

Press Release

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PACE President calls on President Kaczynski to retract his proposal concerning reintroduction of the death penalty

Strasbourg, 03.08.2006 - In a letter sent to the President of Poland, Lech Kaczynski, the President of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE), René van der Linden, expressed his deep concern at the proposal to reintroduce the death penalty in Europe. The text reads as follows:

"Abolition of the death penalty in all circumstances is a central policy of the Council of Europe. Indeed, the creation of a de facto death penalty-free zone throughout our 46 member States – stretching from Iceland in the west to Vladivostok in the east, and from Norway in the north to the south-east of Turkey – is one of our organisation's greatest achievements.

The Parliamentary Assembly in particular, which brings together democratically elected representatives from across Europe, has always been at the forefront of this campaign. For many years, we have required new Council of Europe member states to abolish the death penalty as an essential condition of membership.

In our view, the death penalty has no place in the criminal justice system of any modern, civilised country. To suggest that its reintroduction could in any sense represent a positive development would be a direct attack on our common values, which are founded on respect for the basic human dignity of every person. Indeed, reintroduction of the death penalty would represent a serious retrograde step in the development of a pan-European space of respect for democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

In particular, restoration of the death penalty would constitute a flagrant breach of a country's obligations under the European Convention of Human Rights, which enshrines the fundamental values of the Council of Europe. Its reintroduction would thus be completely incompatible with membership of our organisation.

I can assure you that, given the extreme gravity of this issue, the Parliamentary Assembly will continue to follow developments closely.

In the light of these concerns, I hope that you will now see fit to reconsider your position and to retract your proposal".

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).