

Press Release

Parliamentary Assembly – Communication Unit

Ref: 065a09

Tel. +33 (0)3 88 41 31 93

Fax +33 (0)3 90 21 41 34

Internet: <http://assembly.coe.int>

e-mail: pace.com@coe.int



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Chechnya: PACE committee demands full elucidation of the recent spate of murders

Strasbourg, 27.01.2009 – The Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE), meeting this morning in Strasbourg, adopted the following statement:¹

"Following the recent spate of murders and disappearances of a lawyer, a journalist, a witness and other critics of, in particular, the regime of the President of the Chechen Republic, the committee urges the competent authorities in Moscow and Vienna to carry out full inquiries and to prosecute the killers as well as the instigators and organisers of these crimes.

Stanislav Markelov, gunned down in Moscow on 20 January 2009, was a courageous human rights lawyer. He represented, *inter alia*, the injured parties in the cases of Colonel Yuri Budanov, Sergey Lapin (a policeman found guilty of torture), Mokhmadsalakh Masayev (who disappeared in Chechnya in the summer of 2008 after accusing the Chechen authorities of having subjected him to secret detention and torture) as well as several victims of members of fascist groups.

Anastasiya Baburova, who died shortly after being shot alongside Stanislav Markelov, was a young journalist with *Novaya Gazeta*, who had reported on Markelov's work.

Umar Israilov, a Chechen refugee who was murdered on 13 January 2009 in Vienna, had made an application to the European Court of Human Rights, in which he accused Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov of being personally involved in serious human rights violations, including torture.

The committee deplores the climate of impunity which reigns in the Chechen Republic, which the Assembly has highlighted in several reports on the human rights situation in this region ([Docs. 10774](#) and [AS/Jur \(2008\) 21](#)). It is concerned that this is now spilling over beyond the borders of the North Caucasus region, threatening outspoken journalists, lawyers and others in Moscow and even in other countries in which they have been granted asylum.

In a series of recent judgments, the European Court of Human Rights held the Russian Federation responsible for a large number of enforced disappearances, arbitrary killings and torture in Chechnya, stressing the absence of any meaningful investigations of these crimes by the competent authorities.²

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1. This statement was jointly proposed by Herta Däubler-Gmelin (Germany, SOC), Committee Chairperson and rapporteur on the fight against impunity; Dick Marty (Switzerland, ALDE), Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the North Caucasus region of the Russian Federation; Christos Pourgourides (Cyprus, EPP/CD), Rapporteur on member states' duty to co-operate with the European Court of Human Rights; Holger Haibach (Germany, EPP/CD), Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; and Pieter Omtzigt (Netherlands, EPP/CD), Rapporteur on the protection of whistleblowers.

2. For the most recent judgments (22 January 2009) see [Dolsayev and Others v. Russia \(10700/04\)](#) and [Zaurbekova and Zaurbekova v. Russia \(27183/03\)](#).

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

President: Lluís Maria de Puig (Spain, SOC) – Secretary General of the Assembly: Mateo Sorinas.

Political groups: EPP/CD (Group of the European People's Party); SOC (Socialist Group); EDG (European Democrat Group); ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe); UEL (Group of the Unified European Left).

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These judgments, and the fresh cases above, urgently require a clear signal from the highest authorities of the Russian state to the effect that perpetrators of such serious human rights violations shall be punished in accordance with the law. The recent pardon of Colonel Yuri Budanov, condemned after several scandal-ridden trials to 10 years in prison in July 2004 for murdering a Chechen girl, and who has become a popular hero to ultra-nationalist and fascist groups in Russia, sends the wrong signal.”