft resolution had been presented. Mr Gross would present the position on each of the Committee on Rules of Procedure and Immunities.

**Mrs Circene** presented Amendments Nos 13, 14 and 15 on behalf of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights. **Mr Gross** said that the Committee on Rules of Procedure and Immunities was in favour, and Amendments Nos 13, 14 and 15 were unanimously **adopted**.

**Mrs Err** presented Amendment No 1 on behalf of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. **Mr Gross** and **Mr Jurgens** expressed opposition, and Amendment No 1 was **rejected**.

Amendment No 16, presented by **Mrs Circene**, and opposed by **Mr Gross**, was **adopted**.

Amendments Nos 2 and 3, presented by **Mrs Err**, of which **Mr Gross** was in favour, were unanimously **adopted**.

Amendments Nos 4, 5, 6 and 7, presented by **Mrs Err**, and opposed by **Mr Gross**, were **rejected**.

Amendment No 17, presented by **Mrs Circene**, of which **Mr Gross** was in favour, was unanimously **adopted**.

Amendments Nos 8, 9 and 10, presented by **Mrs Err**, and opposed by **Mr Gross** and **Mr Jurgens**, were **rejected**.

Amendment No 18, presented by **Mrs Circene**, and opposed by **Mr Gross**, was also **rejected**.

**Mrs Err** withdrew Amendment No 11.

**The President** put to the vote the draft resolution set out in Doc. 11432, as amended, which was unanimously **adopted** [Resolution 1585 (2007)].

**The President** then invited members to decide on the four amendments to the draft recommendation that had been presented.

Amendment No 19, presented by **Mrs Circene**, of which **Mr Gross** was in favour, was unanimously **adopted**.

**Mrs Err** withdrew Amendment No 12.

Amendments Nos 20 and 21, presented by **Mrs Circene**, of which **Mr Gross** was in favour, were unanimously **adopted**.

**The President** put to the vote the draft recommendation set out in Doc. 11432, which was unanimously **adopted** [Recommendation 1819 (2007)].

**Mr van der Linden**, *President of the Assembly*, returned to the chair.



## 14. MIGRATION, REFUGEES AND POPULATION

### Europe's response to humanitarian disasters

Doc. 11429

*Rapporteur of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population:  
Mr Paschal Mooney (Ireland, ALDE)*

**Mr Zernovski**, in the absence of Mr Mooney, rapporteur, who had left the Assembly, presented the report on "Europe's response to humanitarian disasters" (Doc. 11429). Europe alone provided over 60% of all international humanitarian aid. European states participated in humanitarian action through various mechanisms. Steps needed to be taken to improve European states' capacity to organise humanitarian assistance efficiently and to respond both to emergencies stemming from natural disasters, such as earthquakes, tsunamis, floods and forest fires, and to humanitarian disasters resulting from armed conflict.

**The President** put to the vote the draft resolution set out in Doc. 11429, which was unanimously **adopted** [Resolution 1586 (2007)].

## 15. SOCIAL, HEALTH AND FAMILY AFFAIRS

### Situation of children living in post-conflict zones in the Balkans

Doc. 11353

*Rapporteur of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee:  
Mrs Carina Ohlsson (Sweden, SOC)*

**Mr Schmied**, in the absence of Mrs Ohlsson, rapporteur, presented the report on the "Situation of children living in post-conflict zones in the Balkans" (Doc. 11353). Particular attention needed to be given to the situation of this region's children and their rights. The children not only suffered from poverty and violence, but were also victims of trafficking and prostitution. It was through education in schools which encouraged peace and reconciliation that these children would have a future. The draft resolution contained a raft of measures which could help to bring hope to a whole lost generation.

**The President** put to the vote the draft resolution set out in Doc. 11353, which was unanimously **adopted** [Resolution 1587 (2007)].

## 16. ENVIRONMENT, AGRICULTURE AND LOCAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS

### Radioactive waste and protection of the environment

Doc. 11377

*Rapporteur of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs:  
Mr Alan Meale (United Kingdom, SOC)*

**Mr Schmied**, in the absence of Mr Meale, rapporteur, presented the report on "Radioactive waste and protection of the environment" (Doc. 11377). There was a real and highly sensitive problem where radioactive waste and its processing and storage were concerned, and it affected the citizens of all 47 member states. It was vitally important not to leave this burden for future generations. The report, adopted unanimously in committee, was the product of painstaking and detailed work on which the rapporteur should be congratulated. The draft resolution made recommendations with a view to application of the best possible solutions Europe-wide.

**The President** put to the vote the draft resolution set out in Doc. 11377, which was unanimously **adopted** [Resolution 1588 (2007)].

## 17. POLITICAL AFFAIRS

### a. Co-operation between the Assembly and the Conference of INGOs

Doc. 11441

*Rapporteur of the Political Affairs Committee:  
Mr Aleksander Biberaj (Albania, EPP/CD)*

**Mr Ateş**, in the absence of Mr Biberaj, presented the report on “Co-operation between the Assembly and the Conference of INGOs” (Doc. 11441). He drew attention to the pioneering role played by the Council of Europe in the development of the representation of civil society. INGOs had an important role to play in the Organisation's activities, especially those relating to the promotion of political pluralism.

**The President** put to the vote the draft resolution set out in Doc. 11441, which was unanimously **adopted** [Resolution 1589 (2007)]. The draft recommendation was also unanimously **adopted** [Recommendation 1820 (2007)].

**b. Secret ballot - European code of conduct on secret balloting, including guidelines for politicians, observers and voters**

Doc. 11438

*Rapporteur of the Political Affairs Committee:  
Mr Miloš Aligrudić (Serbia, EPP/CD)*

**Mr Aligrudić** presented the report on “Secret ballot - European code of conduct on secret balloting including guidelines for politicians, observers and voters” (Doc. 11438). Respect for ballot secrecy was one of the essential elements of free and fair elections. Electoral practices in member states continued to be shaped by their traditions. States should make sure that they altered these practices and should take steps to ensure that every citizen could cast a secret vote. The recommendations made in the report were also valid for the long-established democracies, and were useful for all member states.

**Mr Kox** said that there remained a gulf between the values and standards that were supposed to be applied in member states and the actual situation.

**Mr Ateş** invited the Standing Committee to support this important report, which made recommendations which would help to reinforce democracy in member states.

**The President** put to the vote the draft resolution set out in Doc. 11438, which was unanimously **adopted** [Resolution 1590 (2007)].

**c. Distance voting**

Doc. 11434

*Rapporteur of the Political Affairs Committee:  
Mr Zoltán Szabó (Hungary, SOC)*

**Mr Szabó** presented the report on “Distance voting” (Doc. 11434). Distance or postal voting, a way for voters unable to attend a polling station to make known their political decisions, covered the casting of votes by post, by proxy or electronically. Distance voting was bound to spread, and this was why steps needed to be taken to ensure that the votes cast were secure. E-voting held out numerous advantages in this respect. A specific report on e-democracy was to be drawn up in the near future by the Political Affairs Committee.

**Mr Kox** said that democracy was not a lottery and was a matter of citizens carrying out their duty. This was why there were rules giving positive support to the casting of votes. Making it easier for citizens to vote by giving them more ways of doing so was one thing, however, but getting them to make effective use of these methods was another.

**Mr Ateş** regarded such procedures as a challenge to democracies, which ought to strive for excellence.

**The President** put to the vote the draft resolution set out in Doc. 11434, which was unanimously **adopted** [Resolution 1591 (2007)].

**d. Code of Good Practice on Referendums**

Doc. 11435

*Rapporteur of the Political Affairs Committee:  
Mr Luc Van den Brande (Belgium, EPP/CD)*

**Mr Ateş**, in the absence of Mr Van den Brande, who had apologised for his absence, presented the report on the “Code of Good Practice on Referendums” (Doc. 11435). Referendums were a positive way of making it possible for citizens to participate in political decision-taking. The Venice Commission had adopted a Code of Good Practice on Referendums, including clear and detailed guiding principles, and member states were expected to put this into practice.

**The President** put to the vote the draft resolution set out in Doc. 11435, which was unanimously **adopted** [Resolution 1592 (2007)]. The draft recommendation was also unanimously **adopted** [Recommendation 1821 (2007)].

## 18. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN AND MEN

**In favour of a Parliamentary Assembly “Gender Equality Prize”**

Doc. 11436

*Rapporteur of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men:  
Mr Jean-Guy Branger (France, EPP/CD)*

**Mr Branger** presented the report “In favour of a Parliamentary Assembly ‘Gender Equality Prize’”. The objective set by the Assembly for representation of the sexes in public and political bodies, especially parliamentary assemblies, was far from having been achieved. Notwithstanding national legislation and awareness-raising activities in member states, little progress had been made. It was primarily the responsibility of the political parties to change mentalities, so that women entered politics and were guaranteed access to posts of responsibility and to places on party lists that gave them a chance of being elected. The Assembly should offer an equality prize as a reward for exemplary action or initiatives by political parties bringing about significant improvements in the situation.

**Mrs Bilgehan** expressed full support for the report, and said that the introduction of a prize, to be awarded under a media spotlight, could but help to publicise the Assembly’s efforts to promote equality.

**The President** put to the vote the draft resolution set out in Doc. 11436, which was unanimously **adopted** [Resolution 1593 (2007)].

## 19. LEGAL AFFAIRS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

### b. The principle of the rule of law

Doc. 11343  
Amendment

*Rapporteur of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights:  
Mr Erik Jurgens (Netherlands, SOC)*

**Mr Jurgens** presented the report on “The principle of the rule of law” (Doc. 11343). Nobody was unaware of the concept of the “rule of law” or of its importance as a fundamental principle and a shared European value. Although this principle was universally subscribed to, however, its definition and significance differed according to the terms in use in France, Germany and Russia, and its interpretation gave rise to some confusion. In Eastern Europe, it had a particular meaning: dictatorship of the law. Greater consistency therefore needed to be restored to the legal terminology in use in the member states.

**The President** said that an amendment to the draft resolution had been presented.

**Mr Jurgens** presented Amendment No 1, which was unanimously **adopted**.

**The President** put to the vote the draft resolution set out in Doc. 11343 as amended, which was unanimously **adopted** [Resolution 1594 (2007)].

He congratulated Mr Jurgens, whose final report to the Assembly this was, and thanked him for his unwavering involvement for the past 17 years in the activities of the Assembly and its committees.

## 20. OTHER BUSINESS

None.

**21. NEXT MEETINGS**

**The President** applauded the activity and involvement of those members who were leaving the Assembly at the end of this meeting of the Standing Committee, and thanked them for the exemplary contribution that they had made to its work. It was also his last meeting as President of the Standing Committee.

The Standing Committee **decided** that its next meetings would be held in Paris, on Friday, 14 March 2008, and in Stockholm (Sweden), on Friday, 30 May 2008.

The meeting **rose** at 1.30 p.m.

**APPENDIX I**  
**LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

**President of the Parliamentary Assembly**

Mr René van der LINDEN The Netherlands

**Vice-Presidents of the Parliamentary Assembly**

Mr Erik JURGENS The Netherlands  
 Mr Joachim HÖRSTER Germany  
 Mr Göran LINDBLAD Sweden  
 Mr Per-Kristian FOSS Norway  
 Mrs Darja LAVTIŽAR-BEBLER Slovenia  
 Mr Walter SCHMIED Switzerland  
 Mr Murat MERCAN Turkey  
 Mr Andrea RIGONI Italy  
 Mr Konstantin KOSACHEV Russian Federation  
 Mr Miloš ALIGRUDIĆ Serbia  
 Mr Boris ZALA Slovakia  
 Mr Jean-Claude MIGNON France

**Chairpersons of Political Groups**

Mr Lluís Maria de PUIG Socialist Group  
 Mr Mátyás EÖRSI Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe  
 Mr Mikhail MARGELOV European Democrat Group  
 Mr Tiny KOX Group of the Unified European Left

**Chairpersons of national delegations**

Mr Davit HARUTIUNYAN Armenia  
 Mrs Gisela WURM Austria  
 Mr Samad SEYIDOV Azerbaijan  
 Mrs Hanne SEVERINSEN Denmark  
 Mr Andres HERKEL Estonia  
 Mrs Sinikka HURSKAINEN Finland  
 Mr Aristotelis PAVLIDIS Greece  
 Mr Zoltán SZABÓ Hungary  
 Ms Guðfinna S. BJARNADÓTTIR Iceland  
 Mr Zigmantas BALČYTIS Lithuania  
 Mrs Lydie ERR Luxembourg  
 Mr Dick MARTY Suisse  
 Mr Göran LINDBLAD Sweden

**Chairperson of the Political Affairs Committee**

Mr Abdülkadir ATEŞ (SOC) Turkey

**Chairperson of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men**

Mrs Gülsün BİLGEHAN (SOC) Turkey

**Chairperson of the Committee on Rules of Procedure and Immunities**

Mr Andreas GROSS (SOC) Switzerland

**Chairperson of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)**

Mr Eduard LINTNER (EPP/CD) Germany

**Rapporteurs (not members of the Standing Committee):**

Mr Marton BRAUN Hungary  
 Mr Jean-Guy BRANGER France  
 Mr Andrej ZERNOVSKI "the former Yugoslav  
 Republic of Macedonia"  
 Mrs Ingrida CIRCENE Latvia

**Also present :****Other members of the Parliamentary Assembly**

Mrs Anna BENAKI Greece  
 Mr Sergej CHELEMENDIK Slovakia  
 Mrs Marietta DE POURBAIX-LUNDIN Sweden  
 Mr Per KAALUND Denmark  
 Mr Slavko MATIĆ Bosnia and Herzegovina  
 Mr Wolfgang WODARG Germany

**Invited personalities**

Mr Ján KUBIŠ, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic  
 Mr Pavol PAŠKA, President of the National Council of the Slovak Republic

**Council of Europe Development Bank**

Mr Lars KOLTE, Chairman of the Governing Board of the Council of Europe Development Bank  
 Mr Raphaël ALOMAR, Governor of the Council of Europe Development Bank  
 Mr Apolonio RUIZ-LIGERO, Vice Governor of the Council of Europe Development Bank  
 Mr Luca SCHIO, Deputy Head of the Office of the Chairman of the Governing Board of the Council of Europe Development Bank

**Permanent Representative to the Council of Europe**

Mr Viacheslav EGOROV, Deputy to the Permanent Representative of Russia to the Council of Europe

**Secretariat of the Parliamentary Assembly**

Mr Mateo SORINAS, Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly  
 Mr Wojciech SAWICKI, Director General  
 Mr Horst SCHADE, Director for General Services  
 Mr Kjell TORBIÖRN, Head of the Office of the Secretary General of the Assembly and Head of Secretariat of the Bureau of the Assembly  
 Mr Petr SICH, Head of the Private Office of the President of the Parliamentary Assembly  
 Mrs Valérie CLAMER, Secretary of the Standing Committee  
 Ms Alexandra ALLEON, Deputy Secretary of the Bureau of the Assembly

**Council of Europe**

Mr Terry DAVIS, Secretary General of the Council of Europe  
 Mrs Maud DE BOER-BUQUICCHIO, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe  
 Mrs Mireille PAULUS, Secretary to the Committee of Ministers  
 Ms Giusi PAJARDI, Head of Secretariat Partial Agreement Development Bank  
 Mr Ivan KOEDJIKOV, Deputy Director of the Private Office of the Secretary General and the Deputy Secretary General  
 Mr Gianluca ESPOSITO, Adviser to the Secretary General and the Deputy Secretary General

## APPENDIX II

### SYNOPSIS

The **Standing Committee**, meeting on 23 November 2007 in Bratislava with first Mr van der Linden, President of the Assembly, and then Mr Lindblad, Vice-President of the Assembly, in the chair:

- adopted a Declaration on "Involvement of men – a crucial factor for change to combat violence against women", in the framework of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (25 November 2007) (see Appendix 1);
- heard a welcome address by Mr Pavol Paška, Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic;
- held an exchange of views with Mr Ján Kubiš, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers;
- ratified the credentials of new members of the Assembly submitted by the delegations of Belgium, Greece, Ireland and the Netherlands;
- ratified the changes in the composition of general Assembly committees in respect of the delegations of Belgium, Greece and Ireland;
- ratified the references and modifications of references proposed by the Bureau which are contained in Appendix 2 hereafter;
- held an exchange of views on the observation of the pre-term parliamentary elections in Ukraine (30 September 2007), on the basis of the report of the Bureau Ad Hoc Committee;
- adopted, on behalf of the Assembly, the following texts:

<b>Opinion 266 (2007)</b>	<b>Draft Convention of the Council of Europe on the adoption of children (revised)</b>
<b>Resolution 1583 (2007)</b>	<b>Improving the participation of members in Assembly plenary sessions and committee meetings</b>
<b>Resolution 1584 (2007)</b>	<b>Application and amendment of various provisions of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure</b>
<b>Resolution 1585 (2007)</b>	<b>Gender equality principles in the Parliamentary Assembly</b>
<b>Resolution 1586 (2007)</b>	<b>Europe's response to humanitarian disasters</b>
<b>Resolution 1587 (2007)</b>	<b>Situation of children living in post-conflict zones in the Balkans</b>
<b>Resolution 1588 (2007)</b>	<b>Radioactive waste and protection of the environment</b>
<b>Resolution 1589 (2007)</b>	<b>Co-operation between the Assembly and the Conference of INGOs</b>
<b>Resolution 1590 (2007)</b>	<b>Secret ballot - European code of conduct on secret balloting, including guidelines for politicians, observers and voters</b>
<b>Resolution 1591 (2007)</b>	<b>Distance voting</b>
<b>Resolution 1592 (2007)</b>	<b>Code of Good Practice on Referendums</b>

<b>Resolution 1593 (2007)</b>	<b>In favour of a Parliamentary Assembly “Gender Equality Prize”</b>
<b>Resolution 1594 (2007)</b>	<b>The principle of the rule of law</b>
<b>Recommendation 1818 (2007)</b>	<b>Activities and orientations of the Council of Europe Development Bank</b>
<b>Recommendation 1819 (2007)</b>	<b>Gender equality principles in the Parliamentary Assembly</b>
<b>Recommendation 1820 (2007)</b>	<b>Co-operation between the Assembly and the Conference of INGOs</b>
<b>Recommendation 1821 (2007)</b>	<b>Code of Good Practice on Referendums</b>

- decided to hold the following meetings:

- . in Paris, on 14 March 2008,
- . in Stockholm (Sweden), on 30 May 2008.



**APPENDIX 1**

**DECLARATION**  
**in the framework of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women**  
**(25 November 2007)**

***Involvement of men – a crucial factor for change to combat violence against women***

Violence against women, including domestic violence, is a serious violation of human rights affecting all social milieus and every European country.

The Parliamentary Assembly, which is running the parliamentary dimension of the Council of Europe campaign “Stop domestic violence against women” (2006-2008), is determined to pursue its action against this assault on human dignity. It calls on national parliaments to establish a legal framework which ensures that victims are protected, perpetrators prosecuted and action taken to prevent the evil.

Combating violence against women also requires a radical change in attitudes in Europe and combined action by the whole of society. In this context the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly is convinced that involvement of men – who are still in the majority in decision-making spheres – is a crucial factor for change to combat violence against women, promote gender equality and build a fairer society that respects fundamental rights.

The Assembly therefore calls on national parliaments to join “Combating violence against women: men get involved”, its pan-European parliamentary initiative to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (25 November 2007). In particular it urges national parliaments to set up networks of male MPs in Parliament and take action to raise men’s awareness and educate boys. It also encourages national parliaments to pursue their support for the Council of Europe campaign until June 2008 and reinforce law on violence against women, in line with PACE Resolution 1582 (2007) adopted on 5 October 2007.

**APPENDIX 2****Decisions on documents tabled for references to committees****A. REFERENCES TO COMMITTEES**

**Reference No. 3381    Doc. 11399**  
**Motion for a resolution presented by Mrs Cliveti and others**  
**Centenary of the birth of Simone de Beauvoir (2008): VIPs committed to**  
**promoting equality between women and men**

*Transmission to the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men for information*

**Reference No. 3382    Doc. 11400**  
**Motion for a resolution presented by Mrs Pernaska and others**  
**For a Europe-wide sex offenders register**

*Reference to the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights for report and to the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee for opinion*

**Reference No. 3383    Doc. 11401**  
**Motion for a resolution presented by Mrs Vermot-Mangold and others**  
**The role of parliamentarians in promoting the rapid entry into force of the**  
**Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings**  
**and its ratification by as many states as possible**

*Reference to the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights for report at the Standing Committee meeting on 14 March 2008 and to the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men for opinion*

**Reference No. 3384**    **Doc. 11402**  
**Motion for a resolution presented by Mr Sasi and others**  
**The role and relevance of the world economic institutions in an era of globalisation**

*Reference to the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development for report*

**Reference No. 3385**    **Doc. 11404**  
**Motion for a resolution presented by Mrs Bemelmans-Videc and others**  
**Allegations of politically-motivated abuses of the criminal justice system in Council of Europe member states**

*Reference to the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights for report and to the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development for opinion*

**Reference No. 3329**    **Doc. 11172**  
**Motion for a resolution presented by Mr Gross and others**  
**Request for an investigation to clarify the allegedly suspicious death of former President Boris Trajkovski of "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"**

*Reference to the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights for report*

## **B.    EXTENSION OF REFERENCES**

1.    **Doc. 10717**  
**Motion for a recommendation presented by Mr Cortajarena and others**  
**Immigration from Sub-Saharan Africa**  
**Ref. No. 3148 of 25 November 2005 – validity: 25 November 2007**

*Extension until 30 May 2008*

2.    **Doc. 10536**  
**Motion for a resolution presented by Mr Torosyan and others**  
**Göçeada/İmbros and Bozcaada/Tenedos**  
**Ref. no. 3171 of 27 January 2006 – validity: 27 January 2008**

*Extension until 30 June 2008*

3.    **Doc. 10782**  
**Letter by Mr Mercan**  
**Riots in European Cities: lessons and Council of Europe response**  
**Ref. no. 3166 of 23 January 2006 – validity: 23 January 2008**

*Extension until 30 June 2008*

4.    **Doc. 10640**  
**Motion for a recommendation presented by Mr Jurgens and others**  
**Legal recognition of same-sex partnerships in Europe**  
**Ref. no. 3134 of 1 September 2005 – validity: 31 December 2007**  
**(extended on 25 June 2007)**

*Extension until 31 March 2008*

5. **Doc. 10714**  
**Motion for a resolution presented by Mr Pourgourides and others**  
**Freedom of religion and other human rights for non-Muslim minorities in Turkey**
- Doc. 10724**  
**Motion for a resolution presented by Mr Mercan and others**  
**The plight of the Turkish muslim minorities in Western Thrace, Greece**  
**Ref. no. 3203 of 17 March 2006 – validity: 31 March 2008**

*Extension until 31 December 2008.*

**APPENDIX III****SPEECH DELIVERED BY MR. JÁN KUBIŠ,  
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC  
AND CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS**

As you are aware, the Slovak Republic took over the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers for the first time on 12 November, following the very active Chairmanship of Serbia. We are pleased to be in the Chair and I can assure you that it is our intention to be equally active. It is a pleasure to receive the Standing Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly here in Bratislava so soon in order to give you an overview of the Slovak priorities and inform you about the most important developments in the activities and work of the Committee of Ministers in recent months.

The implementation of Council of Europe values, standards and principles remains of great importance to the Slovak authorities. In this perspective, Slovakia will support the continued implementation of the priorities of the Third Summit Action Plan. Slovakia's priorities have three broad themes.

The first one is the promotion of a citizens' Europe. The Slovak Chairmanship considers that involvement of civil society and the general public in the agenda of the Council of Europe will increase its success. It will therefore emphasise the need for openness and the need for solidarity with non-governmental organisations and civil society, in relation to its activities and further development. In line with this, Slovakia will follow the implementation of the recently adopted Committee of Ministers' Recommendation on the legal status of non-governmental organisations.

The Slovak Chairmanship will furthermore seek to implement the recommendations concerning the functioning of the Forum for the Future of Democracy adopted by the Ministers' Deputies this week. In this context, I would like to underline that I welcome the Assembly's strong commitment to and active participation in the Forum and in its Advisory Board. The Chairmanship will strive to enhance the quality of the contextual and organisational aspects of events. It will actively participate in the implementation of the follow-up conclusions.

Access to information is important for a genuine dialogue with non-governmental organisations and for shaping the political awareness of citizens. We welcome the elaboration of a Council of Europe convention on access to official documents, which will be the first document of its kind.

As to our second theme - a transparent and efficient Council of Europe, I would like to emphasise our aim to achieve complementarity and synergy between the main European organisations, the Council of Europe, the European Union, the OSCE as well as between the Council of Europe and the United Nations. Slovakia will aim to promote further dialogue, exchange of experience and good practices and to improve the co-ordination of activities.

Following the conclusion of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Council of Europe and the European Union in May this year, its implementation has been high on the agenda of the Committee of Ministers. It was also on the agenda of the Quadripartite meeting between the Council of Europe and the European Union held in Strasbourg on 23 October 2007. On that occasion the participants discussed co-operation between the two institutions in particular regarding the promotion of democracy and within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy. They reaffirmed their commitment to implementing the Memorandum and agreed to regularly review its implementation at the technical and political level. The implementation of the Memorandum will thus be discussed also at the next Quadripartite meeting to be held in spring 2008 during the Slovak Chairmanship.

I recall that at the 117th Session of the Committee of the Ministers of the Council of Europe, the Ministers requested an evaluation of the annual implementation of the Memorandum. The Slovak Chairmanship attaches great importance to the elaboration of this comprehensive evaluation which will be submitted to the 118th Session of the Committee of Ministers to be held at the beginning of May 2008.

The two main topics discussed at the Quadripartite meeting are in fact closely linked to the follow up to the Juncker report, which contains recommendations covering both these issues. I know that the implementation of the report is a priority for the Assembly. I am therefore pleased to inform you that the Ministers' Deputies'

Rapporteur Group on external relations is actively pursuing this issue, which is a constant item on its agenda. For the time being, the Group is concentrating its work inter alia on Recommendation No. 13 referring to an increased involvement of the Foreign Ministers in the Organisation's work and their attendance at Ministerial sessions.

The Slovak Chairmanship will also focus on further strengthening co-operation between the Council of Europe and the OSCE, while supporting the existing co-operation mechanisms. I take this occasion to inform you that on 19 October, the 6th meeting of the Co-ordination Group between the Council of Europe and the OSCE was held at the Council of Europe's headquarters in Strasbourg. In the light of the reports jointly presented by the focal points of the two organisations, the Group welcomed the progress made regarding co-operation in the four priority areas, ie the fight against terrorism, the protection of national minorities, the fight against trafficking in human beings and the promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination. Referring to the future, it agreed on the necessity of sustaining the efforts that had been undertaken over the last three years and on the importance of a constant flow of information between the two organisations. The Slovakian Chairmanship would like to emphasise the importance of this as it will allow to identify at early planning stages the potential areas for co-operation and to keep the risks of unnecessary duplication to a minimum. The next co-ordination meeting is due to be held in spring 2008.

Slovakia will also promote co-operation with the United Nations and taking advantage of our membership of the UN Security Council for the past two years, we will prepare the elaboration of another resolution on co-operation.

The work aimed at strengthening the system of human rights protection of the Council of Europe, in particular the European Court of Human Rights, has the full support of the Slovak Chairmanship. In this context, I must underline the importance of the proper functioning of national judicial systems. Slovakia will host a meeting of government agents in Bratislava early 2008 in order to discuss these issues.

I know that the Assembly has made considerable efforts for the ratification of Protocol No. 14 to the Convention. I would like to underline the important efficiency increases its entry into force would bring with it and call again for its ratification.

Slovakia also supports the office of the Commissioner of Human Rights and, referring again to the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding and to the follow-up to the Juncker report, I would like to recall that the Commissioner is preparing a memorandum on prospects for reinforced cooperation with the European Union, to be submitted to the Deputies before the end of the year.

I come now to our third theme which relates to respect for and promotion of the core values: human rights, rule of law and democracy.

During the Chairmanship, Slovakia will lead efforts in the fight against discrimination, racism, anti-Semitism, islamophobia, xenophobia, extreme nationalism and chauvinism. We will also promote teaching about the Holocaust. I know that these issues are close to the heart of the Assembly and Slovakia is looking forward to working with you on these and many other issues.

In this context I would like to underline that the Slovak Chairmanship supports the EU Initiative of a European Year on Intercultural Dialogue 2008 as well as the action undertaken by the Council of Europe in this field, i.e. the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue and the 2008 Exchange on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue.

Slovakia will also pursue the objective of a peaceful, secure and socially responsible Europe. This week here in Bratislava, Slovakia and the Council of Europe have been organising the 8th Conference of European Health Ministers "People on the move: Human rights and challenges to health systems".

Turning now to more political issues, Slovakia will support the strengthening of security and stability in the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe as well as a further deepening of the European integration process. Support for democracy, the rule of law and human rights in Kosovo will be part of this policy. During our Chairmanship, I personally intend to visit some countries of the above-mentioned regions. I will travel to Georgia already next week.

The situation in Georgia has been followed closely by the Ministers' Deputies in the context of the work of its Rapporteur Group on democracy. At their meeting held on 21 November, the Ministers' Deputies decided on a set of measures to assist with the preparation of presidential elections to be held on 5 January 2008. The

Committee of Ministers will pay particular attention to the way in which these elections are run and will rely in this respect on the observations made by the Assembly's election observation mission.

During the autumn, the Committee of Ministers' Rapporteur Group on Democracy has considered the situation in Belarus on a number of occasions and this item will soon be on its agenda again. The Slovak Chairmanship wishes to attract the attention of the Belarus authorities to the Council of Europe and its values. We will support the full use of all assistance and co-operation programmes of the Council of Europe that would change Belarus' attitude with respect to meeting the criteria for membership.

On the important issue of minority protection, Slovakia intends to take advantage of the 10th anniversary of the entry into force of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, to support the continuation and development of activities in this field.

Having in mind the very difficult situation of Roma and Travellers, I would like to underline that Slovakia highly values the Council of Europe's efforts in this area, and not least those of your Assembly. We would like to see an enhancement of these activities and during our Chairmanship we will convene an international conference focussing on education of Roma children and youth under the aegis of our Deputy Prime Minister.

These are, Ladies and Gentlemen, the Slovak priorities for the coming months. They may seem ambitious but with the help of all member states and the active support of all Council of Europe institutions, including your Assembly, I am confident that we can achieve considerable progress. We will certainly invest all our energy in this endeavour.

## APPENDIX IV

### **STATEMENT BY Mr LARS KOLTE, CHAIRMAN OF THE GOVERNING BOARD OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE DEVELOPMENT BANK**

It is with great pleasure that I accepted the invitation to address the Standing Committee on the activities of the Council of Europe Development Bank. On behalf of the Bank, and in particular of Governor Alomar who is accompanying me today, I would like to express our gratitude for this important opportunity.

I would also like to thank the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development and the Rapporteur for the open and constructive dialogue throughout the preparation of the report. I had the opportunity to meet members of the Committee on several occasions. Mr Braun also took part in the annual Joint Meeting of the Bank last June in Prague. Further we have maintained close contacts with the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population, which contributed to the report.

The CEB attaches great importance to its relations with the Parliamentary Assembly and the ongoing dialogue. The Governing Board always examines carefully the recommendations adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly and transmitted to it by the Committee of Ministers.

Mr Braun has made an excellent review of the activity of the Bank over the past three years and there is no need for me to repeat here what is already covered in the report. Instead, I will try to share with you some thoughts on the action of the Bank and the challenges it has to face to fulfil its mandate in the forthcoming years.

This year, the Bank is carrying out the mid term review of its Medium Term Development Plan for the 2005-2009 period. The initial results of the Bank's activities in the first half of the Plan are consistent with the objectives pursued: The ambitious objective of rebalancing the loans portfolio, entailing a substantial increase in loans allocated to the Target Group countries has been achieved. The 50/50 breakdown of annual disbursements between the two groups of countries was strictly respected in this period.

The Bank has introduced accompanying measures to the Development Plan in order to underpin its activities in the Target Group. These include the possibility of granting interest-rate subsidies from the Selective Trust Account, in particular to projects in the least developed member countries. Other accompanying measures include an increased support for job creation and preservation in the Target Group countries, as well as the possibility to go beyond the general limit of financing a maximum of 50% of total project costs.

Among the Bank's three main sectorial lines of action, "strengthening social integration" saw the highest activity levels, with almost two thirds of the loans disbursed during 2005-2009 falling into this category. "Management of the environment" and "development of human capital" seem to be catching up on the basis of approvals and disbursement so far in 2007.

The CEB has pursued an active co-operation policy with other international institutions. As set out in Chapter VI of Mr Braun's report, this allowed the Bank to broaden the scope of its action and optimise project development for the greater benefit of recipient countries.

I believe that our Bank must henceforth strive to muster all its strengths, to pursue the ongoing modernisation and to make better known what we are and what we do. We must further improve our transparency and visibility in the years to come, in particular in the wake of the communication actions undertaken last year within the framework of the Institution's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

A lot has been achieved already, and this is easy to see if you compare the Bank's website to what we had there only a year ago. Management has launched a new quarterly communication magazine, "*CEB info*", which is also available online and which enables anyone interested to obtain up-to-date information on the Bank.

In effect, these steps have enhanced our transparency toward our shareholders but also towards the not less demanding rating agencies. Each year the rating agencies evaluate us in a difficult global context. This is a long-term process and it is important to remember that an "AAA" rating should never be taken for granted.

The Bank has recently launched a comprehensive strategic review: It must be clear that our priority is to improve our governance and increase the added value that we give to our shareholders and customers.

This exercise needs the support of all our stakeholders: Not only the governments represented on our Governing Board, but also the members of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly. If we carry it through, this reform will enable our Bank to become more progressive, more readable and more transparent, in accordance with the wishes of each and every one of us.

Rich in experience, strengthened by the backing of its 39 member states and inspired by the values of the Council of Europe, the CEB will be in a position to play its full role in the service of social cohesion and sustainable development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.