

Press Release

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PACE President bitterly disappointed at the failure of the Belarusian presidential elections to meet international standards

Strasbourg, 21.03.2006 - René van der Linden, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), expressed his bitter disappointment that the Assembly's repeated calls for the Belarusian authorities to ensure free and fair presidential elections had gone unheeded.

"As we feared, the OSCE's preliminary findings have concluded that the election did not meet international standards," said Mr van der Linden. "Through a combination of manipulative influence by the administration, a lack of freedom of expression and information, unequal access to campaigning opportunities, state control of the mass media, the frequently violent harassment of opposition candidates and supporters and an election administration that lacked independence, the Belarusian people were not permitted to choose their president through free expression of their political will."

"The Parliamentary Assembly will continue to extend its full support to those in Belarus who yearn for democracy. The authorities must respect the right of the Belarusian people to exercise their freedoms of association, assembly and expression through peaceful demonstrations."

"The international community must now give a firm, coordinated response. In particular, we must reinforce our efforts, both practical and political, to promote democratic forces and civil society in Belarus. The establishment of a Council of Europe Information Office in Minsk would represent a concrete step in this direction. As the Council of Europe approaches the beginning of the first ever Russian chairmanship of its Committee of Ministers, we can look forward to new opportunities for bringing about democratic reforms in Belarus."

In January, the Parliamentary Assembly adopted a [recommendation](#) on the situation in Belarus on the eve of the presidential election, which was followed by organisation of an International [Conference](#) on Belarus in Prague on 22-23 February 2006.

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).