

Press Release

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René van der Linden to President Putin: 'our respect for common values should be reflected in concrete steps'

Strasbourg, 17.01.2008 – At the end of a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow, Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) President René van der Linden today welcomed the Russian Federation's European orientation and its commitment to the values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

"I once again wish to welcome the moratorium on the death penalty and Mr Putin's public position against capital punishment. However this commitment should be formally confirmed by the Russian Federation by ratifying Protocol No 6, he said.

Also, according to the PACE President, "ratification of Protocol No 14 by Russia is important to maintain and develop a common European legal space, at the heart of which lies the European Court of Human Rights. René van der Linden recalled that "the Court's decisions are not directed against any member state, but are for safeguarding European citizen's basic rights".

On the eve of the Presidential election, which PACE will observe, René van der Linden discussed with President Putin PACE's evaluation of the last parliamentary elections. He recalled that the most critical points concerned the treatment of the opposition, fair access for the media and the use of administrative resources. He expressed confidence that the Russian authorities will implement PACE's recommendations in those fields. In this connection, he called for the law to be strictly respected during the process of registration of candidates, in particular during verification of the signatures collected by those candidates.

Relations between Russia and the rest of Europe will be one of the most important political challenges our continent will face in the coming years, PACE President said. He underlined the need to avoid double standards in Europe – "in the Council of Europe, all countries cooperate on equal footing", he said, and the role of Russia in promoting inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue: "Russia is a multi-cultural and multi-religious country". He also expressed the need to reinforce trust and confidence in relations with Russia, and said that the discussions on a US nuclear shield should not lead to confrontation and division.

With this visit Mr van der Linden's three-year mandate as President of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly comes to an end. During this period, relations with Russia have been reinforced, he said, while recalling that Moscow had chaired the Committee of Ministers, Patriarch Alexei II had addressed the Assembly and cooperation at parliamentary and governmental levels had been strengthened.

President van der Linden invited Vladimir Putin to address the Parliamentary Assembly Spring part-session (14-18 April 2008).

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).