

Press Release

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PACE President urges Serbian parliamentarians to counter rising nationalism by focusing on wellbeing of citizens

Strasbourg, 13.07.2006 – René van der Linden, President of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE), today urged Serbian parliamentarians to counter rising nationalism and political radicalisation by focusing on ensuring the well-being of citizens. "It is important you deliver to your citizens what concerns them most: jobs, social security, education and health care," he said during an exchange of views with the Serbian Parliament's Committee of European Integration.

On the final leg of a four-country tour of the Balkans, Mr van der Linden also said that drafting a new Constitution in consultation with the Council of Europe was "vital" for Serbia, as it was a pre-condition for decentralisation and a number of other reforms involving minorities and the judiciary.

In meetings yesterday with President Boris Tadic, Deputy Prime Minister Ivana Dulic-Markovic and the Speaker of Parliament Predrag Markovic, the President also raised the question of Serbia's six-month Chairmanship of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers in May 2007, which he described as "an opportunity" for the country.

He urged Serbia to establish open and harmonious relations with neighbouring states and appealed for "dialogue, compromise and consensus" in the difficult negotiations on the future status of Kosovo. "It is important to have a national identity – one must be true to one's roots – but nationalism should never become a form of isolation. A way must be found to deal with the past which does not obstruct the future."

Mr van der Linden also called for more commitment in Serbia's co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and efforts to raise the public understanding of Milosevic-era crimes. "It is not the Serbian people who are on trial, but a number of well-identified individuals," he pointed out.

He praised the "considerable progress" made in ensuring respect for minorities, but said much remained to be done, and encouraged a tougher approach to the twin evils of corruption and organised crime.

President van der Linden also met leaders of opposition parties and religious leaders during his visit.

The Parliamentary Assembly brings together 315 members from the national parliaments of the 46 member states.

President: René van der Linden (Netherlands, EPP/CD); Secretary General of the Assembly: Mateo Sorinas.

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