

Press Release

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Ukrainian Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich at PACE session in Strasbourg

Unity of Ukraine is crucial for unity of Europe, says PACE President

Strasbourg, 17.04.2007 – “Dividing Ukraine into ‘pro-Western’ and ‘pro-Russian’ is an offence to the wisdom of the people of Ukraine,” said Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly President René van der Linden today when [welcoming Ukrainian Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich](#). “Ukraine, Russia, Europe – these are notions and realities which cannot exist without one another. Ukraine is a crucial link for unity of the whole continent. We are all concerned by the need for it to maintain good relations with its neighbours both in the West and in the East,” he said.

Mr van der Linden stressed that PACE was not here to judge who is right and who is wrong. “By no means is your presence here today a way of us taking sides. If this Assembly has become over the years the highest moral authority on the continent, it is because we have always stood by our principles; because we have always been an open forum for dialogue and discussion,” he explained.

“The Ukrainian people have firmly made the choice for democracy,” the PACE President said. He appealed to the decision-makers to show a great sense of political responsibility to their people and not to heat up tensions in society.

“The existing democratic mechanisms have to be used to their full potential,” he said. He also stressed that the current situation had to be resolved in full compliance with the Constitution of Ukraine and through a constructive dialogue between all political forces represented in the Parliament, and not through street demonstrations. “The Assembly stands ready to contribute to finding a political solution to the current crisis,” he said, expressing hope that the urgent procedure debate on Thursday 19 April would contribute to that aim.

He finally urged the EU to simplify visa arrangements to encourage exchanges of students, experts and young people, rather than discourage them, recalling that people-to-people contacts are one of the most important building blocks of European unity.

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).