

Press Release

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Opposition must be accepted as a normal and necessary part of political life, says PACE President in Moscow

Strasbourg, 21.12.2007 – "Opposition must not be considered as an enemy, but as an integral part of every democratic society," declared René van der Linden, President of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE), during his visit to Moscow from 19 to 21 December 2007.

Following the critical evaluation by PACE observers of the recent parliamentary elections, the PACE President urged the Russian authorities to take seriously into consideration the conclusions and recommendations of the observers and make substantial improvements before the forthcoming presidential elections, in particular as regards the registration of candidates and fair access of all candidates to the media.

"PACE intends to observe these elections and I expect that PACE will be invited", Mr van der Linden added.

During his meetings in the State Duma, the PACE President called on Russian parliamentarians to ratify Protocols 6 and 14 to the European Convention on Human Rights.

As regards Protocol 6, he expressed the hope that it could be ratified soon, which would be an excellent start for the new Duma to demonstrate its human rights commitment.

As for Protocol 14, the PACE President stressed that states must consider the Court and its decisions as an instrument of human rights protection of their citizens, and therefore do their utmost to increase the efficiency of this unique human rights mechanism.

Mr van der Linden stressed the necessity to avoid double standards in Europe. "The Council of Europe is a unique pan-European organisation where states participate on an equal footing. Using double standards would undermine the very foundation on which the Organisation is based," he said.

Finally, Mr van der Linden expressed the hope that the improvement of relations between Russia and its neighbours, as observed in particular with Poland, will continue. In this connection, he now expects that the negotiations between the EU and Russia on the new partnership agreement will start as soon as possible next year. "Our relations with Russia must be forward looking and we have to build on the many elements we have in common, rather than put emphasis on those which could divide us," he said.

During his visit, René van der Linden met with the Speaker of Russia's Federation Council, Sergey Mironov, the Speaker of the State Duma, Boris Gryzlov, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov, the Special Representative of the President of the Russian Federation on relations with the EU, Sergey Yastrjembksi, the leaders of political groups in the Duma (Gennady Zyuganov, Leader of the Communist Party,

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Vladimir Zhirinovski, Leader of the Liberal Democratic Party, Alexander Babakov, head

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

of the Fair Russia group) as well as Yevgeny Primakov, President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the leader of the Russian delegation to PACE, Konstantin Kosachev and Boris Nemtsov from the Union of Right Forces.

He will also meet the First Deputy Prime Minister, Dmitry Medvedev, as well as Mikhail Kasyanov, former Prime Minister of Russia and Grigori Yavlinski, Leader of the "Yabloko" Party.